

The Fishing President: Ritual in constructing leadership mythology

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Abstract

We study leadership using anthropological and visual methodological viewpoints, starting from Lévi-Strauss' association of ritual and mythology. We explore the private fishing ritual of the Cold War era President of Finland, Urho Kekkonen and his political elite 'tribe' using visual discourse analysis. We show how the emergent leadership mythology was communicated both within and outside this tribe. The qualitative dataset consists of one primary and two secondary data types: photographs, and correspondence exchanges and media material fragments. We report our analysis through a photo-essay, in which the development of ritual and mythology is presented over time. Our theoretical contributions include showing the association of ritual and myth in the leadership context and how they are intertwined and how they also may separate, as well as the description of a primal leadership archetype, that of the hunter.

Keywords

Anthropology, discourse analysis, hunter, leadership, ritual, structuralism, study of myth, Urho Kekkonen, visual studies

Introduction

Despite the emergence of post-heroic leadership discourse (Bligh et al., 2011; Fletcher, 2004; Gemmill and Oakley, 1992; Meindl, 1995), heroic leaders persistently appear in discussions of leadership. Speaking of 'leaders' and *their* ability continues to attract interest and awe. Through our research, we suggest that this talk of 'leadership' *is* indeed relevant; it shows the differential privileges and taboos that apply to leaders and their followers (Grint, 2010b). Echoing our tribal ancestors, contemporary human collectives seem to need leaders. It appears that people are almost always able to identify who is 'in charge'. According to

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Grint (2010a: 126) only small-scale or short-lived social configurations seem to do without some form of institutionalised leadership. Thus, leadership is one of the defining characteristics of the human condition. Anthropological theory helps us understand this human social functioning and dynamics. One of the foundational ideas in this field is the association of ritual and myth by Lévi-Strauss (1996).

Our evidence draws on material relating to the Cold War era President of Finland Urho Kaleva Kekkonen. He was a ruthless and Machiavellian politician (Tuikka, 2013), a known womaniser, who held the presidency for over 25 years. Kekkonen had a popular image of an outdoorsman, in many ways similar to the image of the American president Theodore Roosevelt (Cooper, 1985; Testi, 1995). He was depicted as a 'common man' who went on skiing, fishing and hunting trips with the nation's political and industrial elite (Tiihonen, 2013), continually 'beating' everyone else, thus establishing himself as the best hunter of his tribe. Kekkonen had wide support among the population and is still today cited as a paragon of a 'strong, charismatic leader' – someone the nation is 'no longer able to produce' – an iconic figure in Finnish popular culture.¹ We explore how an indigenous ritual of his social circles shaped the shared understanding of his leadership. Theoretically, we show how a leadership mythology emerges from indigenous ritual practice.

We use a visual discursive approach in studying leadership. Our particular interest is in how a 'tribal' fishing ritual was used in constructing an effective leadership mythology in a particular context and how it was communicated both within the 'tribe' as well as outside. We show how ritual fuels the emergence and construction of a leadership mythology. We build our understanding on the notion that ritual and mythology are fundamentally intertwined (Lévi-Strauss, 1996): ritual is the rhythm of socialisation, bringing about the mythological narrative that binds societies together, both generally and with respect to leadership. Mythology carries social signification over time, also reshaping the ritual. Thus, mythology shapes how people perceive and receive the leader. Embracing this coupling of ritual/myth is key to understanding leadership.

The paper is organised as follows. First, we present the theoretical framework we build on and to which we contribute. Second, we discuss the background, cultural and historical contexts of our research target and our data. Thereafter, we present the analysis of our data in a photo-essay complemented with interpretative analysis. Finally, we discuss the contributions of our research.

Theoretical background

Myth-invoking charisma

Within the field of leadership studies, mythology has been mostly applied in the discussion of charisma and charismatic leaders. Charismatic leadership is an attribution based on follower's perception of their leader's behaviour (Conger and Kanungo, 1987, 1998). Shamir (1995) describes charismatic leaders as embodying the core values of the groups, organisations or societies they represent, promoting follower identification. In different cultural systems, different things are perceived as charismatic and perceptive leaders may learn to use the cultural cues to their benefit. Followers identify with a leader who is charismatic and willingly comply with such leader's expectations. Gardner and Avolio (1998) argue that leaders essentially seek to construct a charismatic identity that they believe will be valued by those they target as followers. Examples of leaders trying to influence their image can be seen

through the ages, such as Caesar (54 BC) who wrote his own historical account, as well as in business bestsellers, for example, those offered by Jack Welch (Hegele and Kieser, 2001).

Willner (1984) identified four factors that, aided by the leader's personality, appeared to catalyse the attribution of charisma to a leader: (1) the invocation of important cultural myths by the leader, (2) the performance of what was perceived to be heroic or extraordinary feats, (3) the projection of attributions 'with an uncanny or a powerful aura' and (4) outstanding rhetorical skills. However, the majority of studies trying to disseminate the charismatic image have focused on leader traits (Goethals, 2005, 2008; House et al., 1991), rhetoric performance (Emrich et al., 2001; Hart, 1987) or how followers discursively construct the leader (Chen and Meindl, 1991). We focus on the visual images of the leader; how those images invoked the cultural myths and became part of the leadership mythology of a charismatic leader of a nation. The mythology emerged from ritual practice carried out by the leader; his close associates in the 'tribe', as well as the public media. *We study the mythological narrative that once contributed to the followers' tendency to make leadership appear charismatic.*

Mythology narrates the separation of leaders and followers

Taking on board the notion of religion as a cultural system, we are interested in leadership as a kind of religion shaping the social order, because: '...like environment, political power, wealth, jural obligation, personal affection, and a sense of beauty, it shapes it' (Geertz, 1993: 119). Viewing leadership as an inevitable part of the human condition has severe consequences for the organisation. The interplay of ritual and myth manifested in the leadership discourse has an effect on members of the organisation, to those sharing an identity, agenda and future aspirations. Broms and Gahmberg (1983) remind us: 'The reason why myths are so powerful is that they are not only thought, they are also felt' (p. 488).

Grint (2010b) suggests that 'sacred' is rather the enabler of leadership than its demise. In his view, leadership plays out three elements of the sacred: the separation between leaders and followers, the sacrifice of the latter, as well as silencing of their anxiety and opposition. We assume that the fishing ritual in our data shows some aspects of the leadership within the presidential fishing tribe. We gave all this an anthropological leaning: why not view the visual discourse emerging from a top team or leadership tribe as sacred? For example, Barley (1983) provides a kind of 'visual' account with his semiotic analysis of organisational cultures, along with contemporary visual analyses of CEO portraits and authenticity (Guthey and Jackson, 2005), portraits of business elite and public officials (Davison, 2010; Griffey and Jackson, 2010) and papal leadership (Acevedo, 2011). We propose to move even further, by framing the emergent discourse both as strategic enabler and as the outcome of ritualistic, sacral leadership.

Structuralist understanding of ritual and myth

In anthropology, ritual is often viewed as the means of relieving individuals from economic and social hardship, as well as answering, or at least alleviating, anxiety when people face foundational questions of human existence (e.g. mysteries of birth and death) (Eriksen, 2001). Ritual is a characteristically *human* way of articulating and negotiating matters of existence and identity, as well as the man–nature relationship. From a structuralist perspective, it has a double function. First, it joins human collectives together through an identifying process: 'one ideally merging with the person of the officiant and the other with the

collectivity of the faithful' (Lévi-Strauss, 1996: 32). Second, ritual not only joins individuals with others in the present and in space, but also in terms of time – their mythical origins are brought to the current social system (1996: 236):

Thanks to ritual, the 'disjoined' past of myth is expressed, on the one hand, through biological and seasonal periodicity and, on the other, through the 'conjoined' past, which unites from generation to generation the living and the dead. . . . The commemorative or historical rites recreate the sacred and beneficial atmosphere of mythical times – the 'dream age', as the Australians call it – mirroring its protagonists and their great deeds.

Applicability of understanding ritual extends to all human organisations, for example, from organised crime (De Donno et al., 2009) to leadership, as we argue. The universality of this argument stems from that it is foundational to human existence. The conditions of existence, in particular, are well represented along the ritual–myth axis. As providing nutrition, shelter and security are basic human needs, it is no wonder that an abundance of mythologies linger around them – hunting being a prime example. Despite this, anthropological studies of organisations remain few, with the exceptions of ethnography (Van Maanen, 1979), ethno-science (Gregory, 1983), organisational forms (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), cultures (Pettigrew, 1979) and rites and ceremonials (Trice and Beyer, 1984). Our work is also an answer to the call for 'understanding the tribal roots of our social instincts' (Richerson et al., 2006: 201).

Our starting assumption is that a leadership mythology emerges from the ritual that takes place within the tribe producing it. However, this emergent mythology does not only function in the larger society outside the tribe but *within* the tribe as well (albeit differently). The more distant, charismatic leaders will be perceived as being 'larger than life' heroes. Perceptions of more distant leaders are more simplified and prototypical than for proximal leaders (Shamir, 1995). Naturally, cultural and historical contexts have to be such that the audience (the consumers of the mythology) understand and relate to it. Thus, the ritual cannot be detached too much from the followers' world. In other words, discourse 'exists' both within the tribe, enabling ritualistic leadership in the first place, and also outside the tribe, giving birth to what we call a leadership mythology. Here we treat 'mythology' after Barthes (1973), as the naturalised, organisational 'truth' – a truth transcending all opposition – the mythical truth of leadership.

Historical and empirical context

The Fishing President of Finland

Urho Kaleva Kekkonen was born in 1900 the son of a forestry worker, in Pielavesi, Savonia region, Finland. He was already an avid outdoorsperson in his youth. During the Finnish civil war of 1918, the young, politically 'white', militiaman Urho Kekkonen participated in executions of political prisoners (Uino, 1985). After the war, he worked for the national intelligence agency, specialising in anti-Communist operations. Between the world wars Kekkonen was active in student politics and sports, winning the national championship at high jump in 1924. In 1936, he was awarded a doctoral degree in law and elected to parliament, representing the Agrarian party, and was appointed the minister of justice. He held minor positions in public offices during Second World War. In 1940, Kekkonen was the only member of parliament to vote against the Moscow Peace Treaty ending the hostilities of the Winter War 1939–1940 between Finland and the Soviet Union. Later he changed course as

he was an active participant in the so-called peace opposition – a cross-party movement that wanted to detach Finland from the war. In 1950, he was appointed prime minister by President (and his patron) Paasikivi, the role which he assumed four more times prior to his first presidential term in 1956.

By his family and ideological background, Kekkonen was a right-wing agrarian. Immediately after the civil war, his ideological objectives were nationalism and ‘the liberation’ of ‘Finnish tribal areas’ of the Karelia region, most of which were Soviet territory. Despite his post-war *Realpolitik* acknowledging the interests of the USSR, he wanted to keep Finland linked to the West. Officially, he was a supporter of the legality principle and parliamentary democracy as the ‘right’ political system; nevertheless, he saw no problem of having himself re-elected using whatever means possible. He relied on Soviet support that helped him win elections: it has been claimed that KGB-orchestrated bribery secured the crucial vote in his first election of 1956, as well as his involvement in the Soviet diplomatic note in 1961 to secure his re-election in 1962 (Rautkallio, 1992; Vladimirov, 1993). After his third election in 1968, the term *Finnlandisierung* (referring to a country yielding to political directions dictated by a strong neighbour) appeared in the West German media (of Kekkonen and the KGB; see Lavery, 2003; Rentola, 2008).

In January 1973, the parliament passed a law extending Kekkonen’s six-year term by four additional years until 1978 – without elections or rival candidates. On September 3rd 1975 (his 75th birthday) the highest nominal value bank note of 500 Finnish marks with his portrait was put into circulation – a sign of his emerging personality cult (living persons were not otherwise depicted on Finnish currency banknotes). In the 1978 election, the four main parties nominated him as their candidate, securing his election. During the 1970s, rumours of his weakening physical condition emerged, only to be silenced in the media on the grounds of ‘protecting his privacy’. Towards the end of his tenure, Kekkonen participated in industrial negotiations with the Soviets, culminating in the construction of the Soviet mining city of Kostomuksha. Eventually, he was forced to resign in 1981, after more than 25 years in the office.

Kekkonen was an enthusiastic outdoorsperson. It was natural for him to build networks during fishing and hunting trips (Tiihonen, 2013: 347). The circle of people attending these trips is here referred to as his ‘tribe’ (making the anthropological nature of their association explicit). The reason for this is that they shared a private ritual, as well as that they unknowingly participated in mythology construction, both privately and publicly. The tribe consisted mostly of his personal friends, ideological allies and directors of large companies. They shared an interest in spending time outdoors, a personal affection for Kekkonen, as well as a deep ideological and political agreement, especially towards the Eastern neighbour. We identified a lasting version of the tribe in order to understand its internal development, as well as its external significance to his leadership over time.

Historical context

Having declared independence from Russia in 1917, Finland went through a bloody civil war in 1918, in which the population was divided into two: the socialist ‘reds’ and the conservative landowners, the ‘whites’. With the support of the German Empire, the whites prevailed, and Finland assumed a pro-German leaning. In the 1919 parliamentary election, Finland adopted a republican constitution. In the following years, however, an explicit anti-Russian sentiment remained, exemplified by the so-called kinship wars.² Fenno-Russian

relations remained tense through the 1920s and 1930s, culminating in November 1939 with the USSR attacking Finland. The Moscow Peace ended the 'Winter War' in March 1940. After a 15-month period of 'Interim Peace', the fighting commenced again as the 'Continuation War', Finland fighting with Germany in Operation Barbarossa. In 1945, as a former ally of Germany, Finland was defeated militarily, economically and demographically. The Soviet Union demanded substantial war reparations, also seeking to influence Finnish political life.

Cultural context

After Second World War, the predominately agrarian society started a process of industrialisation and urbanisation. In the past, men were used to hard, physical labour: ploughing and harvesting the fields, logging, as well as fishing and hunting. Women were mostly at home with children, taking care of domestic animals, family matters and economy, as well as gathering berries and edible fungi. Despite the change, the population was able and wished to spend time outdoors in the natural environment, and virtually everyone was able to ski. This cultural background was the basis from which Kekkonen took material for his arsenal. He integrated various aspects of national culture to his public habitus, influencing the narrative of him as the 'hard-man' leader. He found a way to align these factors to the pleasure of the average voter. It is within this context that we understand the leadership of Kekkonen.

Data and approach

Empirical material

Archive. The empirical material is from a single source; the archive of Urho Kekkonen, initiated by himself. The original archive has been expanded with donations from the collections of private individuals. At the time of research, it contained approximately 350 shelf-metres of documentation, photographs, films, recordings and other material. The amount of photographic material alone was more than 30,000 frames. Prior to this study, the archive had been utilised mostly by political historians.

Data. After the first encounter with the data (cursory skimming of thousands of photographs), it appeared that public photographs – taken mostly during official visits – seemed to offer few insights. Thus, we decided to pass over the protocol and focus on the recreational context for a variety of reasons. First, informal situations often reveal the 'actual' social dynamics. Second, the leadership style of Kekkonen was built on charisma, close human relations and political wit (Bagge and Samson, 2007), and he had the custom of maintaining relations in unofficial meetings which often involved one of his favourite pastimes, fishing and cross-country skiing. We wanted to understand how a seemingly recreational context contributes both to the emergence and the reconstruction of an appealing leadership myth.³ Thus, we focused in the dataset on Kekkonen's two pastimes. Of these time pursuits, we found skiing to be more competitive by nature, lacking the social and brotherly atmosphere, whereas fishing is more relaxed – thus providing more room for informal talk, exchanges of ideas and networking. Moreover, as a form of hunting, fishing is more relevant from the anthropological perspective of our research and is shown in the 'tribal' nature of their correspondence (e.g. notes, gifts and photographs). In addition, Kekkonen's fishing trips were well documented during his time, both privately and in the

Table 1. Data sources.

	Period	Number	Use
Photographs	1957–1981	423	Primary
Correspondence	1956–1981	521	Secondary
Media material	1956–1980	192	Secondary

public media. After these considerations, we collected every photograph associated with fishing, official and unofficial.

We identified the tribe using Kekkonen's edited personal diaries (2001–2004). Going through the four volumes gave us a rough idea of the relevant people and their role in the social dynamics of the tribe. Furthermore, we counted their appearances using the index at the end of each volume. Photographs and literature (Bagge and Samson, 2007; Soikkanen, 1998) were the final criterion of who were eventually identified as belonging to the tribe – those who appeared consistently in the photographs (or were known to have taken them) were selected.⁴

Three types of data. All three types of data cover his period of tenure (1956–1981): photographs as the primary data type, two secondary sources being correspondence exchanges (text, photographs and some material objects) and media material, mostly consisting of press photographs and their accompanying texts from local newspapers and magazines.

The primary dataset consists of 423 scanned, digitised, mostly black-and-white photographs covering the fishing trips of the President and his entourage. There were two main photographers within the tribe: Hunter during the first years (who compiled some photo-albums) and Doctor during the latter.

Correspondence data consist of 521 exchanges between Kekkonen and his tribe. Roughly one-quarter of this material is directed from him to them, the remainder being in the reverse direction. The correspondence represents the micro-sociological, 'processual' data in this study, consisting mainly of letters and postcards sent by tribe members to Kekkonen. His responses and letters are also included in the data (they are not in focus as we studied the discourse concerning him.) The particular strength of this data type is that it covers some of the subtleties appearing in the personal exchanges most often omitted from official biographies and analyses.

The media material entails 192 samples from the printed media: newspapers, magazines, weeklies and books. Most of the data are domestic, although some international sources appear. Occasionally, his official visit was combined with fishing, arousing interest in the local press. Kekkonen was well aware of his public appearance; he had everything that was published of him collected. The books mentioned here were written either by members of the tribe or his external devotees.

Methodology

Visual discourse analysis. Our reasoning process was abduction (Niiniluoto, 1999; Peirce, 1878; in archaeology, see Shelley, 1996). In other words, we read and interpreted our data and followed a finding by trying to understand what it meant theoretically. With this process, we made sense of the historical material we gathered; wherever there was a trace of something

relevant behind the apparent, we followed the lead by trying to make theoretical sense of it. In other words, we read the evidence we found through theoretical ideas that seemed most relevant to the research question at hand.

Method. Our challenge was to combine our thinking and data with the existing methodological literature of visual studies. At the outset, we concentrated on visual anthropology (Collier and Collier, 1986; Pink, 2007) and critical visual studies (Rose, 2007). In this research, we ended up using visual discourse analysis. Having gone through the data numerous times, we found ourselves with the inclination, given the underlying theoretical literature and the meta-theoretical challenges, towards using the *visual*, as well as the threefold nature of our data, all suggested for the relevance of discourse analysis.

Methodologically, our research is framed after Rose (2007) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). Rose distinguishes between two kinds of discourse analyses, I and II, the latter being more Foucauldian and institutional by nature. By aligning with the former, we left the Foucauldian and institutional perspectives out, and instead focused on the anthropological and semiotic aspects of presidential leadership. This was done to highlight the foundational aspect of leadership with regard to human collectives. We supplemented the general discourse analytic approach with a social semiotic perspective, by including the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). They focus on the process of ‘sign-making’; a sign has a motivation and a cultural context, along which the ‘semiotic landscape’ takes shape. For Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the ‘truth’ of a claim is constructed in the process of semiosis, depending on the particular social group and its values and beliefs. Our focus was on the emergence of the particular, contextual ‘truth’ found and interpreted in our empirical material – what Kekkonen’s leadership meant to his tribe and the general public. Although particular aspects of the mythology may be strictly contextual, we believe that the tendency of human collectives to mythologise their leaders is, in fact, universal. Putting it into Barthes’ (1967) terms, a way to understand our sense-making style would be to see it as operating on two layers; semiotic understanding of ‘tribal’ photographs as the primary language, and approaching the level of signification of mythological leadership as the second-order language.

Throughout analysis, we focused on the ‘ritual’ and the ‘mythological’. We engaged in reading our threefold data from our theoretical angles. Rose (2007) divides the interpretive space of visual images to sites and modalities. Sites are ‘where’ the meanings of the images are made, whereas modalities refer to the ‘way’ of making sense of the visual material. We focused on the site of production (the tribe) and the social modality (the society). In the following photo-essay (Berger, 1990), we present our interpretation of the data, embedded with central photographs, correspondence and media fragments. It is the discourse that we articulate from our research, in a way that is both theoretically meaningful and faithful to our empirical material. Thus, we align with a researcher-centric ‘commentator’ research approach (Warren, 2008). We arranged the material under epochs reflecting the time and ‘feel’ – focusing rather on the *impression* than the *expression* of the visual material (Biehl-Missal, 2013). On the one hand, we show how private fishing photographs reveal a change in Kekkonen’s presidential leadership over time. On the other hand, we show how the tribal ritual of fishing is captured in the correspondence, as well as the how the leadership mythology of a Fishing President is presented in the media material (the social site). Epochs serve as narrative signposts in theoretical wayfaring highlighting our interpretations.

Analysis

Age of innocence (1956–1962)



Above, the tribe has gathered for a group photo (source: Mäki T, 1960). The men, half- or completely naked, sit and look at the camera. Several of the central members of the tribe can be identified. The caption of the photograph refers to a famous battle,⁵ invoking an association with war heroes. The photograph is also a kind of rebellion, a departure from organised and urbanised society. It dismisses the petite-bourgeoisie moralist standard that dominated the political rhetoric. Here nudity is not only visible, but also a central feature of the dynamics of the situation. The themes that could be read in the context of this photograph include trust, brotherhood and mutual belonging.

At the beginning of his first term, Kekkonen seems to have been on brotherly terms with his tribe, shown in the early fishing photographs. The participants not only share time and space but also a sense of humour. Most of his close allies enjoyed highest social status, academic degrees, military ranks and economic wealth (although they were always 'inferior' to the President) – the tribe accepted Kekkonen's role as *primus inter pares* remarkably easily. For instance, during the trips, others would unload the boat while he sat down, someone else changing his shoes for him. The relaxed expressions and framing of the photographs suggest that this behaviour was natural within the tribe. In the emerging discourse, the abilities of Kekkonen as a fisherman (strength, skill and patience) are paralleled with his skills of holding his office. Comparing the photograph above with a public one taken during the same trip, the rift between the 'official' and 'unofficial' stories is wide.

Correspondence hovered around these matters as well. Trivially, hunters and fishermen talk and exchange ideas, opinions and memories of the trips. We, however, claim that this ritual was the 'cement' between the men, as well as an important ingredient in the construction of the leadership mythology about him and his leadership abilities. Exchanges were

many and reciprocal, as roughly a year later Kekkonen sent a Hawaiian fishing idol to several tribe members. He addressed Hunter:

Dear Brother,

From Hawaii I got You this fishing god. Its name is Ku'ula. Shall it bring You salmon and other fish...

The honourable tone enhanced mutual belonging and identity of 'hunting gentlemen'. Kekkonen showed grace upon 'his' men by addressing them very respectfully (his opponents he addressed sharply and wittily). His tribe returned this by showing him respect and following him physically into the wild. An exchange of game meat and religious artefacts relate to anthropology. Kekkonen's leadership depended on the benevolence of other influential men, creating a system of status quo. Thus, the polite tone not only reflects contentment of the state-of-affairs but also signifies one's fidelity to the general cause. Men who share their game animals share their future. Here, mythology, being a backward-looking system of thought, is aimed at controlling the future, to the benefit of its agents.

Perämeri oli lipeväinä

kun presidentti kävi siianpyynn

Suomen tasavallan päämiehen virkistysmatka poikkeaa suuresti siitä kaavasta, jonka mukaan hänen alamaaisensa tällaisia matkoja tekevät. Presidentti virkistyy liikkeestä – kansalaiset levosta. Presidentti Urho Kekkonen matka Keski-Pohjanmaalle oli »yksityisluontoinen virkistysmatka», täysin epävirallinen. Tosin asiaa oli sikäli, että presidentti halusi tutustua maakunnan rannikkopitäjien kalastajien elämään ja oloihin ja siinä sivussa kalastaa itsekin, mutta kalastusmatkan ohessa presidentti Kekkonen joutui seuraamaan viljan korjuuta, perunannostoa ja sosiaalihuoltoa sekä osallistumaan maakunnan satamarakennussuunnitelmiin ...



From a local weekly (source: *Suomen Kuvalehti*, 1962): 'The sea was slick when the president went fishing. Recreation is completely different for the head of the Republic of Finland than his subjects. The President is excited by exercise – citizens by rest...' The aesthetic is similar to depictions of the providing father found in many tribal and contemporary myths. Kekkonen is the distinguishable, central actor in the photograph. The man rowing to his right is a local fisherman; the two other men are assisting. The tone of captioning is noteworthy, as the caption is not content with subtly replicating the photograph, but adds an emotional tone to the reading. Thus, the strong 'taste' of mythology, at this point ritual (fishing), had become a key ingredient in mythology (leadership). Note the similarity of Kekkonen and Jesus as divine providers. For a population with agrarian and religious backgrounds, this kind of Christian imagery was a powerful mode of communicating 'matters-of-facts'. According to Luke (5:1–11), Jesus brings a great catch upon the unsuccessful fishermen, adding (5:10): 'Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men'. From this point on, the men were his disciples. Note how the allusion to the food-providing Jesus was summoned in Kekkonen's case as the providing father of the nation – and how all this connects with leadership. In a way, the power of the 'spoils' of leadership is shown here; people follow successful hunters eagerly.

Comparing the published one with a private, subtle photograph with no compelling caption, we see that although the denotative messages are somewhat similar (men sitting in a boat), the connotation conveyed from the public photograph (added with the text) creates the difference. This difference is the building block of the leadership myth. The media establishment recognised an original, deep and compelling framing of a leader. The leader-hunter was something that followers found easy to subject themselves to. Neither Kekkonen nor his tribe had anything against such arrangement. Moreover, as going into the wild was personally dear to him, providing raw material for his mythological purposes required no extra effort.

The gang and the hang arrounds (1963–1966)

For the visual discourse, this era marks a change in Kekkonen's leadership mythology – his status as the leader became solid and uncontested. His distance from the grassroots level of the ritual grew, boosting his leadership mythology accordingly. This suggests that mythology is a narrative form of ritual, a kind of history, written to and read by the enjoyers of this mythology. The audience may longer need not to witness the original ritual; mere habitual (ritual) attendance of listening to the official story (i.e. mythology) will suffice. In this way, the human collective is re-constructed through the ritual of mythology.



In this private photograph, self-conscious Kekkonen is shown in the centre, surrounded by his 'tribe' (source: Mäki T, 1964). The caption declares them as the 'PARTICIPANTS OF THE SAFARI'. Kekkonen, holding a cigar in his hand, is pictured as a man surrounded by both official and unofficial cadres, as someone able to gather different social systems together and unite them. All this affirms his primacy within the tribe, located at the centre, posing confidently, holding something in his hand while being photographed (as in portrait paintings). The low angle of the photograph is also interesting – is it for the practical reason of fitting people and their surroundings (the physical context of their trip, the fishing hut) inside the frame, or had the photographer submitted himself emotionally? Considering the photographs taken around the mid-1960s, we developed an impression that as his political power solidified, the fishing ritual became more focused on his personal skills, which also shown in framing and composition of the photographs.

Governor died in 1963. In 1965 and 1966, the atmosphere within the tribe began to change. At the same time, Kekkonen's authoritarian style started to emerge; he became the sole centre of attention both in private and in public. His catch became a popular interest; the media

willingly adopted his image as a skilled fisherman. He preferred a salmon river in Sweden, which was also favoured by the local royals. The media used these visits in constructing the leader-follower discourse. By repeatedly showing the Fishing President – about to catch or catching his fish or others admiring his catch – papers pushed their interpretation of him to the readers. The connotation beyond the explicit, denotative message of the press photographs was that ‘Kekkonen is an able leader’. Consequently, the justification of his presidency came into being; his leadership was constructed through going into the wild. Fishing was an easy context for the average voter to attach oneself to, as at this time urbanisation was taking its first steps, and the majority of the population were physically in touch with nature every day.



Kalamiehen vihellys. Pulskat taimenet vain odottavat arvovaltaista nappajaansa, Blekingen Mörrum-jossa. Johto kalastus-
maottelussa on 3-1.

The caption declares: ‘The whistle of the fisherman. Chubby trouts only wait for their prestigious catcher, in the Mörrum River of Blekinge. The lead in the fishing international is 3-1’ (source: Kultala K, 1965, *Suomen Kuvalehti*). Powerfully composed, this photograph captures the attention and admiration of the viewers. Competition between Sweden and Finland is also provoked, revealing the nationalistic undercurrent of the time. The lead of the text declares Kekkonen’s professional status as a ‘fisherman’, his ‘prestige’ to an extent that even the trout are in waiting to submit themselves to their prestigious predator, as well as the fact that by catching the fish, three against one, he is also delivering his national duty to his citizen subjects as the father of the nation. While fishing, he was never satisfied with the catch as he had an exceptionally strong predatorial passion. This meant that no one was supposed to surpass the size or the number of his catch (Soikkanen, 1998).

In 1966, Kekkonen sent a schnapps chalice to his tribe. He addressed Hunter in a similar manner to previously, in the case of the ‘Ku’ula’ deity:

Dear Brother,

I wish You merry Christmas with this chalice. Shall it always be full of the nectar you need.

Substance intake and ritualistic gift giving are associated with each other, as well as to the wider realms of identity building and group dynamics. The rhetoric is aimed at establishing the role of a mythical provider (nectar is nourishment). Such wording also shows the sacrality of the leadership discourse. Around the same time, Kekkonen started to believe in his exclusivity in leading the country. Both he and his tribe believed in Kekkonen being the ‘feeder’ of the nation (an implication of the importance of his continued leadership). This kind of ‘holiness’ is noted matter-of-factly – beyond earthly suspicion and critique – as a myth.

Beginning of isolation (1967–1971)



This public photograph from 1967 shows Kekkonen in a solid posture, with a keen look (source: *Pressfoto*, 1961–1968). In the private photographs, one can see scenes of intimacy and humour; here he is like a statue. He is also at the rear of the boat where the boat is steered. Of the several ‘business’ members of the tribe, the prime lobbyist was Oiler, who became active in 1969. Retailer and Constructor were also involved in lobbying, along with Doctor and Hunter. In the course of years, however, Oiler’s corporation began to play a more central role as the provider of some of the fishing trips. From approximately this point on, Oiler started sending letters to Kekkonen, mostly relating to energy and trade policies, along with ideological remarks. In general, the businessmen tried to combine Western-style capitalism with nationally legitimated protectionism for the benefit of their companies against a variety of foes: competing international firms, countries ‘hostile’ to their ‘legitimate’ interests, as well as leftist ‘radicals’. In other words, they realised the importance of having an influential friend of the highest national rank.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that public pressure towards Kekkonen and his fishing and hunting trips intensified around 1971. He reacted by increasing the secrecy of his trips, as well as doing some of them privately – and businessmen and corporate directors were eager to host them. They had a symbiotic relationship with each other: on the one hand, in the absence of state-owned recreational centres or national park areas, there were few places to take international guests fishing; only private businesses were able to do it. On the other hand, Kekkonen provided valuable contacts and access to high-level national decision-making. In retrospect, the increased pressure and calls for openness emerged from an increased awareness of the presidential institution and politics in general, as well as from the media. This might have even isolated him further. Finding his old fishing friends dead or weakening, he – an ageing man himself – found refuge in trips and places where the journalists either could not follow or were subjected to restrictions.



In 1971, Kekkonen went to a private fishing trip to Iceland (source: Hafnfjord R, 1971). People shown in the photographs are not part of his usual fishing entourage, but local, hired guides. Starkly contrasting the earlier photographs, his face is marked by discontentment. Our interpretation is that it was due to isolation from his friends; something was not 'quite right'. Instead of expressing strong leadership, his posture communicates old age and withdrawal rather than dominance. He misses his friends and the context of his sovereignty. The hired hands are not emotionally subjected to him and do not accept his leadership otherwise than as a customer. Thus, it seems that not only the natural but also the social contexts have a significant effect on leadership. Articulating this in ritual/mythical language, the fishing ritual is not 'full' as it is not shared with the tribe. He is shown here to perform a narrow, functional role in the fishing ritual, 'just' fishing, without any auxiliary contextual activity. Ironically, taking away his domain, the hunter becomes 'purified', lacking all emotional appeal. Kekkonen does not seem to enjoy this kind of fishing either; other aspects of fishing (trekking off the beaten track with old friends, enjoying food cooked with simple equipment and so on) seem to have been essential for his experience. Fishing detached from its original context, 'the sport of fishing', is a simple, unappealing performance of his own and other people's expectations of him; they reduce him to a mere performer. The wooden structure also detaches him from the violently roaring river providing his game, the 'stage' of the hunt.

Corporate kidnap (1972–1975)



In 1972, a US petroleum company (Oiler's colleagues) hosted a trip in Alaska. The purpose was to catch *Chinook*, the much-desired 'king salmon'. Not much information about this trip was shared publicly, and only few members of the president's usual fishing tribe were invited: Oiler and his US colleague, Hunter, Adjutant and Doctor. In the photograph above (source: Unknown, 1972), the men are having lunch. Perhaps fishing has gone badly, as some tension appears to be visible. Everyone minds his own business, concentrating on eating. The early comradeship is gone. Their bodily postures, facial expressions and stiffness suggest that they were not close friends. And men who are not close friends spend time with each other for other reasons.

By this time, the tribe had worn thinner due to natural deaths and businessmen had taken the vacant seats (Oiler, Constructor and Retailer among them). Their interest was not in fishing, but in getting access to the highest national authority. Providing fishing trips to Kekkonen was their method of achieving this. Politically, Kekkonen emphasised foreign policy and Eastern relations, creating an opportunity for industries involved in international trading. 'Tribe' was replaced by 'business'. They even started wearing dark business suits and discussing matter-of-factly in defensive bodily postures (which, as some believe, increases one's credibility). Kekkonen was flattered by their attention, because they shared business details with him. Ironically, the corporate kidnap also marks the start of the erosion of his power leading to his eventual dethronement. In 1974, Kekkonen travelled to the Caribbean, hosted once again by Oiler's North American colleagues. Evidence from the trip is very similar to that in 1972; comradeship is gone. It seems that for Kekkonen, it was never about fishing in exotic places, but rather being together with his friends and being 'out-of-reach', detached from organised society and his official duties. The 'suits' could not replace something inevitably lost. This trip felt like an empty ritual in which Kekkonen was merely preforming his role.



Presidentin fyysinen kunto on tuonut hänelle legendaarisen maineen maan rajojen ulkopuolellakin. Niinpä presidentti osaakin antaa arvoa fyysisen kunnan hoitamiselle ja rentoutumiselle velvollisuuksien välillä. Kalastajana presidentillä on maine etevänä ja sitkeänä väsyttäjänä.

In 1974, party newspaper published the photograph above (source: *Suomenmaa*, 1974). The caption states: ‘The physical condition of the president has brought him a legendary reputation outside the borders of our country as well. So the president knows how to value taking care of physical condition and relaxing between duties. As a fisherman the president has a reputation of skill and relentlessness in tiring’. Kekkonen’s abilities reached the mythological extent in the discourse; privately he was no longer that interested or energetic. ‘Legendary reputation’ is an overstatement of any living person; used of a 75-year-old man it stirs suspicion of close collaboration between political circles and the media.

The lone emperor (1976–1981)

Coming to late 1970s, Kekkonen was increasingly isolated from the outside world. Although he enjoyed undisputed authority in the country, his close political circle experienced a build-up of flattery. His old fishing mates had either passed away or become marginalised, and he

most commonly travelled to the Soviet Union or privately with businessmen and their interest groups. During these years, he participated in the lobbying of two large-scale construction projects, one in the Soviet Union and another in the Middle East. During the years, the culture of self-censorship prevented the press from publicly questioning these practices. In the private photographs from this era, Kekkonen seems to have lost his vigour. In the public sphere, however, the register of the mythological took over the discourse.



♦ Viidakkokalamatkoissa ei UKK:n mukaan ole oikeaa urheiluhenkä. »Täällä vaan istutaan, odotetaan ja vedetään kala ylös. Saaliin ja saalistajan välinen taistelu puuttuu», sanoi presidentti.

Kesyjä olivat kalat UKK halusi taistella saaliin kanssa

■ Urho Kekkonen legendaarinen kalamatka Brasilian villissä viidakossa on päättynyt, mutta matkan muistot lämmittävät Tasavaltaamme vielä kauan.

■ Saaliit olivat jättimäisiä kiloissa mitattuna, mutta taistelun mittapuulla arviotuna UKK:n Lapin saaliita heiveröisemmät.

■ Seuran toimittaja ja valokuvaaja seurasivat ikinuoren presidenttimme viidakkomatkan jännittäviä vaiheita. Dramatiikkaakaan ei puuttunut.

■ ■ ■ Etelä-Amerikan viidakot ja aarniometsät ovat maailman keuhkot, yli viisikymmentä prosenttia maailman happivarannosta kehittyä Amazonasin ja Mato Grosson seudulla. Viherkasvit ja puut pitävät elämää yllä.

Presidentti Kekkonen vieraili Mato Grosson koillisosassa, jossa aarniometsiin ja viidakkoihin raivataan valtavia alueita farmeiksi polttamalla puusto.

Presidentin tukikohtana ollut Tapiraguai-tila on raivattu polttamalla. Puut ja pensaat oli hakattu maan tasalle, sitten niiden oli annettu kuivua, minkä

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Kekkonen went fishing in Brazil in 1976, sponsored by the same US Company as the trips of 1972 and 1974 to Alaska and the Caribbean (source: Rissanen H, 1976, *Seura*). The trip

was widely covered in the media. The caption of one press photograph shows well the extent of the mythology that had overtaken the discourse: 'Tame were the fish: UKK wanted to fight with the prey: Fishing in the jungle lacks real sport according to UKK: "Here you only sit, wait and pull the fish up. There is no battle between the predator and the prey" said the president'. In the photographs we see an old, withdrawn and disinterested president, similar to the photos of the earlier trip to the Caribbean. Barthesian reading of this would be to note the wide gap between visual and textual messages. Mythology is the bridge over this chasm, which is even wider considering the blatant, nationalistic *un*-truth articulated in the caption: tropical fish species are often large, fierce and enduring fighters.

At the time, there was a whole generation of young adults that had lived under Kekkonen. The mythology, used to naturalise his leadership, started to live a life of its own and was consequently exaggerated. The willing hunter does not sit in the shades with an unhappy face. Over time Kekkonen became more and more exclusively the central person; his salience in the imagery grew. The distance between the visual and the textual, however, shows how ritual was replaced by mythology. The tribe had turned into a network of interest groups.

From the perspective of the photographic act, Doctor was the main photographer of the later private photos. In fact, was his role more than his traditional medical one, diagnosing Kekkonen's illnesses and photographing him? In this light, taking a photograph has direct political significance, a controlled and learned act boosting the presidential leadership, both inside and outside the tribe.



This private photograph was taken during a fishing trip in 1981 (source: unknown, 1981). Kekkonen hides from rain and wind with a protective hood. His expression seems discontent but observant. At this point, he was only a shadow of his former self – his time as the 'master-hunter' of the republic was over.

We briefly summarise the photo-essay with the Figure 1 (private photos to the left and public ones to the right). On the right side of the image, ritual and mythology are developed according to our interpretation. The detailed, conceptual analysis of findings follows.

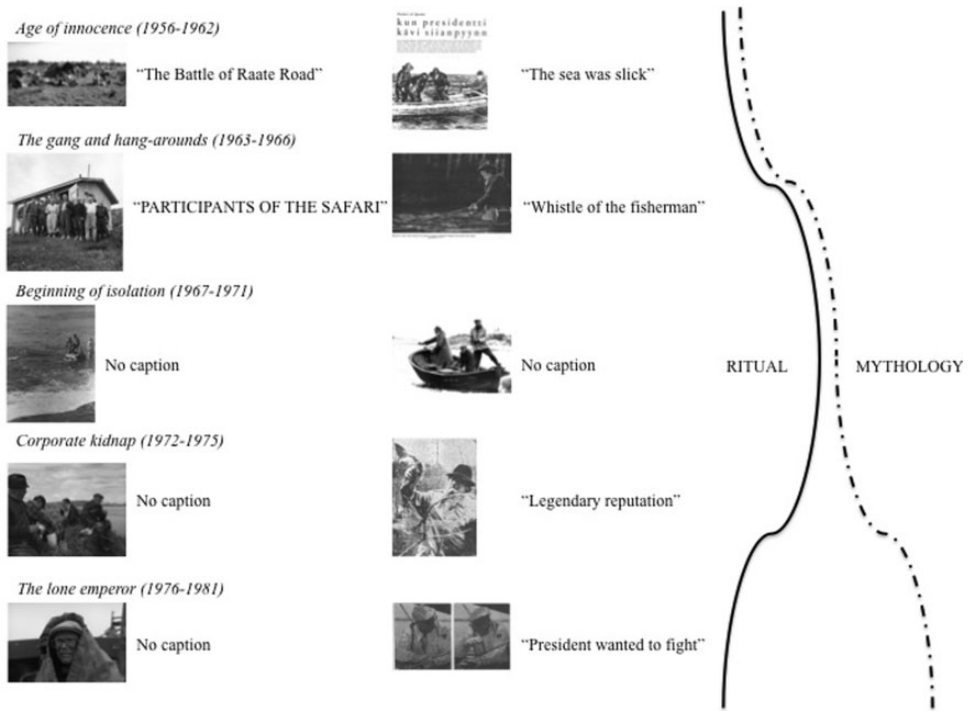


Figure 1. A summary of the photo-essay.

Discussion

Consequences for leadership studies

Kekkonen was aware and active in the construction of his public image. He saw the potential of visual media; then emerging technologies used by the budding media industry. The consumers of his leadership myth were symbolically attached not only to his leader person but also to the shared symbolic landscape of their native country. Kekkonen was the person who made their social existence meaningful through providing them their self-concept in that particular society and time (Shamir et al., 1993). His charisma was communicated through the image of a fisherman. Even though current Western images of leadership primarily draw from other cultural myths (Hatch et al., 2005), there are some contemporary cases of this kind of representations, the visual imagery of Vladimir Putin of Russia being the prime example. Earlier, Theodore Roosevelt explicitly used similar imagery, applying nature and frontier mythology to shape himself into a champion of virility and reform (Testi, 1995). Similar imagery has also been used by other US presidents, frequently featuring them in various sporting activities, from golfing to hunting and fishing. However, the difference between these examples and Kekkonen was that the hegemonic masculinity symbolically defining the American male is created through the registers of ‘military’ activity, and specifically ‘combat’ (Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, 1996). Kekkonen was a hunter, not a warrior.

Evidence from the end of Kekkonen’s tenure suggests that he had many autocratic features both in his day-to-day conduct, as well as in the visual representation of his leadership. ‘Kekkonen’ became synonymous with the concept of leadership, nearing a personality cult; a

trait several of his Soviet bloc colleagues shared. Nevertheless, we argue that the creation of the myth of the Fishing President was not a conscious project. Kekkonen *was* a fisherman; he loved and revealed his character through it. The media and the lobbyists recognised the ritual and its worth. The myth emerged from the ritual, and the participants saw its potential. To live long is to die young. Eventually Kekkonen was forced to resign. The end of his tenure ended the construction of his leadership mythology. He did not, however, retire early enough to sustain his legend, resulting in a stain in his mythology. He became a caricature of his old self during his final years; physically withered and mentally demented reality stood in stark contrast with the mythological hunter and former athlete. This dissociation of ritual and mythology is a social theoretical departure from the findings of Lévi-Strauss. We witness this in our data.

The missing leader archetype: the hunter. Having conducted our research, we find leaders to be symbols of their societies. We view leaders to be the great reference points of their societies: in a way ‘created’ by the contexts within which they are embedded. In other words, there is no ‘leadership’ out of context, as suggested by Ladkin (2011). Our local findings warrant no exaggerated generalisations, and we wish to press the understanding of historical and cultural contexts in order to understand the leadership that took place. In the context of Fenno-Ugric tribes, the shared and earliest mythical topics and symbols ‘depict the sensory world of the environment of a fisher/hunter of the Northern arctic and sub-arctic’ (Siikala, 2013: 20). We extend these contextual considerations to the human universals of leadership. Favouring the ability to hunt and survive in harsh conditions is hard-wired in human biological makeup – ‘highest ability marks the leader’. Performing this role successfully creates eager followers. From then on, the emergent leadership mythology is the narrative that naturalises and eternalises this ability.

The use of metaphors in understanding leadership has focused on heroic business press accounts (Alvesson and Spicer, 2011). Hatch et al. (2005) analyse the myths that the CEOs of multinational companies draw from in their storytelling. They conclude that modern leadership includes three different ‘faces’: manager, artist and priest. For Hatch et al. (2005), archetypes and myths hide behind the face of the rational-logical manager, and that a mythological consciousness would reveal the faces of the artist and priest in business leadership (p.76). Moreover, they show how leaders use myths and archetypes in their leadership storytelling. A successful leader supplements the manager role of discipline, control, intellect, expertise and decision-making with the artist’s role of curiosity, provocation, emotion and innovativeness and the priest role of empathy, comfort, faith and acting as a saviour to the organisation.

We complement the ‘Three Faces’ with a primal reading of a leader: *the hunter*. Kekkonen was the embodiment of a mythological hunter. He led the political space with a hunter’s understanding: *feeding is leading*. Kekkonen renewed his leadership through prey. The hunter satisfies his immediate role within society by providing food and protection to his followers – staying firmly in ‘this’ world. Tribal (and organisational) leaders work with actual people, handling common matters that are understandable to the average follower. His/her role is to bring the food to the table; formerly in the form of game animals, currently in the form of ‘shareholder’ value. Kekkonen used the rhetoric of *Realpolitik* in furthering his goals – he provided his understanding to his followers as *the truth*. He created the fear of the powerful neighbour, only to satisfy the need of security by presenting himself as the ‘man trusted by the Soviets’. Arguably, the hunter was the first hero archetype in human

storytelling. We argue that even in our post-modern, contemporary era the hunter represents a strong leader. Contextuality should be appreciated – leaders should adapt to the social landscape of their followers. Thus, using a natural pair of ritual and leadership mythology creates the conditions of lasting awe. Symbolic overcoming of adversity, conquering the nature and providing food and shelter to followers are still appreciated, regardless of what the proponents of post-heroism might say.

There is no doubt that ‘the Fishing President Kekkonen’ was an example of a gendered leader (of his sportsman image, see Wuokko, 2011). Collinson and Hearn (1994) identify five discourses and practices of masculinity: authoritarianism, paternalism, entrepreneurialism, informalism and careerism. Kekkonen fits easily to all of them. At the beginning of his tenure, ritual was central in his leadership style. Moreover, he was physically fit (as a former sportsman) and energetically vigorous in pursuing his political objectives. Thus, in the vocabulary of Collinson and Hearn, his style was careerist, informal and entrepreneurial during the early years. Towards the end of his tenure, however, he grew older and his wife passed away. Consequently, the traits of authoritarianism and paternalism emerged. In the early photographs, a vigorous, energetic and inspiring Kekkonen pursues his political agenda and wins hearts and minds of many allies and followers in political and public spaces. Vitality, strong will and even lustfulness stir the emotions of followers – people prefer willing, strong and sure leaders. The hunter-leader is perhaps the ultimate example of a masculine leader – Urho Kekkonen in 1956.

Vigour and physical strength cannot survive time, however. The central ingredients of Kekkonen’s leadership were physical strength and ability – traits that were associated with his political skills. In fact, Sinclair (2005) suggests that a physically weak or frail leader invites suspicion. As Kekkonen grew older and his old fishing mates passed away, the composition of his tribe changed – flattering businessmen replaced his old allies. However, the symbolic base of his leadership, the visual imagery of Kekkonen’s fishing trips, was then already institutionalised. The ‘magic’ ingredient was his vigour, and the trick of continuing the fishing trips despite the lack of ritual behind it could only make it last for a certain time. Nevertheless, his leadership mythology survived – and does so to our present day – a clear sign of that only myth can beat time. As the narrative extending from the ‘dream age’ to the present day of the tribe, Kekkonen’s leadership mythology became the nuclear narrative around which his new, ‘hijacked’ tribe and greater society organised. In the later photographs, we see an un-willing leader. In fact, the most remarkable sign of the weakening of his grip on power was not his fading physical strength, but his lack of interest. The lustful hunter-leader had become a disengaged old man, missing his friends – *un-willing is un-leading*.

This brings us to the understanding of how energetic success attracts followership. Our view, ‘the spoils of leadership’, is shown in how successful leaders attract followers. We witness this identity appeal across organisational fields – from sports to politics and business. Think, for example, how many *new* fans are attracted by a championship win. Similarly, why are star companies the most desired workplaces among university students? The Fishing President – the prime hunter of his tribe – became the object of awe and flattery. Kekkonen was a predator of fish and political adversaries; towards his tribe and followers he was a hunter. This is how his political and social roles differed. The hunter is the social embodiment of the predator: by killing animals he performs a social function – he is not a lone killer but a benefactor of the tribe. This was Kekkonen’s self-identity, as well as his public image. Whatever predator was in his personality, he lived through socially, as the providing hunter.

Notes

1. In 2004, Kekkonen was chosen as 'The third greatest Finn of all time' in a vote organised by the Finnish Broadcasting Company.
2. A campaign of state-sponsored militia raids around 1920 in the Soviet Russian territory, aiming to 'liberate' the Fenno-Ugric tribes from their Slavic and Communist 'oppressors'.
3. We remain agnostic of the intentionality of the leadership mythology.
4. Governor: a local politician in the north of the country, personal friend and ally of Kekkonen; Adjutant: Kekkonen's personal bodyguard and aide; Hunter: a civil servant in the ministry of agriculture, good shot, fisherman and cook, the photographer of early photographs; Retailer: the director of a retail company; Oiler: the director of the national oil corporation, provider of fishing trips through his network; Constructor: the director of a large construction company, well connected with the Soviet Union; Doctor: Kekkonen's personal doctor and later photographer.
5. 'The Battle of Raate Road', fought in January 1940 between the Soviet Union and Finland, resulted in substantial Soviet losses.

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