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The Many-Voiced Factory Community

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Maria Vanha-Similä 2017. *Yhtiöön, yhtiöön! Lapsiperheiden arki Forssan tehdasyhteisössä 1950–1970-luvuilla*. [To the firm, to the firm! The everyday life of families who worked in the Forssa textile industry from the 1950s to the 1970s.] Kansatieteellinen Arkisto 58. Helsinki: The Finnish Antiquarian Society. 250 pp. Diss. ISBN 978-952-6655-05-5 (print). ISBN 978-952-6655-06-2 (electronic). ISSN 0355-1830.

Maria Vanha-Similä's doctoral dissertation deals with the everyday life of the factory community of Finlayson-Forssa Ltd (1847–2009) from the 1950s to the 1970s, and the main focus is on the everyday life of families with children. After the Second World War (1939–1945), the factory's rise and success were at their highest during the 1950s and 1960s. According to the author, the factory faced constant changes during the decades following the 1970s. The decades after the 1970s brought with them a gradual decline in production and the closing of some of the factory's units. One reason for this was the globalisation of the textile industry, and the gradually increasing cheap import of textile products. Employees' everyday life was shadowed by uncertainty over their jobs. On the other hand, many social changes affecting families' lives also took place in the 1970s; for example, the 1973 law on children's daycare, which obligated municipalities to make sure daycare was available. Another relevant justification for the time frame of Vanha-Similä's dissertation is that most of the research materials focus on the decades from the 1950s to the 1970s. Admittedly, extending the research into the 2000s would have disturbed the compact structure of the research.

Vanha-Similä briefly sheds light on the background of research on working-class people's history, factory communities and working-class families by describing research from Finland and Sweden, and especially the tradition of research on the working-class history of Great Britain. She intertwines questions arising from the research materials with the starting points of and questions in her own research. The most pronounced point of reference of Vanha-Similä's research is to the discipline of Ethnology at the University of Turku. During the 1950s and 1960s, Professor of Ethnology Ilmar Talve initiated research projects on the "folk culture" of industrial working people and occupational groups.

Differing from earlier Finnish ethnological studies on factory communities, Vanha-Similä excludes technical descriptions and explanations of actual



work tasks. The main focus is on highlighting and analysing the experiences and memories of people who worked at the factory at different times. Studying the factory community from the perspective of families is a well-suited method for the purpose of Vanha-Similä's research. Women have made up a large part of the workforce in the Finnish textile industry, in contrast to many other fields of industry. This was the case for Finlayson-Forssa Ltd, too. In the factory, the division of labour between men and women was clear; women mostly worked in the spinning and weaving units, where the level of wages was lower than in the units where men worked.

Even though Vanha-Similä is not exactly conducting gender research, one of the central viewpoints of her research lies in the ways the narrators have described and defined everyday life between the genders both during factory work and at home. With regard to the female perspective, the study is linked to present Finnish ethnological research on female workers and their position in industrial communities as well as other fields of work. Examples of this research include: Tytti Steel 2013. *Risteäviä eroja sataman arjessa* [Intersections in the everyday life of harbours]; Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto 2013. *Her Own Worth: Negotiations of Subjectivity in the Life Narrative of a Female Labourer* and Kirsi-Maria Hytönen 2014. "Ei elämäni lomina mahtunut." *Naisten muisteluterontaa palkkatyöstä talvi- ja jatkosotien ja jälleenrakennuksen aikana* ["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]. Questions relevant especially to this research indeed arise more from the decisions made by textile factory workers in their everyday life to combine their family life and factory work, often in shifts, into a functional system. For families' everyday life to run smoothly and be well-organised, flexibility was required in arranging childcare and a division of labour was needed between women and men at home and in the factory.

In Chapter 3, discussing how the research materials were composed, the author presents and analyses the diverse and comprehensive research materials in a thorough and satisfying manner. The author's work on a project concerning Finlayson-Forssa, titled "Muistoja Kutomolta 1979–2009" [Memories from the weaving unit of the Finlayson-Forssa factory 1979–2009], produced ample interview and reminiscence materials, which she was also able to utilise in this dissertation research. The Finnish National Board of Antiquities carried out its "Työväenkulttuuri" [Working-class culture] project in the 1980s, which studied the Finlayson-Forssa factory community. The interview materials gathered in this project as well as the study based on them (Pekka Leimu 1983. *Elämää tehtaanpillin mukaan* [Life according to the factory whistle]) are linked to Vanha-Similä's research, providing additional and background ma-

materials. Vanha-Similä has also gone through and utilised plenty of other materials, the most extensive entity being Finlayson-Forssa Ltd's Tekstiliarkisto [Textile archives] stored at the Forssa Museum and containing varied documents and other materials on the factory's production and operation. Moreover, the author's reflections on her own role as a researcher and her researcher position in relation to the research questions, materials and methods are meritoriously written.

In addition to the interviews and written materials, photographs have had an important role in the research. As a method, they have supported the interviews to stimulate the interviewees' memories. The photographs illustrating the dissertation are an excellent way to demonstrate the research, whose subject matter is less familiar to the general public. The photograph on page 144 perfectly encapsulates the everyday life of factory work for families: some employees are on their way to work, others leaving. Many are accompanied by children, who are returning home holding hands with their parent, whose work shift has ended.

Vanha-Similä's work exhibits two significant paradigmatic changes that have taken place in Finnish ethnological research. During the 1970s, ethnological research started to widen from the study of agrarian culture to cities and industrial environments. Letting the narrators tell their stories connects the author's research specifically to the significance of memories and personal experience in people's narratives, a research trend that has gained more and more interest since the 1990s. The dissertation's theoretical framework lies in the study of memory materials, which ties it to the international trend of oral history research, largely reformed by Italian literary scholar Alessandro Portelli. He emphasises the significance of memory material as a narrative and in itself a valuable "second voice", which is in the same way one of the central premises of Vanha-Similä's research.

The other theoretical-methodological tool used by the author is the idea of collective memory, which was first introduced by French sociologist and philosopher Maurice Halbwachs in the 1930s. In principle, collective memory is related to the relationships between individual and collective memory, especially to how different memory situations create socially shared interpretations of the past. In Vanha-Similä's research, collective memory appears in the interviews through e.g. the interviewer being very careful about which questions are appropriate to ask. Particularly during group interviews and public discourse, collective memory provided a framework for how the factory community was discussed.

In Vanha-Similä's research, the framework for studying nostalgia comes mostly from Fred Davis's 1979 tripartite classification. The author applies

this to some extent to the interview materials. However, nostalgia both as a theoretical and analytical concept is complex and could have been explained more widely and analytically. Memories identified as nostalgic tend to share a strong emotional tone, and the author could also have presented and analysed some of the interviewees' survival stories through bittersweet nostalgia.

The starting point of the research was to examine the factory community especially through the everyday life of families. The ways working-class fathers took part in housework and childcare are interesting. In some families, fathers only worked during weekends, which enabled them to spend time with their children, which in turn brought them closer together. On the other hand, family life is mostly observed through adults, and the children's experiences do not get much mention. Nevertheless, in addition to singular interview excerpts that present the children's viewpoint, the study does include two subchapters that centre more on childhood and somewhat bring forth their point of view: "Lapset tarhaan" [Children to kindergarten] and "Lapset osana yhteisöä" [Children as part of the community]. It would have been interesting to find out about, for example, children's games and playing environments. What was allowed for children, what was forbidden? Did children form gangs of friends and were there scuffles in the courtyards of the factory housing, or did they develop romantic relationships as they grew older?

In the factory community, work was essential to ensure income, and people had to be able to overcome difficulties while continued employment was not always guaranteed. Still, the Finlayson-Forssa textile factory was characterised by employees' long careers, although at the same time there was a relatively large amount of employee turnover. Another typical characteristic of the factory was how several generations sought out to or just wound up working there. Education was not necessarily valued in families, and instead, the factory was seen as a safer option for the children's future. In the patriarchal factory community, the employees' whole life environment from housing and healthcare to leisure activities was in some way tied to the factory. The work community with all its benefits was safe, but at the same time, the way the employer was in a sense always "present" in all aspects of the employees' lives could (also) cause anxiety. The factory community was also very hierarchical, not only between the management and employees on different levels, but also between the employees themselves. The signs of a single employee's rising social class included, among others, buying or building their own house, owning a car and with it, having more freedom of movement and the ability to spend holidays farther away.

Vanha-Similä has managed to construct a many-voiced and comprehensive study of the Finlayson-Forssa factory community with an emphasis on fam-

ilies and how they coped with different challenges provided by everyday life. The diverse research materials have made it possible to widen the point of view to a more general level of the social and societal development of Finnish society. At the end of the research, Vanha-Similä takes a look into the future by reflecting on prospects and possible ways to help local people to deal with their past and memories as workers in the textile factory. As a workable example, she mentions successful oral history projects in Manchester after the local textile industry died down. As a whole, the structure of the research is well balanced, and the research is written fluently and in a competent manner.

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