

## Anne Haila (1953–2019), 'the most important Georgist in the World', dies at sixty-six



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Anne Haila loved to read, reflect, and recount what she had read. Research had to be dialectical or it was mediocre. She was a warrior for Southern knowledge, but not all versions of it. Although she was on top of the state-of-the-art in social sciences and the expansive breadth of research approaches in the social sciences, for her no social science enquiry was complete without a serious engagement with land—not just land in its material sense, but its rent. No, she was not a physiocrat, even if she was fond of the Agricultural University of Norway where she worked from 1997 to 1998. Her focus was cities. Indeed, as one of only a few Academy Professors in Finland, a Finnish way of saying 'Distinguished Professor', or the *crème de la crème* of the Finnish professoriate, she was more a disciple of Henry George and Sun Yat-sen than she was of Francois Quesnay, Charles Richard de Butre, or any of the French physiocrats. In Finland, she attributed the influences on her to Pekka V. Virtanen who assured her of the uniqueness of land and to Lauri af Heurlin 'who released the issue of land rent from the academic curfew imposed upon it'.

Once released, however, Haila made sure that it would never be ignored again. She defended and extended it—like Henry George about whom Haila wrote, 'He figures prominently in what I have to say about land reforms'. Thus, upon hearing of the death of Anne Haila, the Editor-in-Chief of the *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, the best

journal of Georgist political economy, was emphatic that 'the most important Georgist in the world' has died.

Students assigned to her promptly declared that they had received a 'death sentence' for her sustained transformative teaching. Those who managed to withstand her rigorous mentoring and stay with her until the end of their PhD and early career period produced award-winning work. They soon became land economists. Who wouldn't, after studying with Anne Haila? With a path to supervision which involved Anne Haila as the sole supervisor, who else could bear the torch of truth and be so unshakeable in their commitment to the land? She supported international students in many ways, including finding them housing for which they only paid peppercorn rent. A dependable voice for the voiceless, and a defender of the rights of the meek, she offered the weak a home in Finland far from home. Those from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia who were interested in cities knew one name: Anne Haila. If they did not, they were sent to one person: Anne Haila. She was a mother to them. Like the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, they collectively created a mutually-supportive ecosystem to defend the land and advance similarly oriented land rent theory.

Once asked whether it is strategic to develop a career focused entirely on urban land rent theory, she responded, 'I have done so not out of strategy, but because of interest'. Academy Professor Anne Haila saw land, and land rent, in everything. With a PhD thesis on 'Land as a Financial Asset: Studies in Theoretical and Real Trends', written as far back as 1990, she was sceptical of financialization as a current research trend not only because of its reliance on the neoclassical urban economics demand and supply framework for its explanations, but also because of land rent theory, a methodology that she applied to everything, including 'Christmas decorations and real estate'. Her own university, the University of Helsinki, was not even spared the searching power of land rent theory by which Haila demonstrated the university's widespread contribution to uneven and unequal urban development.

A fan of Paul Lafargue's the *Right to be Lazy*, she was, alas!, the very opposite of indolence, or even one to 'take life easy'. It was common for her students and colleagues to receive emails from her at midnight and she was usually the last to leave the university building after the close of work. Love or hate her, Anne Haila was the paragon of devotion and excellence. David Harvey was her doctoral opponent. That David Harvey, arguably the world's leading urban political economist, flew from Oxford University in the UK to a relatively small university, Helsinki University of Technology, in a freezing cold country, Finland, to examine a young female scholar is testament to the pioneering and promising nature of Anne Haila's work. Thus, when, almost 20 years later, Haila published her magnum opus, *Urban Land Rent*, David Harvey was emphatic in his endorsement:

The role of land and property markets in recent economic crises has clearly been significant. It also seems as if capitalism is trending towards more and more rentier as opposed to productive activities. Yet there is surprisingly little written on the subject. Haila's book remedies this lack and comes at a very opportune moment. This is a must-read for anyone concerned with contemporary economic conditions and trends.

That's pretty much everyone, but Haila herself often felt that her contribution was neither well understood nor well appreciated, particularly at home where her focus was typically deemed 'narrow'. This reality recalls an experience in the 'Crime of Poverty', where Henry George recollects a personal encounter with a greenbacker who said, 'Yes, yes, the land question is an important question; oh, I admit the land question is a very important question; but then there are other important questions. There is this question and that question, and the other question; and there is the money question. The money question is a very important question; it is a more important question than the land question'. But, Haila faced even more daunting scepticism. The 'prophet' in the proverbial aphorism, 'a prophet has no honour', had it easier than his female counterpart, Haila. She suffered a quintuple 'problem': woman, critical scholar, land economist, and living in Finland. Courageous and confident, and yet humble and respectful, she was disadvantaged in a profession in which the descriptor, 'humble professor', is an oxymoron. Thus, together with the widely-held view in Finland that, while for many in the Anglo-Saxon world the road to academic stardom is paved for them through a historically long period of global scientific engagement, Finns have had to build their road by themselves, learning only relatively recently to face global anonymous scientific communities. Haila also had to deal with internal hurdles.

These identity and class biases against Dr Haila were particularly striking in the case of acceptance by economists, so she turned to sociologists for audience and engagement. However, she always carefully pointed out that she was, first and foremost, an economist. Still, the sociologists regarded her highly, ultimately voting overwhelmingly for her to become the Vice President of the International Sociological Association (ISA) Research Committee on Urban and Regional Development (RC21), and later Secretary and Board Member of the RC21. Her contribution to urban studies was the most extensive. For five years, she was Editor-in-Chief of the leading urban studies journal in Finland, *Yhdyskuntasuunnittelu*, before becoming corresponding editor for two leading global urban studies journals: *Urban Studies* and the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*.

Even in these circles, she was sometimes misunderstood. Some considered her sustained, stinging critique of Western philosophy to be an uncritical acceptance of postcolonial urban studies, most strands of which, in fact, she thoroughly rejected. Others accused Haila's work of 'ignorance' when, in her paper, 'The Market as the New emperor', she challenged the uncritical use of Western private property rights theories in the Chinese context in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. She was subsequently openly flayed for turning this leading journal into a 'tabloid'. But Haila was a thick-skinned political economist who feared no authority, once remarking that, even as a PhD student, there was nothing as enjoyable as being opposed by David Harvey! 'She had a presence in every meeting' is how one colleague remembered her in Finland. Elsewhere too, she left a lasting footprint. Haila's urban economics examination questions, set at the National University of Singapore, invited students to challenge the mainstream urban economics models of land rent (better known as the 'Alonso-Muth-Mills' models).

These questions invited open confrontation because it was precisely Edwin Mills, a towering figure in mainstream urban economics, who had to approve such questions as External Examiner of the Urban Economics course in the Real Estate Programme. He didn't, commenting that he did not like the questions. Yet, Haila persevered until she prevailed, based on sound pedagogical arguments. Far from being an outlier, Dr Haila thrived on being contrarian, a critic of neoclassical, new institutional, and Austrian urban economics. 'It has become almost a habit', she wrote in the preface of her doctoral dissertation, 'to thank a female for making a male understand when it is time to switch off the PC and stop writing'. She continued, 'I am in a position to do just the opposite. I would like to thank Uskali Mäki, for making me realise that I can never cease demanding more accurate thoughts and expressions'.

It is ironic that Haila's dialectical, contrarian, and political economic methodology, might have been lost on many other urban scholars who considered her simply as doing 'case studies', 'land rent research', or 'Asian studies'. She scoffed at these labels. Indeed, she felt 'apologetic', as she once wrote in an editorial in *Urban Studies* on 'Globalising Asian Cities', that urban studies was caught in 'Anglo-American-centrism', while Asian studies was fastidiously tied to rural studies. Her solution was not to turn to sterile localism. Instead, as a political economist, dialectics was in her bones, often making her slide to political economy circles, although most of these were largely aspatial, with few exceptions, such as the board of the *Edinburgh Studies in Urban Political Economy*, a book series committed to publishing books with the characteristics of Anne Haila's own work. When invited, she did not look away: she proudly accepted the calling and served on the board with distinction. Political economy journals, such as the *Journal of Australian Political Economy* and *Review of Radical Political Economics*, published moving reviews of her book.

Like the great political economists of all time, she understood that research is not simply to understand the world, scholarship must also be able to transform the world. Thus, when Academy Professor Haila was invited to serve on the powerful Economic Policy Council of Finland whose 'political economy' was in the policy sphere, she embraced the opportunity, becoming the only woman and also the only political economist on the Council whose task is to evaluate targets set for economic policy and how they link with social and public policy. Asked what her initial impressions were about contributing to the Council, she stated what had to be said, the truth, not what people wished to hear: Finnish land policy is a mess, explaining much of the worsening political-economic and social problems in a country which, according to UN reports, is supposed to be an Eldorado.

Mild-mannered and softly spoken, yet firm and resolute in her commitments to social justice, Haila was feared, particularly by egotistical white males. Like Mrs C.W. Loomers who challenged Theodore Schultz, the economics Nobel Prize Winner on his questionable portrayal of land, Anne Haila provided a spirited denunciation of the work of the economics Nobel Laureate, Douglas North who ventured into land economics with little or no experience. Described sometimes as 'gloomy', Anne Haila was often characterized as 'technical'. Even her PhD, obtained at the 'technical' Aalto University (until 2010 known as Helsinki University of Technology), was a source of commentary, all being veiled criticisms of non-intellectualism, perhaps even an incapacity to see the big picture because she was too 'technical'.

However, nothing could be more facile or more farcical. For a scholar whose reference lists were much longer than the full articles of many leading social scientists, a writer who challenged reductionist interpretations of Singapore's success as something related to its culture, or Asian values, and a world-class intellectual thrice denied full professorship at Aalto University by white men who did not consider her work 'technical' enough, nothing could be farther from the truth. Haila only travelled to conferences with an empty suitcase. Asked why she did so, she responded that her suitcase was not meant for clothing but to carry back to her study in Helsinki new books, which were often on display and on sale at conferences. She was a walking encyclopedia in a literal sense because she was often seen dragging her precious treasure back home. All these books were read carefully, as their in-text notes and reviews in her seminars showed.

After almost two decades of challenging the so-called prospects of private property rights, prolifically denouncing them in a tsunami of articles, not just as unmet in practice but as the most important driver of global social problems, she became paralysed: one of her hands stopped working. She refused to give in to the urges of her body to stop working. Instead, she quickly learnt to write with the other hand.

With age and retirement catching up on her, she doubled her output—much like the marathons she loved to run. Thus, when the Academy of Finland responded affirmatively to her proposal in 2018 to concretely demonstrate alternatives to private land ownership, Haila saw an opportunity to subvert the mainstream. Like every good social scientist, her diagnosis was complete, but scholarship to buttress her preferred alternative—which she fondly called 'high risk, high gain'—had just begun. It was not that the two were separate, but rather she wanted to provide more global examples of her alternative which included religious land, notably Islamic, Christian and Buddhist land in Thailand, Taiwan and China, but also other types of public and common land such as *adat* in Indonesia.

Advocates of her work in her research group paved the way with books such as *The Commons in an Age of Uncertainty* which provide sustained critiques of existing theories of the commons that pay little or no attention to land. *Divided by Policy*, a doctoral thesis that denounced descriptive urban inequality research that only mapped and geo-depicted crushing inequality, complemented the scene setting. However, the real breakthrough, the masterpiece, was going to come from Professor Haila herself, possibly under the title, *Alternatives to Private Land Ownership*. She worked on this groundbreaking book and her memoirs every day. She toiled day and night, travelled to Asia almost every other month, and reasoned with everyone who would listen. As with Henry George, from whom she took inspiration, Haila left too soon, possibly from the culmination of years of exhaustion and fatigue.

Anne Haila, Distinguished Professor, was born into her native land in 1953. She fought all her life for its sanctity and to establish what she called the 'Helsinki School of Critical Urban Studies'. She returned to the land on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2019.

-- Franklin Obeng-Odoom, on behalf of Anne Haila's Research Group, the 'Helsinki School of Critical Urban Studies', University of Helsinki, Finland