
The Meanings of Paid Work

Hytönen, Kirsi-Maria 2014. *Ei elämääni lomaa mahtunut. Naisten muistelukerrontaa palkkatyöstä, talvi- ja jatkosotien jälleenrakennuksen aikana.* (English summary: "There was no time for holidays in my life": Women's memories of paid work during the Second World War and in the years of rebuilding in Finland.) Kultaneito XIII. Joensuu: Suomen Kansantietouden Seura. 282 pp. Diss. ISBN 978-951-9451-05-03. ISSN 1239-3843.

The quotation 'there was no time for holidays in my life' in the title of Kirsi-Maria Hytönen's dissertation in ethnology captures the message Finnish women have wanted to pass on about their wartime experiences: a great deal of work was done at the time by women without question or complaint. This is something that has been shown also in earlier research on Finnish women's wartime experiences. As such, for Hytönen this is only the starting point for her research, which concentrates especially on women doing paid work.

In Finland, the proportion of women in the labour force was relatively high already before the Second World War. Still, the war has been seen as a game changer for women's lives with respect to their role at home and in working life. Although Hytönen critically examines the ways in which war affected women's lives, she also agrees with the idea that the decades surrounding the war years represented an exceptional time for re-negotiating gender roles. No doubt, these negotiations were visible in women's everyday lives during the war, but what did it mean in the longer term perspective?

In her research, Kirsi-Maria Hytönen analyses women's experiences of paid work both during the Second World War and the so-called 'years of rebuilding' that followed the war period. To do this, she has analysed an extensive range of material compiled from four different archives and eight different collections, including both women's written reminiscences and some interviews. Altogether, her material includes the personal reminiscences of 411 women. The professions they represent are multiple, including industrial work, office work and sales as well as those working in crafts trades, nursing and the building trade.

To contextualise the reminiscences, she also analysed women's magazines published in the 1940s and 1950s. The magazines helped her to understand both the ways of narrating and the preconditions for women's paid work. They give an idea of the ways in which womanhood(s) has been constructed and how they were part of the social reality at the time. However, it is the reminiscences and the experiences they describe that play a central role in the research; the magazines are highlighted mainly when discussing the different discourses concerning the integration of motherhood and paid work.

Hytönen has focused her research on women working on the home front, which she sees as a group whose role has long been overlooked in research. As such, her research is also part of a wider research field that has become popular especially at the beginning of the 21st century, where the experiences of war as told from the viewpoints of gender, family, children and other groups and actors previously dismissed have become of interest. The research questions approach

women's experiences from various viewpoints. She is interested in the ways women depict their experiences decades after the events took place, and in what kinds of meanings they have given to their paid work, work community and working environment. She also discusses the ways gender was experienced in the work places and the ways the women tried to fit motherhood into their working lives.

Hytönen connects her research to the oral history tradition, although her material is mainly written material. She emphasises the meanings of personal experiences and the ways people talk about them. She also positions her research within women's history instead of gender history. Through her research, she wants to take part in the discussion within Finnish ethnology and history about the ways in which the image of the 'strong Finnish woman' has been constructed and to question the hierarchies, values and patterns based on gender.

In doing this, the reflexive role of research and the researcher is also important. This is why she also carefully describes the processes by which the reminiscences were produced and in what contexts and the role of archives with different kinds of aims. However – and perhaps surprisingly – the different collections did not add diversity to the general overview; in the end, the stories told were quite similar to one another. Or, at least the differences cannot be traced to the different archives. Hytönen points out, though, that this observation mainly applies to the contents of the reminiscences. A more diversified picture might have appeared if the focus had been on the means of narrating.

Stories of loyalty and obligation, of learning and surviving, and of new responsibilities are central when analysing women's reminiscences from wartime. On the other hand, the material reveals insecurities about managing new duties because of the physical difficulty or because of a lack of experience, training or proper instruction. However, the descriptions of changes in duties emphasise the more positive aspects: the women were motivated to take on the new role they were being offered and they also felt they had a chance to make choices in their working life – at

least more freely than later in life. The descriptions of conflicts reveal, however, how ideas of professions were intricately connected with ideas of manhood and womanhood. Despite the changes in and negotiations about gender roles, the material creates a picture of gendered work, especially in industry.

The uniform stories of women who could successfully do a man's job create a crystallised narrative whole. The ability to manage and to learn are the positive elements when talking about paid work during wartime. According to Hytönen, the men are invisible in these stories, away at the front or in a supportive role, like foreman, in the work places. She argues that the changes in gender roles may have been more visible on the micro level, in the concrete work done by the women, than in the statistics or discourses at the macro level. However, the narrated experiences also have varying emphasis in terms of how well the changes were adopted in the end. This depends partly on the way the women themselves contextualise their stories within either the circumstances before the war or after it.

Hytönen has paid special attention to the way in which the women have narrated experiences of tiredness and exhaustion. This is an interesting choice, as women's war-time narration often stresses resiliency and fortitude. To do this, Hytönen analysed the factors surrounding feelings of tiredness: haste, experiences with the work being difficult, a sense of hunger and uncleanness. All of this had to do with the war, which seems to have become intertwined with all aspects of life, and the stories are structured as part of the shared war effort. As the author states, this way of narrating is very much connected to the way the archives have wanted to record war-time experiences.

The themes analysed in the study concentrate mainly on the wartime period. This is understandable because of the sources used. The analysis proceeds chronologically, and in the end attention is paid more to the years of rebuilding. Some of the themes, however, recur throughout the various contexts. Nonetheless, I think – as the researcher herself does – that women's experiences during the rebuilding years and the way they themselves

analyse them still form an interesting research theme that Kirsi-Maria Hytönen could continue working with. The research at hand provides a solid foundation for doing just that.

For some of the narrators, the change from war to peace was just as big as the change from peace to war. Those who experienced this change most negatively seem to also be those who reacted most strongly to them in their narrations. The individual narrations are also more polarised than a more general homogenous narration of war. This means that the stories are as much about continuities as they are about breakages. What is interesting is the way the styles of narrating also change when the women start to discuss the post-war period. Hytönen briefly analyses her material within the context of nostalgia for the 1950s. Although her examples do not create a uniform picture here, the time of rebuilding seems to be pictured in

quite positive terms. There might be differences when compared to rural women struggling outside the field of paid labour, for whom the years after the war did not seem to become any easier.

The number of stories analysed by Kirsi-Maria Hytönen is massive. Still, or because of that, the story of the strong Finnish woman can also be heard in this material – loud and clear. The uniformity of the narration is broken, however, by the researcher bringing out counter narratives and different points of emphasis from her sources. The analysis shows that there is no easy answer to questions of why or when. Instead, questions of how help us understand the nature of change: the different kinds of factors promoting or inhibiting it and the different ways of reacting to it.

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