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OF EXPERIENCE

# Lived Institutions as History of Experience

*Edited by* Johanna Annola  
Hanna Lindberg · Pirjo Markkola



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# Palgrave Studies in the History of Experience

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This series, a collaboration between Palgrave Macmillan and the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in the History of Experience (HEX) at Tampere University, will publish works on the histories of experience across historical time and global space. History of experience means, for the series, individual, social, and collective experiences as historically conditioned phenomena. ‘Experience’ refers here to a theoretically and methodologically conceptualized study of human experiences in the past, not to any study of ‘authentic’ or ‘essentialist’ experiences. More precisely, the series will offer a forum for the historical study of human experiencing, i.e. of the varying preconditions, factors, and possibilities shaping past experiences. Furthermore, the series will study the human institutions, communities, and the systems of belief, knowledge, and meaning as based on accumulated (and often conflicting) experiences.

The aim of the series is to deepen the methodology and conceptualization of the history of lived experiences, going beyond essentialism. As the series editors see it, the history of experience can provide a bridge between structures, ideology, and individual agency, which has been a difficult gap to close for historians and sociologists. The approach opens doors to see, study, and explain historical experiences as a social fact, which again offers new insights on society. Subjective experiences are seen as objectified into knowledge regimes, social order and divisions, institutions, and other structures, which, in turn, shape the experiences. The principle idea is to present a new approach, the history of experiences, as a way to establish the necessary connection between big and small history.

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Johanna Annola • Hanna Lindberg  
Pirjo Markkola  
Editors

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Johanna Annola, Hanna Lindberg, Pirjo Markkola

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Experience, Institutions, and the Lived Welfare State

*Johanna Annola, Hanna Lindberg, and Pirjo Markkola*

### INTRODUCTION

Modern people encounter a multitude of institutions throughout their life course. The centuries-long triad of “church, state, and family” has been split into several entangled institutions that structure people’s daily lives by producing, reinforcing, and sometimes preventing various social and societal experiences. However, the interaction between institutions and individuals is not a one-way process: shared experiences contribute to the formation and reformation of current and future institutions. As such, institutions should not be seen as rigid entities but rather as the outcome of mutual interaction between individuals and society.

The gradual development of the welfare state has in a conspicuous way contributed to institutional fragmentation. It has also changed the

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distribution of responsibilities between the state and the family as institutions.<sup>1</sup> For example, while both children's primary socialization and the care for the sick and the elderly were previously regarded as responsibilities of the family, the twentieth century marked the expansion of the welfare state into these areas, especially in Northern Europe. Municipal mother and child clinics, public daycare, and public residential homes for the elderly, among others, provide new institutional settings in which the experience of society is constituted.<sup>2</sup>

The degree to which the welfare state is present in people's lives varies over time and space, as well as through the course of the individual's life, but no one is unaffected by the route the welfare state takes. Through social benefits, insurance, and services, as well as education and health care and their respective branches, welfare institutions set the frames for people's daily lives. However, as Stein Kuhnle, Per Selle, and Sven E.O. Hort, three renowned scholars of welfare policies, point out, "welfare states come in different shapes and sizes."<sup>3</sup> This means that the interaction between the state, civil society, local communities, and the market—not to mention their impact on people's daily lives—is a changing phenomenon.

In this book, we study institutions that were formed first by the state in general and later by the emerging welfare states in Northern Europe. Our period of interest ranges from the late eighteenth to the twenty-first century, which allows for a view of the earlier forms of welfare provision and the multi-layered development of the welfare state<sup>4</sup> without omitting some of its most blatant shortcomings. Our geographical focus is on the countries bounding the Baltic Sea: Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Poland. These regions share much common history, and the Nordic countries can also be characterized as the cradle of the internationally appealing Nordic model of welfare.

<sup>1</sup> "Family" usually refers to a group of people bound together in kinship, marriage, or co-residence. The ways in which the boundaries of this group have been defined in different times and places have varied greatly. See, for example, Aatsinki, Annola, and Kaarninen, *Approaches to Changing Values of Upbringing*, 1, 5–7.

<sup>2</sup> For discussion on the relationship between familial responsibilities, family ties, and the development of tax-funded welfare provisions, see Reher, *Family Ties in Western Europe*; Muravyeva and Toivo, *Honor Thy Father and Mother in Sovic, Thane, and Viazzo* (eds.) *The History of European Families*.

<sup>3</sup> Kuhnle, Selle, and Hort, *Introduction*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> For the multi-layered historicity of the welfare state, see Kettunen and Petersen, *Introduction*, 5–7.

We explore how institutions were experienced as an outcome of interaction between the individual and society, as well as how institutions as sites of experience shaped and structured people's everyday lives. Utilizing theoretical and methodological frameworks developed within the history of experiences, the book aims to illuminate the interconnections between experience and welfare institutions and the ways in which these mutual connections are related to societal change.

## HISTORY OF EXPERIENCE AND THE LIVED WELFARE STATE

In the book, we merge studies of institutions and the history of the welfare state with the history of experience. In recent years, the history of experience has gained renewed attention from historians, and the contours of a distinct yet diverse field have taken shape.<sup>5</sup> The history of experience seeks to investigate the ways in which experiences are formed and articulated as a part of a collective setting and how the processes of sharing and consolidating experiences contribute to societal change.

On the one hand, the field builds on the tradition of new social history. From the 1960s onward, labor history, gender history, and other orientations of new social history answered the call for “history from below” by focusing on the history of everyday life as well as on the history of “common people” and other previously ignored groups. One of the key figures, the British historian E. P. Thompson, launched in the 1960s a thorough discussion on the experience of the working classes. For him, experience was a social fact that explained social relations and social power. In general, the new social history developed a keen interest toward the experiences of the working classes, rural poor, minorities, and women.<sup>6</sup> The new social historians linked experience, social identity, and politics together and often worked alongside grassroots movements. As the US historian Laura Lee Downs argues, “[I]ndividual experiences, interpreted in light of inherited

<sup>5</sup>For recent contributions to the history of experience, see Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*; Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*; Kivimäki, Suodenjoki, and Vahtikari (eds.), *Lived Nation*; Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo (eds.), *Histories of Experience*; Haapala, Harjula, and Kokko (eds.), *Experiencing Society*; *Digital Handbook of the History of Experience*, several entries.

<sup>6</sup>Haapala, Harjula, and Kokko, Introduction; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*. For the German history of everyday life, see Lüdtke, *The History of Everyday Life*; Iggers, *Historiography*.

cultural tradition, formed the indispensable ground of political and revolutionary action.”<sup>7</sup>

However, the cultural and linguistic turns in the historical sciences questioned social historians’ attempts to reach the experiences of so-called ordinary people. Poststructuralism displayed the fundamental role of language, knowledge premises, and social relations in shaping experiences. The category of experience was soon dismissed as part of outdated social history.<sup>8</sup> Gender history, in particular, was steered toward a poststructuralist understanding of experiences. In the 1980s, US historian Joan W. Scott criticized social historians’ attempts to assume an exact fit between class consciousness and experience and suggested attention be paid to discourse to understand how conceptions of class organized social experience and how representations and meanings given to material life were constructed.<sup>9</sup> In her seminal article “The Evidence of Experience” (1991), Scott encouraged historians to avoid a naïve interpretation of individual experience as a reflection of social reality. Scholarly focus on the discursive construction of experiences, as suggested by Scott, was fruitful, but it did not provide the tools to deal with materiality. According to historians Rob Boddice and Mark Smith, “Scott was unable to see how to include the body and the brain, the feelings and the senses.”<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, the history of experience builds on the tradition of *Erfahrungsgeschichte*, which was developed in Germany around the turn of the millennium. Crucial to this tradition is the analytical separation between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. The former refers to people’s pre-discursive perception of the world, while the latter is understood as the socially shared and culturally, historically, and linguistically embedded interpretation of events.<sup>11</sup> In this book, we do not rely on the German history of experience as such, but in line with Finnish historians Ville Kivimäki, Sami Suodenjoki, and Tanja Vahtikari, we follow the German tradition’s emphasis on how culture and social relations bind experiences to “power

<sup>7</sup>Downs, *Writing Gender History*, 31.

<sup>8</sup>This has been pointed out by Laura Lee Downs, who also writes about “the individual-experience-to-social-identity link on which many narratives of social history rested.” Downs, *Writing Gender History*, 95.

<sup>9</sup>Scott, *Women in The Making of the English Working Class*, 88–9.

<sup>10</sup>Scott, *The Evidence of Experience*; Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, 19.

<sup>11</sup>Koselleck, *Future Past*; Kivimäki, *Sodan kokemushistoria*; Kivimäki, *Battled Nerves*; Kivimäki, Suodenjoki, and Vahtikari, *Lived Nation*, 11–12.

relations, institutions and systems of meaning.”<sup>12</sup> Experiences are a societal phenomenon, and the history of experience explores society.

Furthermore, the history of experience is closely connected to the history of emotions and the senses. Recent decades have seen an upsurge in historical studies of emotions, focusing on the ways in which emotions are socially and culturally shared and reproduced in different historical contexts. Emotions tie communities together, but their forms and the ways emotions are emphasized vary over time and space. Like the history of emotions, the history of the senses has also studied the changing historical meanings of different senses and how these have formed our understanding of the world.<sup>13</sup> Both emotions and senses are intimately intertwined with experience and are integral parts of how people form socially shared experiences.

Thus, the history of experience intersects with social history, gender history, cultural history, the history of emotions, and the history of senses. It draws on these fields both theoretically and conceptually, but to an increasing degree with a framework of its own, merging constructivist understandings of experiences with explorations of emotional and sensory corporeality.

The Finnish historians Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo have suggested that the concept “experience” can be understood on three levels. First, experience happens to people as part of their social reality. Second, experience marks a cultural process to give meaning to what happens and to explain it. Third, experience is used as a category to analyze the first two levels. Experience can thus be interpreted as an ongoing social, contextual, and situational process. It is the task of the historian to analyze how past experiences have been “produced, shared, controlled, appropriated, approved of or discarded.”<sup>14</sup>

How, then, can the history of experience approach benefit welfare state research? The established welfare state research often highlights the agency of nation states or concentrates on ideological and structural comparisons of different welfare models and regimes.<sup>15</sup> Recently, a growing body of

<sup>12</sup> Kivimäki, Suodenjoki, and Vahtikari, *Lived Nation*, 12.

<sup>13</sup> For the history of the senses, see, for example, Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*; Smith, *Sensing the Past*.

<sup>14</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 11–13.

<sup>15</sup> The most notable starting point for intensive scholarly debates on welfare regimes was Gøsta Esping-Andersen’s *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* in 1990. Kettunen and Petersen, Introduction, 2–3.

scholarly research has questioned the focus on the national welfare state and underlined transnational and global phenomena.<sup>16</sup> As Finnish historian Pauli Kettunen suggests, transnational history can function as a Foucauldian history of the present—that is, be concerned with discursive and non-discursive practices that are seen as given or natural.<sup>17</sup> One way of problematizing these “taken-for-granted” practices and making them visible is the history of experience approach in which careful analysis of encounters between people and institutions are examined. As experience as an analytical concept has the potential to bridge the gap between macro-level changes and micro-level quotidian life, our approach provides a topical way of looking at the welfare state.

In the book, we use the concept of the “lived welfare state” as an umbrella term to capture and analyze the presence of the welfare state in people’s daily lives. We suggest that welfare states materialize through the ways in which people experience welfare benefits, social care, social services, and the institutions that provide—or are expected to provide—all this. As individuals share their subjective experiences of the welfare state through textual, corporeal, and material communication with each other, these experiences gradually become common knowledge and collective practices. In the long run, the shared practices develop into policies, norms, ideologies, and different types of institutions. These in turn reshape subjective experiences of the welfare state.<sup>18</sup> Hence, the welfare state is constructed, maintained, challenged, and reformed through experiences.

The importance of everyday experiences is also embedded in terms that are often used to describe the Nordic welfare states, in particular. Those terms are trust, solidarity, equality, and reciprocity. This implies that the relationship between an individual and the society that provides welfare—or fails to provide welfare—plays a crucial role in the construction and adaptation of the welfare state.

Welfare state building was introduced as a breakaway from earlier poverty policies. However, the lived welfare state approach is not limited to the period of twentieth-century established welfare states but also calls for analyses of earlier time periods. We believe that *longue durée* analyses

<sup>16</sup>For example, Kildal and Kuhnle (eds.), *Normative Foundations*; Morgan, *Working Mothers and the Welfare State*; Kettunen and Petersen (eds.), *Beyond Welfare State Models*; Kessler-Harris and Vaudagna (eds.), *Democracy and the Welfare State*; Kuhnle, Selle, and Hort (eds.), *Globalizing Welfare*.

<sup>17</sup>Kettunen, Introduction, 4; Kettunen, The concept of society, 156–7.

<sup>18</sup>Haapala, Harjula, and Kokko, Introduction.

allow for a more complex or comprehensive view of welfare and the welfare state. First, such analyses reveal the changing interfaces between welfare, poverty, disability, illness, discrimination, modernization, and citizenship. Second, *longue durée* analyses show how the concepts, practices, and institutions of modern welfare states may still carry the experienced legacy of previous welfare policies. Although the focus of this volume lies in the Nordic countries, lived institutions are not limited to Nordic welfare policies. This is exemplified by one of our contributions, which explores an institution for disabled war veterans on the Polish-Ukrainian borderland in Lviv. The chapter helps us to problematize further the multi-faceted nature of encounters between individuals and institutions. As Pauli Kettunen argues, “a comparative historical study would benefit from also including those Eastern European agrarian societies that were politically shaped through the collapse or modification of the European empires during and after the First World War.”<sup>19</sup>

In the early 2000s and 2010s, reflections on the lived welfare state were few—with the exception of scholarly interest in the cultural history of the welfare state.<sup>20</sup> In recent years, scholars have to a growing extent paid attention to the experience of welfare or the lack thereof. In Nordic historiography in particular, there has been a flux of analyses of the everyday experiences of both the providers and the recipients of social care,<sup>21</sup> the entanglements between lived religion and lived welfare,<sup>22</sup> the interfaces of lived nation and lived welfare,<sup>23</sup> the relationship between medicine and the

<sup>19</sup> Kettunen, The concept of society, 144. See Oksana Vynnyk’s chapter in this volume.

<sup>20</sup> van Oorschot, Opielka, and Pfau-Effinger (eds.), *Culture and Welfare State*; Béland and Petersen (eds.), *Analysing Social Policy Concepts*; Bude, *Generation*; the publications of a major British research project *The Cultural History of the NHS*.

<sup>21</sup> Grønbæk Jensen, “*At åbne skuffen*”; Lottrup Rasmussen, *De fattiges ret*; Annola, Eletty laitoshoito; Harjula, Eletty sosiaalityö; Harjula, Framing the Client’s Agency; Settle, *Probation and Policing of the Private Sphere*; Annola, Kackerlackor i säsen?

<sup>22</sup> Kuuliala, *The Religious Experience of Ill Health*; Annola, *To the Undiscovered Country*; Annola and Miettinen, *Piety and Prayers*.

<sup>23</sup> Kaarninen, *Red Orphans’ Fatherland*; Markkola and Östman, *Guardians of the Land?*; Lindberg, *National Belonging Through Signed and Spoken Languages*; Hakosalo, *The Ill(s) of the Nation*; Vahtikari, *Finns Start Life Safe*.

experience of modern illness,<sup>24</sup> and the diversity of welfare concepts and cultures.<sup>25</sup>

New scholarly openings to the lived welfare state have also emerged in the wake of state inquiries into the abuse and neglect of children in institutional child welfare. Such inquiries have been conducted in more than twenty countries, including the Nordic countries, and a similar one has also taken place regarding care facilities for people with disabilities in Denmark. In some cases they have been followed by political redress processes.<sup>26</sup> The inquiries and research based on them have broadened our understanding of the relationship between welfare policies and the ways in which welfare was experienced by individuals who were subjected to institutional “care.” Moreover, the redress processes have provided a new perspective to the ways in which the history of experiences is interpreted and politicized in/by the contemporary welfare states.<sup>27</sup>

Yet another recent contribution to the history of the lived welfare state has been provided by the edited volume *Experiencing Society and the Lived Welfare State*.<sup>28</sup> By exploring the expectations the welfare state met—or failed to meet—and the response it received in people’s everyday lives, the volume concentrates on the relationship between the individual and society. In doing so, the book discusses the ways in which the rights and responsibilities in relation to welfare were constructed and how the ideals of equality, belonging, and trust emerged, took shape, or failed in people’s everyday lives around the world. With its broader scope, *Experiencing Society* can be seen as a companion publication to *Lived Institutions*, in which we turn our gaze to institutions as laboratories to unravel the relationship between structures, spaces, practices, and the experiences thereof.

<sup>24</sup>Tuohela, *The Ordeal of the Soul*, 219–29; Tuohela, *Sammanbrott och tillfrisknanden*, 77–102; Tuohela et al., *Sielun ja mielen sairaus*, 195–232; Boddice and Hitzer, *Emotion and Experience in the History of Medicine*; Parhi, *No Coming Back to Sick Society*; Parhi, *Sensitive, Indifferent, Labile*.

<sup>25</sup>Edling (ed.), *The Changing Meanings*.

<sup>26</sup>Sköld and Markkola, *History of Child Welfare*; Wright, Swain, and Sköld, *The Age of Inquiry, Honoring the Truth, Barnehem og specialskoler under luppen*; SOU 2009:99; SOU 2011:61; Rytter, *Godhavnsrapporten*; Kragh et al., *Anbragt i historien*; Hytönen et al., *Lastensuojelun sijaishuollon epäkohdat*; Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*.

<sup>27</sup>Swain, *Institutionalized Childhood*; Sköld and Swain (eds.), *Apologies and the Legacy of Abuse*; Vehkalahti, *Dusting the Archives*; Lundy, *Paradoxes and Challenges*; Malinen, Markkola, and Hytönen, *Conducting Commissioned Research*; Malinen, “Eleven Old Boys Crying Out for Revenge.”

<sup>28</sup>Haapala, Harjula, and Kokko (eds.), *Experiencing Society*.



## INSTITUTIONS

According to the French philosopher Michel Foucault, the seventeenth century saw the “Great Confinement” of deviant individuals—the poor, the unemployed, prostitutes, criminals, and the insane—in different institutions to protect societal order in Western societies. Foucault suggests that the power that underpinned the prevailing order took the form of the constant surveillance of the inmates and the discipline imposed on them. The ultimate goal of the institution was to make its inmates “docile bodies”—that is, individuals who controlled themselves through self-imposed conformity to contemporary norms.<sup>29</sup>

Another classic in the field of institutional studies is the US sociologist Erving Goffman, who coined the term “total institution.” Total institutions exist for care and punishment alike. In such institutions, similarly situated individuals live for longer or shorter periods, restricted by the regulations of the institution, isolated from the world outside. Goffman suggests that the totalistic features include, among others, a sharp division between residents and staff, incompatibility with the basic work–payment structure, a mismatch with family life, and the breakdown of barriers that normally separate the places of sleep, play, and work. However, as Goffman notes, not all features are shared by all total institutions.<sup>30</sup>

Although scholarly outputs that look at historical institutions from below are not so numerous, the book at hand is not the first attempt at discussing everyday life in institutions or seeking out the voices of the inmates or the recipients of welfare provisions. For example, in Britain and the United States, scholars have traced the experiences of workhouse inmates and patients in hospitals and mental hospitals, as well as inmates and residents in other institutions.<sup>31</sup> In the Nordic countries, there are studies that shed light on the lives of inmates and residents in different institutions in the past, often by exploring their letters and other so-called egodocuments.<sup>32</sup> The most comprehensive Nordic work in this field so far is the edited volume *Inspärrad* (Locked-in), published by Swedish scholars

<sup>29</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*.

<sup>30</sup> Goffman, *Asylums*.

<sup>31</sup> Lane, “The Doctor Scolds Me”; Beveridge, *Life in the Asylum*; Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives*; Green, *Pauper Protests*; Tomkins, *Workhouse Medical Care*; Humphries, *Care and Cruelty in the Workhouse*; Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution*.

<sup>32</sup> For example, Ahlbeck, *Diagnostisering och disciplinering*; Engwall, “*Asociala och imbesilla*”; Wallman-Svensson, *Bonapojkarnas brev*; Tuohela, *Huhtikuun tekstit*; Vehkalahti, *Constructing Reformatory Identity*; Jönsson, *Berättelser från insidan*; Tuohela et al., *Sielun ja mielen sairaus*.

in 2016.<sup>33</sup> In their empirical essays, the contributors offer glimpses of the ways in which the inmates in mental hospitals, sanatoria, prisons, reformatory schools, and alcohol rehabilitation clinics understood their situation and their surroundings between 1850 and 1992.

The aspects of everyday life in prisons, detention centers, and other places of incarceration have also been tackled by carceral geographers and other scholars of prison space.<sup>34</sup> By focusing on the ways in which prisoners resist the disciplinary practices, use different tactics to protect their autonomy, and create their personal spaces in “carceral TimeSpace,” these scholars have revealed the changing relationship between prison policies and prison practices. Moreover, researchers have analyzed prison soundscapes and other sensory engagements with carceral spaces.<sup>35</sup> However, as many of these works only deal with present-day institutions, there is a need for historical analyses of carceral and other institutional spaces. Institutions have usually undergone major constructional and ideological reforms during their life span and therefore carry “living memories” as a part of their present-day structure.<sup>36</sup> Historical analyses increase our knowledge of past societies and help us understand present institutions.

In *Lived Institutions*, we explore prisons, workhouses, residential schools, hospitals, shelters for single mothers, and care facilities for people with disabilities—in other words, institutions that Goffman labeled as “total.” In addition to these walled institutions, the contributions to the book discuss welfare provisions and other societal institutions that provide welfare, such as voluntary organizations and families. The chapters also touch upon the entanglements between different institutions: for example, Johanna Annola maps nineteenth-century Finnish female prisoners’ experiences between state-managed prisons and a private shelter, while Marie Meier discusses the tension between the institutional care of mental

<sup>33</sup> Nilsson and Vallström (eds.), *Inspärrad*.

<sup>34</sup> For a brief overview of the scholarly discussion on institutional geographies in general, see Repo, *Confined to Space*, 23–6.

<sup>35</sup> Ogborn, *Discipline, Government and Law*; Philo, *Accumulating Populations*; Baer, *Visual Imprints on the Prison Landscape*; Dirsuweit, *Bodies, State Discipline and the Performance of Gender*; Fiddler, *The Penal Palimpsest*; Crewe, *The Prisoner Society*; Wener, *The Environmental Psychology of Prisons and Jails*; Conlon, *Hungering for Freedom*; Crewe, Warr, Bennett, and Smith, *The Emotional Geography of Prison Life*; Hemsworth, *Carceral Acoustemologies*; Moran, *Carceral Geography*; Rowe, “Tactics,” *Agency and Power*; Turner and Knight (eds.), *The Prison Cell*.

<sup>36</sup> Morin and Moran, Introduction; Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution*.

health patients and families as sites of mental illness in post-Second World War Denmark. As shown by Riikka Suominen in her chapter on an institution for single mothers, non-governmental welfare institutions were in some cases born out of the perceived neglect of the state.

By analyzing a wide range of institutions, we show, first, how different selections of totalistic features applied in different institutions produced varying experiences of lived welfare (or the lack thereof) and how the inmates/residents used specific coping methods to adapt to the life in a specific institution. At the same time, the essays imply that the residents' need to express and exercise their autonomy has remained more or less the same throughout centuries, as demonstrated by Emilie Luther Valentin's essay on eighteenth-century Danish prison workhouses, Oksana Vynnyk's contribution on a disabled veterans' home in interwar Poland, Heini Hakosalo's chapter on twentieth-century Finnish tuberculosis sanatoria, and Klaus Petersen and Sarah Smed's contribution on institutions for people with intellectual disabilities in twentieth-century Denmark. These and the other chapter in this book demonstrate very clearly that "existing in the exercises of power does not mean existing without a choice."<sup>37</sup>

Second, we show the ways in which those institutions that did not entail day-to-day contact, such as grants and benefits given to families, were nevertheless present in people's everyday lives on a regular basis. Here, too, we see Foucauldian biopower in action. As Minna Harjula shows in her chapter on Finnish family benefits, the development of welfare provisions rested on presumptions of the lived conditions of the citizens and aimed at promoting a particular set of norms. However, it is not our intention to concentrate solely on institutional structures but rather on the interaction between an institution and individuals who lived within its sphere of influence. This is crystallized in Heikki Kokko's chapter on the local-level reception of the Finnish poor relief reform of 1852 and in Mervi Kaarninen's chapter on the so-called Red Widows' experiences of poor relief in interwar Finland.

Third, we show how individual experiences of institutions have been publicly disseminated and used in policymaking. Hanna Lindberg shows in her chapter how experiences were utilized in public debates surrounding the role of residential schools for deaf people. In their chapter, Johanna Sköld, Bengt Sandin, and Johanna Schiratzki discuss care-leavers who had been victims of historical institutional child abuse and the ways in which

<sup>37</sup> Wisniewski, Foucault and Public Autonomy, 424.

their experiences were considered in the Swedish state's financial redress scheme.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of experience can be used as a bridge between societal structures and individual lives. The contributors to *Lived Institutions* are not so much choosing between the ideologies behind the emergence and management of different institutions *and* empirical examples of lives led within the sphere of these institutions; they are interested in *both* of them. Moreover, the chapters shed light on the different positioning of institutions vis-à-vis individuals. Experiences were not only related to lived institutions but also to imagined, future, and remembered institutions. We ask what kind of ideologies, practices, encounters, performances, spatial settings, soundscapes, language, and embodied sensory elements were present in different institutions and how individuals responded to the same. How do socio-cultural patterns of experiencing institutional contexts vary across time and space? How are experiences of lived institutions and lived institutional care—including accounts of imagined and remembered institutions—related to societal change?

In our attempt to answer these questions, we employ a broad variety of theoretical concepts. We discuss “space” and “place,” as well as the concepts of “carceral TimeSpace” and “carceral layers.”<sup>38</sup> Our chapters also aim at applying and developing the term “scene of experience,” coined by Minna Harjula and Heikki Kokko,<sup>39</sup> by offering concrete examples of multi-layered experiences within institutional settings. In order to tackle the interaction between individuals, institutional settings, and society at large, we use concepts such as “tactics,” “navigation,” “strategy,” and “cultural script.” Shared experiences, the process of sharing experiences, and the extent of sharedness are discussed by utilizing concepts such as “collective experience”, “emotional community”, and “community of experience.”<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup>The term was coined by Finnish carceral geographer Virve Repo, see Repo, Carceral layers in a geropsychiatric unit in Finland, 187–201; Repo, *Confined to Space*.

<sup>39</sup>Scene of experience is a key concept developed by Minna Harjula and Heikki Kokko. Within HEX, they have developed the theoretical and methodological concepts of the social history of experience since 2018. Harjula and Kokko, *The Scene of Experience*. See also Kokko and Harjula, *Social History of Experiences*.

<sup>40</sup>For the community of experience, see Kivimäki, Malinen, and Vuolanto, *Communities of Experience*.

## THE CURRENT VOLUME

In this volume, we explore the entanglements between institutions, welfare, and experience through twelve chapters divided into four parts. In Part I, “Encounters with Institutions,” the chapters examine how institutions were entered, lived, and remembered. With the late eighteenth century as a starting point, the part begins with Chap. 2 by *Emilie Luther Valentin*, in which she explores how the inmates of a Danish prison workhouse navigated their experiences within the institution. In her chapter, Luther Valentin studies what it meant to be imprisoned by studying the physical experiences of imprisonment as well as the practices of coercion employed by the prison workhouse authorities. Focusing on three specific cases, which have left a broad set of sources, the chapter illuminates different experiences and tactics used by the inmates.

Chapter 3 by *Johanna Annola* also deals with experiences of incarceration. Annola studies Finnish female inmates’ experiences of prison by analyzing letters they wrote in the 1880s to the early 1900s. Although prisoners did not always describe their lives in detail, their experiences of carceral TimeSpace are embedded in their letters in the choice of cultural scripts. As the letters were written in prison but addressed to a private Christian shelter for women, they also reveal entanglements between the present institution and the absent institution. These entanglements hint at the accumulation of carceral layers and the institutional burden in the minds and bodies of the writers.

The tension between future, present, and past institutions is also at the center of Chap. 4 by *Riikka Suominen*. Suominen studies the Helsinki Mother and Child Home, a non-governmental institution established in 1942 for unmarried women. She analyzes the postwar encounters between the shelter and single mothers, who were mainly working-class women. By focusing on the process of becoming a resident in the shelter, Suominen examines how experiences of single motherhood were constructed on the ideal, sociomaterial, and individual levels.

Part II of the volume, “Lived Social Citizenship,” focuses on the ways in which poor relief, benefits, and pensions formed experiences and the citizens’ place in society. In Chap. 5, *Heikki Kokko* explores the societal significance of the 1852 poor relief reform in Finland by analyzing local readers’ letters to newspapers. Kokko shows how the poor relief reform was experienced on the local level and how it generated changes in the individual-society relationship. Finland is used as a case study to examine

how early social citizenship was formulated in a modernizing society via the interplay between local and transnational levels of society.

*Minna Harjula* in Chap. 6 studies the formation of lived social citizenship in Finland by examining the emerging institution of social benefits: the maternity benefit for pregnant women (1938), the family benefit for large low-income families (1943), and the child benefit for all children (1948). By approaching the encounters between families and local authorities as scenes of experience, this chapter exposes the multi-layered historicity of the lived welfare state.

In the last chapter (Chap. 7) of the part, *Mervi Kaarninen* focuses on the widows of the Red soldiers, who had fought on the losing side in the Finnish Civil War of 1918. By utilizing emotional community and collective experience as her theoretical concepts, Kaarninen studies encounters between the widows and the nascent social welfare institutions in early twentieth-century Finland. She shows how these encounters formed the widows' social citizenship and how experiences of humiliation over time were replaced by feelings of confidence as the widow's position in society changed.

In Part III of the book, "Experiencing Institutional Spaces," the chapters focus on the experiences institutional spaces have generated. Chap. 8 by *Oksana Vynnyk* examines experiences of disability in interwar Poland by focusing on the Lviv Disabled Veteran's Home. Situated in the city of Lviv, the veteran's home was a part of urban life and reflected the changing political and social relations of the region. By utilizing vast archival sources, Vynnyk analyzes the interplay between various discourses constructed by the disabled veterans as well as military and civilian authorities, which together formed the Lviv institution and determined injured soldiers' experiences of disability.

In Chap. 9, *Heini Hakosalo* analyzes sanatoria patients' experiences of space in twentieth-century Finland. Utilizing mainly a thematic writing competition organized by the Lung Patients' Union and the Finnish Literature Society in 1971, Hakosalo focuses on how patients interacted with the sanatorium building. Hakosalo uses the distinction between space and place as introduced by Michel De Certeau in order to analyze meanings, emotions, and social relations connected to the sanatoria building.

*Klaus Petersen* and *Sarah Smed* in Chap. 10 study experiences of institutionalization in the Danish Special Care Sector in 1933–1980. Through interviews as well as systematic and comprehensive archival studies, the authors explore how people with intellectual disabilities experienced life

and changing policy paradigms in the institutions. The contribution is based on research that was conducted for a government-initiated historical report on (mis)treatment within Danish institutions for disabled groups. It gives a unique insight not only into the institutions but also into the voices and experiences of the institutionalized group.

The chapters of Part IV of the book, “Dealing with Institutional Experiences,” discuss different ways in which experiences have been either silenced or publicly recognized and debated. In Chap. 11, *Hanna Lindberg* studies the role of residential schools for deaf children in the 1930s and 1980s and the manner in which experience was utilized in the public debates over these residential schools. The chapter focuses on the case of the school for the deaf in Borgå, Finland, which was intended for the Finland-Swedish minority. Lindberg shows how the experiences and expectations of an institution that was repeatedly under public debate exposed changes within deaf education and the position of the Finland-Swedes during the twentieth century.

Chapter 12 by *Marie Meier*, on the other hand, explores processes of silencing by focusing on the entanglements of family secrecy and changing experiences of mental illness in Denmark from the mid-twentieth century onward. Drawing on oral history interviews, Meier proposes a contextual understanding of experiences of mental afflictions. In the chapter, family secrecy surrounding mental illness in the twentieth century is exposed through three cases, which highlight the different ways in which mental illness was dealt with within families.

The dynamics between silencing and recognition is the focus of Chap. 13 by *Johanna Sköld*, *Bengt Sandin*, and *Johanna Schiratzki*. Sköld et al. discuss the ways in which experiences of abuse and violence within welfare institutions have been treated in the Swedish state’s financial redress scheme for child abuse in past out-of-home care. The authors show how the redress scheme’s aim shifted from acknowledging past sufferings to limiting what type of abuse the state could be deemed responsible for. For many former victims, this process led to a renewed experience of abuse.

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PART I

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## Encounters with Institutions



## CHAPTER 2

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# Navigating Imprisonment: Tactics and Experiences in an Eighteenth-Century Danish Prison Workhouse

*Emilie Luther Valentin*

### INTRODUCTION

On a February day in 1769, Cathrine Pedersdatter Rosenlund stood before the gates of the prison workhouse at Christianshavn on the outskirts of Copenhagen. She had been sentenced to a lifetime of punitive labor within the prison for having committed grand larceny. A few months later, the prison received another life prisoner by the name of Daniel Jørgensen Runge. He had been caught forging a substantial number of bank notes and had therefore been condemned to serve out the remainder of his life in the prison workhouse. A year later, yet another life prisoner arrived at the institution: Niels Larsen had been sentenced for the crime of intending to murder his master and mistress. Although Rosenlund, Runge, and Larsen had all been sentenced to life within a short period, their journeys through the system went down widely different paths. Like all the

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other inmates in the prison workhouse, they shared a common relationship to the authorities, but how the inmates navigated the system and their fates differed from inmate to inmate: Some attempted escape from the prison, while others had their families petition for their release. Some of the inmates silently accepted their fate, while others created the best situation for themselves within the scope of the prison institution.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I will explore how the inmates of the prison workhouse at Christianshavn navigated their experiences within the institution in the latter part of the eighteenth century. I am especially inspired by Michel de Certeau's concept of tactics and strategies. He defines tactics as "determined by the absence of power just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power."<sup>2</sup> In other words, strategies are implemented by structures of power (such as organizations and institutions) and are targeted at individuals in an attempt at controlling their actions. Tactics, on the other hand, are enacted by individuals and are contingent on their lived reality and as reactions to the conditions of the environment put in place by the structures of power. In the context of the prison workhouse, the institution itself enforced the strategies that shaped the structures of imprisonment, while the inmates would have employed tactics in their navigation of the environment of the prison.

From the outset of Rosenlund's, Runge's, and Larsen's experiences within the prison workhouse, the chapter explores three sets of tactics employed on a general level by the inmates. The tactics both shaped and were products of the inmates' experiences within the institution. I have chosen to focus particularly on Rosenlund, Runge, and Larsen because their journeys through the prison system accumulated a broad section of sources and therefore provided exceptional insight into the experience of imprisonment. Before diving into the three inmates' trajectories through the prison system, I will begin by describing the context and structures of the experience of imprisonment in the prison workhouse at Christianshavn.

To assess the inmates' experiences, I turn to three letter books from the prison workhouse at Christianshavn written between 1769 and 1789. The letter books contain copies of all outgoing post as well as some incoming

<sup>1</sup>This chapter is largely based on the analyses of my Ph.D. dissertation *Feelings of Imprisonment*.

<sup>2</sup>de Certeau, *The Practices of Everyday Life*, 34–9.

correspondence to the prison concerning the everyday management of the institution. Most of the letters were written by the warden of the prison workhouse, namely Johannes Oest, and were addressed to the director(s) of the prison. The letters vary in content and genre: Some concern the accounting of the prison finances, such as the wages of the prison personnel and the bills from the maintenance of the prison building and the purchase of common items such as food, clothes, and firewood for the inmates. Others concern the management of the inmates themselves, such as conflicts that arose from the everyday management of the prison, statements made on the behavior of the inmates in connection with a petition for release, or the dealings with inmates that either obeyed or broke the rules of the prison. Although the letters are written from the perspective of the prison administration and not the inmates themselves, they still allow us to form a picture of how the inmates navigated the system as they negotiated with the authorities. They also provide us with an understanding of the everyday management of the institution. In addition to the letters, I also draw information on the inmates from a prison register which was begun in 1772. The register has been digitized in a database and covers close to 13,000 entries to the prison workhouse between 1772 and 1799.<sup>3</sup>

## A PRISON BETWEEN POOR RELIEF AND PUNISHMENT

The prison workhouse as an institution emerged and spread throughout Europe in the early modern period. To begin with, the institutions were not employed against criminal behavior, but as disciplinary institutions targeting immoral conduct, laziness, and disobedience. For that reason, they were perceived as a type of charitable institution often founded within or as part of the system of poor relief. By the eighteenth century, the prison workhouses had evolved into multi-purpose institutions. Although still engaged in disciplining beggars and vagrants, they were gradually integrated into the penal system as they came to assume the penal

<sup>3</sup>The database is part of the larger research project *Enslaved by the State* (<https://doi.org/10.5278/4fed7097-53f4-4a10-8dd7-e2965dc21935>), led by Johan Heinsen at Aalborg University.

responsibilities for a number of crimes that otherwise would have been punished corporally or with the death penalty.<sup>4</sup>

The prison workhouse at Christianshavn, specifically, was established in 1662 on the outskirts of Copenhagen. It was commonly referred to as “Børnehuset” (“the Children’s House”) since it originally had been tasked with relieving society of the unsettled poor—among these, orphaned school children—while at the same time teaching them a craft. However, the prison had since its beginning also served as a correctional and disciplinary facility that was perceived to be a mitigation of the period’s harsher punishments, such as public corporal and shaming punishments, as well as executions.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the eighteenth century, in line with similar institutions in Europe, the prison workhouse at Christianshavn grew in its penal responsibilities. By the second half of the century, the majority of the inmates had been sentenced to the prison workhouse either for begging and vagrancy or for some sort of property crime (mostly theft), but forgers, assaultants, and even murderers were placed within the institution, too. In this way, the prison workhouse was situated squarely between the system of poor relief and the penal system. This meant that the institution had an intricate combination of disciplinary and caring obligations, as it was both responsible for the well-being as well as the discipline of its inmates.<sup>6</sup>

The prison workhouse at Christianshavn was connected to a wider coercive network<sup>7</sup> consisting of actors and institutions across the kingdom of eighteenth-century Denmark.<sup>8</sup> It shared administrative experiences with other institutions from the poor relief system, such as common

<sup>4</sup> See Pieter Spierenburg, *The Prison Experience*, chapters 2 and 7, for a description of the developments of the prison workhouse. The term “prison workhouse” was termed by Spierenburg to emphasize the institution’s construction around confinement and work. Although the title of his book claims to explore the experience of imprisonment, the book is predominantly engaged with institutional developments of the period.

<sup>5</sup> The multiplicity in the prison’s purpose was common to the early modern prison institutions. See Heinsen, *Historicizing Extramural Convict Labour*, 18–21.

<sup>6</sup> Valentin, *Feelings of Imprisonment*, 112–114.

<sup>7</sup> The term “coercive network” was first introduced by Taylor C. Sherman in her chapter *Tensions of Colonial Punishment*.

<sup>8</sup> Johan Heinsen and I have mapped the coercive network of eighteenth-century Copenhagen from the perspective of the prison workhouse at Christianshavn and the extramural military prisons known as “the slaveries,” see Valentin and Heinsen, *Coercive Network in Eighteenth-Century Copenhagen*. The old Norse term “thraldom” was connected with “slavery,” see Heinsen, *Penal Slavery in Early Modern Scandinavia*, 343–7.

hospitals and orphanages. At the same time, it was also connected to other penal institutions, such as the military prisons and the provincial prison workhouses. Compared to the provincial prison workhouses, the prison workhouse at Christianshavn was both bigger in its number of inmates, but also in its penal responsibilities, as it housed dishonored inmates that were refused by the provincial institutions.<sup>9</sup>

No recent studies have been made on the prison workhouse at Christianshavn in the eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> The historiography has predominately portrayed the institution as a place of misery and corruption. This perception is mainly built on the conception of the developments that took place within the prison in the first half of the nineteenth century and does therefore not serve as an accurate depiction of the conditions of the prison in the eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup> However, recent studies of the provincial prison workhouses have helped explain the multiplicity of the prison workhouses' societal purpose. The studies have mainly examined the prison workhouses as integral to the state's intention of educating and improving subjects when the institution of the household failed. Since the studies primarily focus on the prison system's societal purpose from a normative perspective, experiences from within the institutions have not been examined closely.<sup>12</sup>

## THE STRUCTURES OF PRISON EXPERIENCE

The governance of the prison workhouse at Christianshavn was, upon its establishment in 1662, bestowed upon a board of directors. To function as their eyes and ears, and to see to the daily management of the institution, the directors appointed a warden to lead as supervisor. When

<sup>9</sup>For more on the inmate population in the provincial prison workhouses, see Larner, *The Good Household Gone Bad*.

<sup>10</sup>The only thorough examination of the prison's history in the eighteenth century can be found in nineteenth-century prison historian Fr. Stuckenberg's two-volume history of the Danish prison system, see Stuckenberg, *Fængselsvæsenet i Danmark 1550–1741* and Stuckenberg, *Fængselsvæsenet i Danmark 1742–1839*.

<sup>11</sup>This perception has especially been framed by Jens Engberg in his work on the Danish Golden Age from 1973. Engberg wished to contrast the romantic image of the period and draws among other things on the miserable existence of the inmates in the prison workhouse in the first half of the nineteenth century. Engberg, *Dansk Guldalder*.

<sup>12</sup>See Larner, *The Good Household Gone Bad*; Koefoed, *Negotiating Memory and Restoring Identity*; Koefoed, *I Trust You With my Child*; Koefoed, *Households and State-Building in Early Modern Denmark*.

Rosenlund, Larsen, and Runge arrived at the prison, a new warden, by the name of Johannes Oest, had recently been appointed to the position. Oest entered the position in early 1769 and remained as warden until his death in 1789.

The prison was organized so that only a small number of prison officials could manage the everyday workings of the institution. As opposed to the modern penitentiary with its solitary cells, the areas in which the inmates moved and resided were organized into large and open spaces. This made it possible for only the few members of staff to keep order in the prison by overseeing the largest possible number of inmates at a time.

The daily life of the inmates was centered around a repetitive labor regime. The inmates were raised from their beds at five o'clock in the morning and were in bed again at nine in the evening. Depending on their sentence, the inmates were required to perform a set amount of work either in the large work halls, processing wool and spinning, or in the rasp-house, performing the strenuous task of rasping dyewood into dust. The spinners were expected to produce what corresponded to about four kilometers of yarn a day, while the rasp-house inmates were expected to deliver close to ten kilograms of rasped dyewood. This set amount had been worked out to keep the inmates busy throughout the day.<sup>13</sup>

Different means of coercion and control were used by the institution to keep the inmates in line and at work. Two spinmasters were responsible for keeping order among the inmates, and they were allowed to use physical force as a measure of discipline (a practice akin to the right of discipline and chastisement which both parents and masters were allowed over their children and servants).<sup>14</sup> There are, however, almost no records of either the measure or frequency of this practice in the letter books. Whether this is a mark of its normalcy, or conversely its rarity, is difficult to answer. It seems fair to assume that the administering of beatings or other corporal measures of compulsion would have been an inherent part of the management of the inmates in the eighteenth century—especially if we consider the circumstances relating to the wages of the spinmasters: The spinmasters' wages were directly connected to the productivity of the inmates,

<sup>13</sup>Valentin, *Feelings of Imprisonment*, chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>14</sup>The Danish Code paragraphs 6-5-5 and 6-5-6 stated that the husband and his wife were allowed to discipline their children and servants with force—that is, with canes, not weapons; however, they were not allowed to harm them “on their health.” For more on this practice, see Østhus, *Contested Authority*, 251–66.

making 7 percent of the total profits.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the spinmasters' chastisement, the directors of the prison workhouse could decide to meet out the prison's official punishment on inmates who had behaved particularly badly. The official punishment was flogging with a *tamp* (a piece of rope either with or without knots at the end) at a pole in the prison yard. A rare occurrence, the punishment was usually only delivered when inmates attempted escape from the prison or when they resorted to violent behavior.<sup>16</sup>

Even though the everyday management of the prison workhouse was centered around the inmates' compulsory labor, the prison's obligations of care took up an essential part in the day-to-day workings of the institution. The prison administration used large sums of money on clothing the inmates, taking care of inmates admitted to the prison sick ward, and keeping the institution clean and in repair (at least to the best of their abilities). On a weekly basis, the inmates received an allowance so that they were able to buy food from the prison sutler. The allowance was not excessive but fixed to accommodate the sutler's prices. Interestingly, the allowance differed according to the inmates' circumstances within the prison workhouse—the longer and harsher the sentence was, the higher the allowance.<sup>17</sup>

The prison usually housed between 350 and 450 inmates at a time. Approximately one-third were serving life sentences, one-third had a sentence of one or several years, and the remaining third were beggars and vagrants (who were usually facing a shorter sentence of a few weeks or months). Although the population was almost equally divided between male and female inmates, slightly more of the life prisoners were female.<sup>18</sup> The majority of the inmates were of an age where they would have been

<sup>15</sup>The Danish National Archives (DNA), Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1769–1776: 437–8.

<sup>16</sup>Valentin, *Feelings of Imprisonment*, chapter 4. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, new types of punishments were implemented in the prison workhouse—such as solitary confinement as well as confinement on bread and water. In the eighteenth century, such measures were only used when confining a dangerous person for a short period of time.

<sup>17</sup>Valentin, *Feelings of Imprisonment*, chapter 3.

<sup>18</sup>This makes sense seeing that male felons usually were placed in another prison institution in this period in which they performed extramural labor. See Heinsen, *Ind og ud af slaverierne*.



able-bodied and strong, but the prison also housed old and weak beggars as well as some children.<sup>19</sup>

In theory, the only difference between the inmates in the prison workhouse was whether they were sentenced to the spinhouse or the rasphouse. However, the inmates came from many different backgrounds and therefore experienced the confines of the prison workhouse differently. Such differences of experience were especially related to the work performed by the inmates. The prison administration took into consideration if an inmate was too frail, young, or disabled to perform the required amount of work. For this reason, the oldest and weakest inmates were usually put to task with easier and less straining types of work, while the youngest inmates, under the age of 14, were required to turn in much less yarn than adult inmates. In contrast, strong male inmates were usually employed with the most straining types of work and only male inmates were sentenced to the rasphouse.<sup>20</sup> Those who were skilled at spinning could turn their aptitude into a profitable opportunity. In a letter to the directors of the prison workhouse, the warden reported that some of the female inmates (usually those who were sentenced for lewd behavior) were quick to pick up the skills required in the spinning halls and would therefore quickly reach their required amount of work in a day. It had therefore become a practice among the inmates that those who had trouble reaching the required amount of work could (if they had the extra funds) buy the labor of those who were skilled at spinning.<sup>21</sup>

The conditions within the prison workhouse remained more or less the same in the period from 1769 to 1789. Generally speaking, the work and conditions within the prison workhouse would not have been strange to the majority of the inmates, as most of those who were sentenced to the prison were used to physical labor and poor conditions. Indeed, to some the institution even provided structure and guaranteed food and lodgings. In periods when food was expensive or the weather conditions harsh, the prison experienced an increase in voluntary admissions and a rise in the number of inmates who wanted to stay within the prison beyond their expired sentence. Of course, others experienced the institution as

<sup>19</sup> Valentin, *Feelings of Imprisonment*, chapter 2.

<sup>20</sup> DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1769–1776: 244–6; DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1777–1780: 265–7.

<sup>21</sup> DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1777–1780: 153–5.

constraining and rough, and therefore sought to be free from its control.<sup>22</sup> In the following, I will explore what tactics the inmates employed to be free from the institution—and if that was not possible, then at least to reach a sense of autonomy within its walls.

### PETITIONING THE AUTHORITIES

When Cathrine Pedersdatter Rosenlund arrived at the prison workhouse in February 1769, it was not her first encounter with the confines of the institution. Rosenlund had at the age of 13 been sentenced to life in the prison workhouse—then for arson. She had arrived in 1757, but she was already released two years later in connection to a petition made by her mother on account of her young age and good behavior.<sup>23</sup> Petitioning the King was not an uncommon practice among the inmates; in fact, the practice was part of a larger culture of petitioning the King.<sup>24</sup> From the prison's letter books, it is clear that the inmates made use of this practice as a strategy for obtaining early release from the prison workhouse.<sup>25</sup>

Although not an uncommon practice, not all the inmates attempted to write their way out of the prison workhouse. Almost all of those who petitioned for their release were facing sentences of a longer duration, either life or sentences between one and ten years. This was related to the crimes of which they were convicted—mostly property crimes or crimes of violence (such as attempted murder, arson, attempted suicide, or clandestine childbirth). The majority of those who petitioned for their release were female and, in addition to this, most of the inmates were of an age where they were considered fit and healthy.

The warden of the prison workhouse was obligated to make statements on the inmates' behavior in connection to their petitions for release. The

<sup>22</sup>These differences in experiences have similarly been examined by Falk Bretschneider in his book on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Saxon prisons, see Harrington, Falk Bretschneider *Gefangene Gesellschaft*.

<sup>23</sup>DNA, Danske Kancelli, Supplikker, 1701–1771, 5S, 1093.

<sup>24</sup>The introduction of the Danish Code in 1683 had given people the right to petition the King for all sorts of matters, see Bregnsbo, *Folk skriver til kongen*, 38. It was not necessarily common for the inmates to be able to write, but they were entitled to help from a scribe or from family, and at times it was reported that another inmate had helped formulate the petitions.

<sup>25</sup>For more on the practice of petitioning in the prison workhouse, see Valentin, *Feelings of Imprisonment*, chapter 6.

statements serve as an indicator of what the warden perceived as good behavior by the inmates. Looking through the statements, two emotional ideals stand out: First, it was important that the inmates felt remorse and understood the severity of their crime. Second, the inmates needed to portray a willingness to take part in society by being a productive member of the state. The two emotional ideals correlate with the purpose of the prison workhouse: If its purpose was to re-socialize and rehabilitate the inmates into society, the warden would not recommend the release of an inmate's who felt no remorse or did not want to conform to the rules and structures of society.

The statements also reveal that there was a general awareness among the inmates that certain behavior or certain tactics would increase their chances of being released from the prison workhouse. When Rosenlund arrived at the prison workhouse again in 1769, she and her family were already familiar with the practice of petitioning. In the ensuing 20 years, around a dozen petitions were made for her release. The statements made in connection to these petitions reflect the different tactics employed by Rosenlund in her attempt at freeing herself from the prison workhouse. Her case is therefore perfect for describing and defining the inmates' awareness of the institutional expectations, as well as how they navigated these expectations to their own favor.

Common to the petitions was that they insisted on the inmates' improved behavior. In the case of Rosenlund, this tactic had worked the first time around, and it therefore makes sense that she would see fit to make use of it again. However, stating a fact does not make it true, and the warden noted that "she seems convinced that her behavior in here has been completely irreproachable, but she needs to understand and regret her former deviances and show considerable improvement [in her behavior] before she can petition for such a high royal mercy." Furthermore, he explained that he had warned her parents not to petition for her release before they were sure that she had shown an earnest improvement in her behavior.<sup>26</sup>

Another common tactic in the petitions was for the inmates to connect themselves to a support system outside the prison workhouse. The inmates could, for instance, emphasize that they had family or friends who would provide for them if they were released. Additionally, male inmates would

<sup>26</sup>DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1769–1776: 132–3, 176, 219, 304–5.

at times connect themselves to an apprenticeship outside the prison workhouse, while female inmates drew on their own familiar obligations as a missing mother, wife, or daughter. Many of the petitions that were made on behalf of Rosenlund were written by her parents. In them, they pledged that they would support her and see to her continued education and discipline, but they also hoped that she would be released so that she could help them in their old age.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to this, Rosenlund also seems to have caught on to a tactic among the female inmates of promising themselves off to marriage as a possible way out of the prison. The tactic was connected to the idea that a husband would provide support for the inmate if released. However, the warden of the prison workhouse seems to have become aware of this and often discouraged an inmates' release if he thought the betrothal insincere. In 1773, an inmate by the name of Daniel Petersen petitioned for Rosenlund's release, asking to marry her if they were released. The warden found the match unsuitable. The first reason was because of Daniel Petersen's heritage—he had been born in the prison to a dishonored inmate who had been impregnated by a black rasphouse inmate. The second reason was because the warden suspected that Rosenlund's promise to Daniel Petersen was only given as a means of escaping the prison workhouse.<sup>28</sup> Needless to say, the petition was not approved. Two years later, another petition was submitted asking for Rosenlund's hand in marriage. This time, the petition was turned in by a farmhand by the name of Christian Nielsen. They had gotten to know each other when for a short time he had been confined to the prison workhouse to be taught and confirmed in his knowledge of his salvation. In contrast to the previous attempt, the warden approved of the relationship, and he declared that he believed the two to be in love. He was, however, still concerned that Rosenlund had not actually learned her lesson from her time in the prison and suspected that she only performed her duties out of fear of punishment.<sup>29</sup>

Rosenlund seems to have understood that the only way out of the prison was to convince the warden of her improved disposition. At least in the subsequent statements, the warden expressed his satisfaction with seeing Rosenlund's improved behavior. Nevertheless, he was still concerned

<sup>27</sup> DNA, Danske Kancelli, Supplikker, 1773–1799, 6R 918.

<sup>28</sup> DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1769–1776: 281–2.

<sup>29</sup> DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1769–1776: 405, 431.

that if she was released from the prison workhouse, she would fall right back into her old vices and bad habits, referring to the fact that this was not her first incarceration at the prison workhouse.<sup>30</sup> A couple of years passed and in 1787, the warden's opinion seemed to have improved considerably:

It is likely that she now after 18 years of slavery has been led to reflection and regrets her previous crime, and she promises that she henceforth, if she is released, will lead a silent and better existence as to be to more use for the world than if she stayed in eternal bondage.<sup>31</sup>

Another two years passed before anything happened, but when Rosenlund petitioned for her release again in 1789, her plea was accepted, and she was released from the prison workhouse in June that same year—20 years after her arrival at the prison workhouse.

### ESCAPING THE AUTHORITIES

When Niels Larsen arrived at the prison workhouse in November 1770, he was only 15 years old. He spent the first years of his sentence being disciplined and schooled in his religious salvation and about his wrongdoings. At the age of 21, he had grown weary of his life within the prison. His father therefore submitted a petition to the King, asking for his son's release. The petition was rejected, but that did not discourage Larsen. He began contemplating his life outside the prison workhouse and eventually he came into contact with a blacksmith in need of an apprentice. Once again, a petition was submitted on behalf of Larsen, and once again, the petition was rejected. This seems to have hit him hard. The prison authorities noted that Larsen had seemed dispirited since receiving the news of the unsuccessful petition—and this ultimately led him to take new action: Not trusting the system to provide him with the freedom he so desired, Larsen decided to take his fate into his own hands. On a July morning in 1779 as the laundresses were cleaning the dormitories, Larsen slipped up into the attic of one of the prison buildings. He was well-acquainted with the layout as for some time he had helped fix the roof. From a window,

<sup>30</sup>DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1777–1780: 175–6; DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1781–1789: 5–6.

<sup>31</sup>DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1781–1789: 280–1.

Larsen climbed into an adjoining room and got hold of a washing line. He tied the line to a roof-top beam and hoisted himself down into the back yard. From there he jumped the palisade and successfully escaped the prison workhouse.<sup>32</sup>

Larsen was but one of many inmates who attempted escape from the prison workhouse. Between 1769 and 1800, 124 inmates attempted escape. Three out of four of those who attempted escape were male inmates, and most were relatively young, under the age of 40, when they attempted escape—this indicates that it perhaps was easier to blend in and find a new place of employment as a young male inmate. Close to half had been convicted of some sort of property crime, and almost all of the inmates were facing long sentences, either for life or for several years. Only little more than half of the inmates who attempted escape succeeded in remaining free (and Larsen was one of them). The prison workhouse had a low escape rate and was considered relatively secure by the authorities.<sup>33</sup>

The low escape rate was related to the construction of the prison workhouse as an enclosed institution. Although some of the inmates escaped from the prison workhouse simply because they came across an opportunity—such as the gate being momentarily unsupervised—the majority had to come up with a carefully devised plan of escape. Such a plan could, for instance, be contingent on the time and day on which they escaped. Although the inmates attempted escape on weekdays, a larger number of inmates attempted escape on a Saturday. This might pertain to the fact that the inmates were only required to work half the day on Saturdays, which would have given the inmates more time to execute their plan of escape. Moreover, many inmates used the cover of the night or the commotion of the evening, when the inmates were led to the dormitories, to enact their escape.

A vital part of planning an escape was knowing the weaknesses of the prison's security—either by knowing which places were under less surveillance by the prison authorities or knowing which members of the prison staff were less attentive. This was, for instance, the case in the spring of 1780: After having watched their spinmaster for some time, two female

<sup>32</sup>DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1769–1776: 441; DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1777–1780: 109–10, 240–1; DNA, Danske Kancelli, Supplikker, 1773–1799, 6Y 1778, 7A 488.

<sup>33</sup>For more on the escape practices of the inmates, see Valentin, *Feelings of Imprisonment*, chapter 7.

inmates had decided that it would be easy to evade the drunk and careless master and carry out a plan of escape. One evening when the master had appeared particularly intoxicated, the two inmates saw their chance. Just before they were led to their dormitory at the end of the day, they hid in a pile of wool, and when all had calmed down, they hoisted themselves out of a window into the night.<sup>34</sup>

Some inmates were particularly knowledgeable about how to escape. In 1788, an inmate by the name of Christian Terkelsen was admitted to the prison sick ward. He had been in and out of the penal system on several occasions and had therefore acquired a great deal of experience of the prison workhouse, which he exploited to help himself escape and evade the authorities: Terkelsen was first sentenced to the prison workhouse at the age of 17 in 1784. He was released after a few weeks, but a year later, he was once again admitted to the prison workhouse, this time sentenced to a year within its confines. A few weeks before he was scheduled to be released, Terkelsen succeeded in escaping with another inmate. He initially succeeded in keeping out of the spotlight, but a couple of years later, Terkelsen was once again arrested. This time he had been caught stealing, and he was therefore placed under interrogation. In September 1788, he was transferred to the sick ward of the prison workhouse, and using his knowledge of the institution, he once again attempted to escape, this time with the help of another patient. The escape was not successful, and he was returned to his inquisitors. A few days later, he was again admitted to the sick ward in the prison workhouse. Upon his arrival, he broke out of the irons which he had been placed in, proclaiming that no such means could hope to confine him. Although Terkelsen was captured and threatened with beatings, he maintained that as he was still under interrogation, he was not an inmate in the prison workhouse, and for this reason the prison administration did not have the authority to constrain him further.<sup>35</sup>

When looking at the inmates' tactics of escape, it is interesting to consider what they were willing to risk for the chance of freedom. As Terkelsen experienced, those challenging the authorities risked facing corporal punishment (that is, being whipped at the pole in the prison yard). Those who were caught in an attempted escape would often face the same kind of punishment or in one way or another have their mobility even more greatly constricted. For instance, when two rasphouse inmates were caught after

<sup>34</sup> DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1777–1780: 87–8, 210–1, 214–215.

<sup>35</sup> DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1781–1789: 361–2.

having escaped in 1779, the warden wanted to make sure that they would not be able to do so again, and they were therefore placed in iron collars. However, the spinmaster soon reported that the iron collars hindered them in their work in the rasphouse. Consequently, the iron collars were removed, and the two inmates were instead placed in a small and secure cell at night to hinder future escape.<sup>36</sup>

Corporal punishment and restrictions were not the only risks the inmates had to consider when they attempted escape. Although one of the most popular modes of escape was for the inmates to hoist themselves out of the windows, it was also the riskiest form of escape. In 1781, the inmate Anna Marie Olsdatter attempted to hoist herself out of a window from the dormitory on the fourth floor. Unfortunately, her makeshift rope, which she had fashioned out of her bedsheets, broke, and Olsdatter plummeted to the street beneath, breaking both of her legs. She died four days later from the injury.<sup>37</sup> This was neither the first nor the last time an inmate would die in an attempted escape. Thus, the inmates would have been aware that they were risking their life when carrying out hazardous escape plans. This would have been the case if we return to Niels Larsen's escape: He had been willing not only to be caught and face the prison's punishment but also to risk his life by climbing out a four-story high building and hoisting himself down to the street using a thin washing line. This suggests that the goal of obtaining his freedom from the prison workhouse somewhat overshadowed the risk of losing his life.

## NEGOTIATING WITH THE AUTHORITIES

When Daniel Jørgensen Runge arrived at the prison workhouse on a summer day in 1769, he had spent the previous four months in one of the kingdom's jail houses. Having been caught forging a substantial number of bank notes—5490 one-rixdollar notes, to be exact—he had originally been sentenced to death, since the crime was considered an act of treason.<sup>38</sup> Runge had therefore petitioned the King asking for a more lenient sentence, and since the money had never been distributed, the sentenced

<sup>36</sup>DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1777–1780: 376–7; DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1781–1789: 6–8.

<sup>37</sup>DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1780–1789: 62.

<sup>38</sup>The Danish Code 1683, 6–18–2.



was reduced to life in the prison workhouse.<sup>39</sup> Two years after his arrival at the prison workhouse, Runge put pen to paper once again, this time asking for his freedom from the institution. Between 1771 and 1773, he wrote three petitions, but all were rejected on the grounds that Runge already had received a more lenient sentence.<sup>40</sup> As a consequence of the rejections and out of desperation, Runge attempted to break out of the prison workhouse four years after arriving at the institution: One evening after the inmates had retired for the night, the prison staff heard a suspicious noise coming from one of the male dormitories. Two staff members were sent off to inspect the scene, and on closer examination, they discovered that preparations had been made for removing an iron bar from one of the windows. This prompted a closer scrutiny of the inmates, and the staff members discovered that Runge was hiding a piece of rope in his bed. At his interrogation, Runge admitted that had he found the opportunity, he would have attempted escape.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, within the first four years of his sentence, Runge had both petitioned for his release and attempted to escape from the prison workhouse. However, as both tactics had proven unsuccessful, Runge had to come to terms with his fate in some other way: Instead of rebelling against the authorities, Runge turned to negotiating his position in the prison workhouse through diligence and loyalty to the prison administration. In 1780, he submitted another petition—not as a plea for release, but a request for better circumstances within the prison workhouse. In his response to the directors of the prison workhouse, the warden reported that Runge for the last couple of years had proven a loyal and diligent worker: “I have to say to his commendation that under the former spinmaster Jacobsen’s service, [Runge] was the reason for the other inmates’ calm behavior and that [he] always informs me of any conspiracies [among the inmates]...”<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the warden stressed that Runge continuously went above and beyond what was required of him. After finishing the work required of him in the work halls, he would always volunteer his time and, having experience as a postmaster, also his skills with pen and paper by helping the

<sup>39</sup> Copenhagen City Archives (CCA), Rådstuerettens arkiv, Domssager, Voucher 508, 12 April 1769.

<sup>40</sup> DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1769–1776: 157–8, 269–270, 307.

<sup>41</sup> DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1769–1776: 294.

<sup>42</sup> DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1777–1780: 352–3.

spinmaster with any clerical work and by keeping an eye on the other inmates. For that reason, the warden recommended that Runge's petition be approved. He argued that "to show the other inmates that diligence and good behavior gain distinction, I wish that the Royally Appointed Directors would consider his petition and grant him the same allowance as a Rasphouse inmate at 6 Shillings a day."<sup>43</sup>

As time passed, Runge seems to have taken on more and more responsibility at the behest of the spinmaster. In 1785, he was officially taken on as an assistant to the spinmaster and received a wage of three marks,<sup>44</sup> eight shillings a week (that is, 56 shillings in all). However, when a new spinmaster was appointed to the position in 1786, Runge was dismissed from service, and he was returned to the required work alongside the other inmates. Soon thereafter, Runge fell ill under the strain of the work, and once more, he petitioned the authorities as to improve his situation. The warden was once again supportive of Runge's request. He maintained that Runge's good behavior, and the fact that he had devotedly surrendered both his health and strength inside the prison walls, made him worthy of milder conditions within the institution. The warden therefore suggested that Runge could help with any occurring easy jobs in the daily management of the institution. For instance, he could help explain the tools and the craft to new inmates and help the inmates weigh their work, he could oversee the institution's furniture and equipment, escort the inmates to their beds, and tend to the lights in the dormitories. For that, the warden found it fair that Runge would receive a wage of one rixdollar a week (that is, 96 shillings).<sup>45</sup>

Thus, Runge succeeded in elevating his position within the prison workhouse. In 1790, as the prison underwent a reorganization, he plucked up the courage to apply for his freedom once again. The reorganization of the prison meant that the institution needed another gatekeeper, and for this reason Runge applied for the job. However, this seems to have been too much to ask. Although the warden appreciated Runge's efforts within the prison workhouse, he thought it an unreasonable idea that an inmate should be entrusted with the important task of keeping the gates. Instead, he would rather that Runge was awarded his freedom from the

<sup>43</sup> DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1777–1780: 352–3.

<sup>44</sup> Sixteen shillings was equal to one mark.

<sup>45</sup> DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1781–1789: 251–2.

institution.<sup>46</sup> Runge was bestowed neither the position as gatekeeper nor his freedom, and three years later, at the age of 49, he died within the prison workhouse.

Runge was not the only inmate who negotiated with the prison administration to improve his conditions within the prison and to create a sense of autonomy. The small number of staff meant that the prison administration relied on the collaboration of trustworthy inmates. Those who proved loyal and diligent were appointed to positions of privilege, such as laundress, nurse in the prison sick ward, or errand woman (female inmates who were allowed to run errands in the city on the behest of the spinmasters). These positions allowed the inmates a sense of autonomy in a place of constraint.

## CONCLUSION

Situated between the penal system and the system of poor relief, the prison workhouse at Christianshavn was faced with many obligations. On the one hand, the prison was responsible for the discipline of its inmates, which it enacted through compulsory labor and corporal discipline. On the other, it was responsible for the welfare of its inmates, and the prison institution struggled daily to provide the necessary care for the many members of the prison population. Thousands of inmates entered and exited the prison workhouse at Christianshavn in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Although they shared the confines of the institution, their experiences were formed by how they navigated the system. To some, the prison provided shelter and structure. To others, the prison was a temporary obstacle on their way back to freedom.

Rosenlund's, Larsen's, and Runge's experiences in the prison workhouse provide us with glimpses of how the inmates navigated their way in and around the system. Although all three arrived at the prison workhouse in similar circumstances, their journeys through the system took completely different routes with very different outcomes. Rosenlund was released, Larsen escaped, and Runge remained in the prison till his dying day. Whereas Rosenlund used her knowledge of the system to secure her freedom, Larsen challenged the authority of the prison and forced his own way out of the system's constraints. Runge tried but gave up his pursuit of

<sup>46</sup>DNA, Børnehuset på Christianshavn, Brevkopibog 1781–1789: 403–4.

freedom, albeit his submission to the institution provided him with a different kind of opportunity, allowing him to rise above the station of the other inmates.

Thus, studying the experiences of the people who navigated their way through the system of the prison workhouse not only provides us with an understanding of the complexities and plurality of what it meant to be imprisoned in an eighteenth-century prison workhouse; it also grants us an understanding of how the institution itself interacted with the inmates and was in turn shaped by their actions.

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## CHAPTER 3

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# The Experience of Prison in Finnish Female Inmates' Letters from the 1880s to the 1900s

*Johanna Annola*

### INTRODUCTION

The experience of prison is a new and emerging topic in history and criminology.<sup>1</sup> As suggested by both British criminologists and Nordic historians, the scholars of past prisons have often overlooked prisoners' experiences and portrayed prison wardens as mere faceless guardians of discipline.<sup>2</sup> Historians of incarceration have been reluctant to open new avenues of research, because the source material is usually scarce and

<sup>1</sup>This chapter was written as a part of my Academy Research Fellow project *Lived, Layered, Locked Up. Rethinking Women's Prisons in Finland in the Long Nineteenth Century*, funded by the Academy of Finland (grant number 341042).

<sup>2</sup>Johnston, Introduction; Johnston, Moral Guardians; Anderson and Pratt, Prisoner Memoirs; Nilsson and Wallström, Inledning; Englund, *Fångsambället*; See also Smith, *Isolation and Mental Illness*; Schaanning, *Menneskelaboratoriet*.

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consists only of records produced for administrative purposes. However, as Swedish historians Roddy Nilsson and Maria Wallström point out, it is possible to circumvent this problem by finding new kinds of sources or re-reading the existing ones with fresh eyes.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, I take up the gauntlet by discussing Finnish female prisoners' letters found in the archives of a Helsinki-based private shelter for so-called fallen women. The institution was established by primary school teacher Emma Mäkinen in 1880. She had found her spiritual home with the Free Mission, an originally Anglo-American evangelical revivalist movement, which gained popularity in Helsinki in the late 1870s. After her conversion from Lutheranism to evangelical Christianity, Mäkinen abandoned her career as a teacher to work among women who had deviated from the contemporary (middle-class) ideal of womanhood by committing a crime, selling sex, drinking, keeping bad company, or being out at night. The purpose of Mäkinen's shelter was to turn these "fallen creatures" into God-fearing working-class women by offering them both the Gospel and training in household chores.<sup>4</sup>

The surviving documents of Emma Mäkinen's shelter include a collection of letters from women who either wished to enter the shelter or had resided there previously. The shelter accommodated circa 1200 women during its 35 years of existence, but there are some 30 surviving letters from its former protégées.<sup>5</sup> Hence, it appears that very few women contacted the directress after leaving the institution. It is likely that most women who spent some time in the shelter were only seeking temporary refuge, not a life-long relationship with the directress. Moreover, not all women could write. Most Finnish adults could read superficially because reading skills were a precondition for receiving communion, and

<sup>3</sup> Nilsson and Wallström, Inledning.

<sup>4</sup> For evangelical Christianity and Mäkinen's shelter, see Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*; Annola, "Minulle eläminen on Kristus"; Markkola, Women's Spirituality; Annola, The Conflict Between Lived Religion; Markkola, Working-Class Women Living Religion. For middle-class sexual morality, see also Nieminen, *Taistelu sukupuolimoraalista*; Rajainen, *Naisliike ja sukupuolimoraali*; Häggman, *Perheen vuosisata*; Markkola, Moraalin miehet; Jansdotter, Rädde Rosa, 115; Annola, *Säädöttömät*, 70–1, 98, 190–3, 310. For sexual morality among the lower classes, see Markkola, *Työläiskodin synty*, 62; Saarimäki, *Naimisen normit*, 205–6; Miettinen, *Ihanteista irrallaan*; Vainio-Korhonen, *Musta-Maija ja Kirppu-Kaisa*; Annola, *Säädöttömät*, 54–5, 71.

<sup>5</sup> For discussion on the letters and on the relationship between Emma Mäkinen and her former protégées, see Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*; Annola, "Minulle eläminen on Kristus"; Annola, "Minulle eläminen on Kristus."



communion was a precondition for marriage. Writing skills were far less common: it has been estimated that 13 percent of the Finnish population could write in 1880.<sup>6</sup>

Prisoners' letters have not previously been singled out from the letter collection to be analyzed together other than by the present author.<sup>7</sup> So far, I have been able to identify eight letters from prisoners, written between 1886 and 1914. While some writers had been in Mäkinen's shelter prior to their prison sentence, others contacted her without any previous acquaintance to ask for help. For this chapter, I have chosen four women who specifically mentioned the shelter in their letters, which were written between 1886 and 1904. Ida Somppi and Amanda Storränk had resided at the shelter, Helena Lindström had placed her daughter in the orphanage that was annexed to it, and Katriina Komi wished to enter the shelter upon her release from prison.<sup>8</sup>

Each writer had a pressing concern or a problem they wished to solve by contacting Emma Mäkinen. Ida and Amanda approached Mäkinen to inform her of their present whereabouts, Helena wrote to enquire after her daughter's health, and Katriina was looking for a roof over her head. On the one hand, the fact that these working-class women contacted one institution while residing in another reveals their vulnerable and marginalized position in the slowly modernizing Finnish society that lacked public sector safety nets. The only form of public sector social security was poor relief, but able-bodied adults were given assistance only in exchange for work, often in a poorhouse.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the four women's attempts at reaching out to Emma Mäkinen show that they were willing to use the limited power they had to gain control over their own lives.<sup>10</sup>

The letters of these four women can also be used to discuss the place of their writing, the prison. As British sociologist Liz Stanley has pointed out, letters can be understood as performances in which the writer

<sup>6</sup>Laitinen and Mikkola, *Johdanto*, 9.

<sup>7</sup>Annola, *Naisvankien kirjeet*.

<sup>8</sup>It has also been possible to find useful background information on these four women in digitized prisoner rolls, prison parish records, other relevant parish records, digitized newspapers, and in some cases also in other letters found among Emma Mäkinen's correspondence. As I do not wish to perpetuate the marginalized status of the writers, I have chosen to refer to them by their full names (and not by their first names) as much as any other individuals mentioned in this chapter.

<sup>9</sup>For Finnish poorhouses, see Annola, *Maternalism and Workhouse Matrons*.

<sup>10</sup>Annola, *Naisvankien kirjeet*, 42–3.

constructs one version of her/himself in relation to the recipient.<sup>11</sup> The performance is always shaped by the writer's understanding of the recipient, but also by the situation in which the writing takes place. Prison was certainly a specific situation. As Ida, Amanda, Helena, and Katriina sat behind bars, their correspondence was subject to surveillance and censorship by prison officials. Prisoners had to write their letters on a prison letterhead, or if there was no specific letterhead in use, the letter was stamped with a prison stamp. The letterheads included printed instructions according to which replies were not to be addressed directly to the inmate but instead to the governor.

To quote British carceral geographer Dominique Moran, the four female inmates lived and wrote their letters in “the now of carceral TimeSpace.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, the carceral set limits on the women's lives in both a spatial and temporal sense. For them, prison was a present institution, a lens through which they examined “both past and future and the passage of time.”<sup>13</sup> Viewed through this lens, the shelter in Helsinki was an absent institution. It was either something that belonged to the writers' past, a remembered institution, or something the writers wished to include in their future, an imagined institution.

In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which the experience of prison was embedded in the four female inmates' letters. I suggest that even though letter performances are unique, they are steered by so-called cultural scripts—shared patterns of social interaction that are characteristic of a particular group of people. Cultural scripts capture the models for thinking, feeling, and communicating in a particular cultural context.<sup>14</sup> My hypothesis is that even though Ida, Amanda, Helena, and Katriina did not offer very detailed accounts of their everyday lives in prison, their experiences of carceral TimeSpace are present in their letter performances in the form of those cultural scripts they chose to follow and perpetuate.

The peculiar existence of the writers in between two institutions also raises a question of the nature and extent of the carceral in these women's

<sup>11</sup> Stanley, *The Epistolarium*. For letters as source material, see Leskelä-Kärki, Lahtinen, and Vainio-Korhonen, *Kirjeet ja historiantutkimus*; Nordlund, *Kirjeet*; Halldörsdottir, *Elämä kirjeissä*; Keravuori, “*Rakkaat poikaiset!*” 25–44.

<sup>12</sup> Moran, *Carceral Geography*, 55.

<sup>13</sup> Moran, *Carceral Geography*, 55.

<sup>14</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, Introduction, 15–16. For more on cultural scripts, see for example Goddard and Wierzbicka, *Cultural Scripts*; Vanclay, *The Role and Functioning of Cultural Scripts*.

lives. While the shelter was not a prison, it nevertheless meets the characteristics of a quasi-carceral space, because the lives of its residents were controlled and limited in various ways.<sup>15</sup> As Finnish carceral geographer Virve Repo has suggested, the different aspects of carceral spaces and the ways in which these aspects overlap in individuals' lives can be described as carceral layers. If people are transferred *between* institutions, carceral layers may “agglomerate in their bodies and minds through their experiences,” producing an “institutional burden” that may impact the lives of individuals even after the actual confinement.<sup>16</sup> Inspired by Repo's thought, I explore the ways in which the interplay between prison and the shelter—albeit absent—may have contributed to the accumulation of carceral layers and the institutional burden in the writers.<sup>17</sup>

The chapter unfolds as follows: in the first section, I discuss the writers' lives as well as the ways in which they communicated their experiences of being labeled as deviant. In the two following sections, I analyze how the women framed their experiences of prison life. The idea of prison as a present institution and the shelter as an absent institution runs through these three sections. As a whole, the chapter yields new information on prison as a lived institution,<sup>18</sup> the use of cultural scripts as carriers of emotions and experiences, and the entanglements between different institutions.

### COMMUNICATING DEVIANCY

In January 1886, Emma Mäkinen received a letter from Katriina Komi, a 26-year-old crofter's daughter from a rural parish in eastern Finland. Katriina was serving a sentence in Hämeenlinna Prison Workhouse and Penitentiary (henceforth Hämeenlinna Penitentiary). The institution was

<sup>15</sup> For a recent overview of the scholarly discussion on the aspects of “carceral,” see, for example, Repo, *Confined to Space*, 27–30.

<sup>16</sup> Repo, *Confined to Space*, 46.

<sup>17</sup> For theoretical discussion on the concept of “layer” in the field of the history of experiences, see Harjula and Kokko, *The Scene of Experience*.

<sup>18</sup> Apart from some master's theses and two research articles by the present author (Annola, *Naisvankien kirjeet*; Annola, *Vankeusmaantieteellinen näkökulma*), there is not much historical research on Finnish female prisoners. For women in other institutions in Finland, see Ahlbeck-Rehn, *Diagnostisering och disciplinering*; Ahlbeck, *Ratkaisuna sterilisaatio*; Tuohela, *Huhtikuun tekstit*; Tuohela et al., *Sielun ja mielen sairaus*; Pukero, *Epämääräisestä elämästä*; Vehkalahti, *Constructing Reformatory Identity*; Annola, *Äiti, emäntä, virkanainen, vartija*; Vainio-Korhonen, *Musta-Maija ja Kirppu-Kaisa*. For a Nordic overview of institutional history, see, for example, Nilsson and Vallström, *Inledning*; Englund, *Fängsambället*.

the only women's prison in the Grand Duchy of Finland, but there were some female prisoners also in county prisons, either in pretrial custody or serving shorter sentences. Katriina's sentence was a relatively long one. "I was sentenced to six years for losing [getting rid of] a child," she explained in her letter and continued: "[B]ut god saw it fit to lessen my earthly punishment so that I will serve three years[.]"<sup>19</sup> As Katriina's sentence was slowly but surely coming to an end, she wished to know whether Emma Mäkinen would welcome her to the shelter upon her release from prison. Katriina's story appears to have been true: according to other sources, in 1883 she had killed her illegitimate newborn.<sup>20</sup>

A couple of weeks later, Emma Mäkinen received another letter from Hämeenlinna Penitentiary. The writer was Helena Lindström, a 39-year-old wallpaper factory worker's wife from Helsinki, who was serving a three-year sentence. On her admission to prison, Helena had left her 13-year-old daughter Wilhelmina at the orphanage that was annexed to Mäkinen's shelter. In her letter, Helena asked how the girl was doing. Unlike Katriina, Helena did not mention the reason for her imprisonment, probably because Emma Mäkinen was already familiar with it. Helena dismissed the topic by admitting that she was "impossible."<sup>21</sup> Other sources reveal that Helena was in prison because of procuring. She had kept a brothel in her home, which she had shared with Wilhelmina and "a step-daughter" after ending up living apart from her husband. Procuring was not Helena's first offense: she had in 1879 been convicted of petty theft.<sup>22</sup>

The third writer, Ida Somppi, was a worker's daughter from Turku, a city on the southwest coast of Finland.<sup>23</sup> A surviving letter from Ida's mother to Emma Mäkinen shows that the 20-something Ida had been

<sup>19</sup>National Archives of Finland (NAF), Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Katriina Komi to Emma Mäkinen, 17 January 1886.

<sup>20</sup>Digital Archives of Finnish Family History Association (FFHA), Archives of Kirvu Parish, communion book 1881–1890, 555; NAF, Archives of the Pastor of Lappeenranta Spinhouse, communion book 1868–1889, 46.

<sup>21</sup>NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Helena Lindström to Emma Mäkinen, 31 January 1886.

<sup>22</sup>*Folkvännen* 24 May 1884; *Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti* 24 May 1884; *Nya Pressen* 14 September 1884; NAF, Poll tax records, U:99, Uusimaa Province poll tax records 1884, 248; NAF, Archives of the Pastor of Lappeenranta Spinhouse, communion book 1868–1889, 48.

<sup>23</sup>FFHA, Archives of Turku Cathedral Congregation, additional communion book 1865–1880, 2019; NAF, Poll tax records, T:201, Turku and Pori Province poll tax records 1895, 40.

sent to the shelter in Helsinki so that she would mend her ways.<sup>24</sup> Ida crushed her mother's hopes by leaving the shelter. In the mid-1890s, she sat down in Turku County Prison to write a letter to Emma Mäkinen. Ida described how she had gone out with a girl against Mäkinen's will, been caught by the police, and then sent back to her hometown, Turku. "This time they did not Release me but gave me Six months," Ida explained.<sup>25</sup> Like Helena, she did not specifically name her offense, but the letters as well as the length of the sentence point toward vagrancy and/or fornication.

The 39-year-old Amanda, in turn, was a former maidservant from the city of Vaasa on the western coast of Finland. In 1904, she approached Emma Mäkinen with a letter written in Hämeenlinna Penitentiary. The letter reveals that at some point in her life, Amanda had resided at the shelter but had not enjoyed her stay. "I was never happy but for the smallest setbacks snotty and hard and I thought that I'd rather be in the Spinhouse than here," she confessed, and continued: "I found what I was looking for so that I now have 3 years for theft."<sup>26</sup> Other sources show that Amanda's adult life had involved a series of offenses. She drank, smashed windows, and cast stones. She stole money, teaspoons, food and tobacco, clothes from the local poorhouse, and the blanket of a cabman's horse. Amanda was also familiar with Hämeenlinna Penitentiary: she had been there two times prior to this sentence for grand theft.<sup>27</sup>

This brief overview of the lives and letters of the four women shows that they all chose to lay the blame for their sorry state on themselves. Moreover, Ida and Amanda specifically stated that their punishment was a

<sup>24</sup>NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Elisabet Somppi to Emma Mäkinen, undated. Elisabet gave her address in the letter, which is why it is possible to use poll tax records to date the letter to the 1890s.

<sup>25</sup>NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Ida Somppi to Emma Mäkinen, 24 December, no year.

<sup>26</sup>NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Amanda Storränk to Emma Mäkinen, 27 May 1904. Amanda's reference to the *Spinhouse* points to Turku and Lappeenranta Spinhouses, prison workhouses that had preceded Hämeenlinna Penitentiary as women's prisons. Both institutions were closed upon the opening of the penitentiary in 1881.

<sup>27</sup>*Vasabladet* 20 June 1883; *Vasabladet* 13 January 1894; *Vasabladet* 16 January 1894; *Wasa Nyheter* 22 March 1899; *Vasabladet* 24 August 1899; *Vasabladet* 26 October 1899; *Vasabladet* 15 February 1900; *Vasabladet* 10 April 1900; *Vasabladet* 24 August 1901; *Österbottningen* 21 July 1903; *Vaasa* 17 September 1903; FFHA, Archives of Hämeenlinna Penitentiary and Prison Workhouse, prisoner roll 1900, 1903.

well-deserved one.<sup>28</sup> The writers' portrayal of themselves resembles the harsh attitude that various authorities had toward "fallen" women. The police, prison authorities, poor relief officers, healthcare officials, and reformatory school staff all justified their intervention in the lives of the "fallen" by claiming that these individuals deserved to be corrected, because they had intentionally chosen to misbehave.<sup>29</sup>

Private philanthropists often adopted a radically different approach by portraying "fallen" women as victims. Previous research has shown that upper- and middle-class charity workers depicted prostitutes and other wayward women as ignorant country girls who had moved to the city in search for work as domestic servants but ended up selling sex or being seduced by their masters or other men of power. They had fallen because nobody had taken care of them. By stressing the inexperience and insecurity of these women, and by clinging to the image of the seduced and betrayed woman, philanthropists downplayed the agency of the "fallen." At the same time, the helpers justified their own involvement in these women's lives.<sup>30</sup>

The two approaches to deviancy can be seen as two competing cultural scripts. In their letter performances, the four female inmates preferred the authorities' harsher script over the philanthropists' milder and in some ways more understanding one. The women's choice of script implies that prison, as experienced by the writers, encouraged inmates to remember and communicate their past lives as a bad choice.

The prisoners' situation resembles that of reformatory school residents. According to Finnish historian Kaisa Vehkalahti, reformatory school staff expected deviant young girls to admit their faults and show moral improvement as a part of their re-education. Vehkalahti suggests that as the girls knew that their correspondence was closely monitored by reformatory school staff, they probably adjusted their letters to meet the expectations

<sup>28</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Ida Somppi to Emma Mäkinen, 24 December, no year; NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Amanda Storränk to Emma Mäkinen, 27 May 1904.

<sup>29</sup> Jaakkola, Sosiaalisen kysymyksen yhteiskunta; Häkkinen, *Rabasta—vaan ei rakkaudesta*; Nygård, *Erilaisten historiaa*; Vehkalahti, *Constructing Reformatory Identity*; Annola, *Äiti, emäntä, virkanainen, partija*; Harjula, Annola, and Ekholm, *Etniset ja sosiaaliset vähemmistöt*.

<sup>30</sup> Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 212–14; Annola, "Minulle eläminen on Kristus," 163; Jansdotter, *Ansikte mot ansikte*, 65. Also Mahood, *The Magdalenes*; Vammen, *Ambiguous Performances*.

imposed upon them.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, it is likely that the four female prisoners were aware of the surveillance. They probably knew that by complying with the officials' script, they could secure themselves better prospects within carceral TimeSpace—after all, good behavior could in some cases result in the reduction of a sentence. As such, surveillance was one of the mechanisms through which the disciplinary power of the prison penetrated prisoners' lives and made them control themselves through self-imposed conformity to a prevailing set of norms.<sup>32</sup>

Emma Mäkinen was clearly influenced by both scripts. On the one hand, she felt that “fallen” women were in most cases nothing but foolish girls who needed her helping hand. On the other hand, she seems to have believed that habitual offenders and elderly women had deliberately chosen a vile way of life. They seldom sought change in earnest.<sup>33</sup> In Mäkinen's opinion, only the transformative power of faith could make these women repent—but as they were usually unwilling to accept Jesus into their hearts or were weak of faith, there was little hope for a profound change in them.<sup>34</sup> Given Mäkinen's skepticism, it may be that elderly prisoners with long criminal records never received a reply to their letter(s) but were instead exposed to experiences of dismissal and silence. In such cases, the shelter as an absent institution influenced the prisoners' experience of being labeled as deviant and hence contributed to the accumulation of the institutional burden in their minds.

### COMMUNICATING LONELINESS

As prison separated deviant individuals from their previous lives, the sentence also meant separation from family and friends. The women discussed in this chapter were not shy to admit in their letters that they felt lonely behind bars. From the prison officials' point of view, this was probably acceptable if not advisable. Prison did not serve only as a place of correction for the deviant but also as a deterrent for people outside prison walls. In other words, the carceral was from time to time deliberately extended outside prison space: a remorseful inmate, who communicated her feelings

<sup>31</sup> Vehkalahti, *Opitut tunteet, kerronnan kaavat*, 233–4.

<sup>32</sup> Foucault, *Tarkkailla ja rangaista*.

<sup>33</sup> Annola, “Minulle eläminen on Kristus,” 164–8.

<sup>34</sup> Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 73–83; Annola, “Minulle eläminen on Kristus,” 157–9; Annola, “Tehe minusta itselles.”

of isolation to the outside world, certainly demonstrated to other people that crime did not pay. The inmates, however, had their own motivations for writing letters that carried their experiences of longing and loneliness.

British criminologist Helen Johnston has studied the nineteenth-century British female prisoners' take on their severed family ties. She suggests that incarcerated women used their limited resources to assert their identity as mothers but often experienced difficulties maintaining contact with their children. Imprisoned mothers found the lack of knowledge about their children deeply distressing.<sup>35</sup> A similar experience is embedded in the letter written to Emma Mäkinen by Helena Lindström, whose daughter Wilhelmina resided at Mäkinen's orphanage. During her prison sentence, Helena lost contact with the orphanage and grew increasingly worried about her daughter.

In her surviving letter to Emma Mäkinen, Helena openly complained that she had approached the directress three months earlier to find out how Wilhelmina was doing but had received no reply at all. Silence had made Helena frustrated and suspicious:

[D]id missus not receive my letter or what is wrong has my dear child died already because I am in the belief that she is dead and that missus does not want to add to my troubles if such is the case then if missus would be so good and let me know[.]<sup>36</sup>

Between these two letters, Helena had tried to figure out other ways to reach her daughter. While in prison, she had befriended the above-mentioned Katriina Komi. As Katriina approached Emma Mäkinen to ask whether the directress would welcome her in the shelter, she also added the following greeting in her letter: "Helena Linströöm [sic] asked me to send her love to her daughter Wilhelmina."<sup>37</sup> Judging by the fact that Helena nevertheless decided to put pen to paper for a second time, it is likely that her greetings had not been answered either.

Helena's attempts at reaching Wilhelmina show that mothering in prison TimeSpace was characterized by weak or non-existent communications and a harrowing realization of the passage of time. It seems that she

<sup>35</sup> Johnston, *Imprisoned Mothers*.

<sup>36</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Helena Lindström to Emma Mäkinen, 31 January 1886.

<sup>37</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Katriina Komi to Emma Mäkinen, 17 January 1886.



may even have found the gnawing uncertainty and frustration more distressing than the possibility of Wilhelmina being dead “already.” Helena’s opportunities for nurturing her relationship with her daughter were regulated by prison officials, on the one hand, and Emma Mäkinen, on the other. These gatekeepers decided which messages got through and which ones did not, and all that Helena could do was to keep trying while counting the weeks and months that had passed with no news of the child. In this sense, both prison and the shelter contributed to the piling up of the institutional burden in Helena’s mind by adding to her experience of isolation.

Another writer, Ida Somppi, painted a rather claustrophobic picture of the spatial setting in which her writing took place: the prison room “preyed” on her soul, and the “heavy doors” of Turku County Prison separated her from her family and friends.<sup>38</sup> In her letter, written to Emma Mäkinen one Christmas Eve, Ida desperately reached out to the wider world beyond the prison walls:

[I] have to sit here lonely oh if only I was alone but I have family oh how I have again given such a heavy grief to my old mother. [Oh] dear Madam Now it is precious Yuletide oh how you all Rejoice and sing together there, but oh I cannot rejoice as I have been parted from my family and friends and closed up Here Behind the heavy doors[.]<sup>39</sup>

Christmas Eve was celebrated also in prison. For example in 1892, the chaplain of Turku County Prison sketched a celebration for prison officials, their families, and prisoners. There would be a Christmas tree in the middle aisle, surrounded by the officials, their family members, and a choir. The choir would sing a hymn as female prisoners would slowly file past the Christmas tree. The chaplain would hand each prisoner a religious pamphlet, after which the women would return to their wing to give way to male prisoners.<sup>40</sup> Ida may also have participated in such festivities, but

<sup>38</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Ida Somppi to Emma Mäkinen, 24 December, no year.

<sup>39</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Ida Somppi to Emma Mäkinen, 24 December, no year.

<sup>40</sup> Finnish National Museum, The Collection of Prison Museum, chaplain’s plan for Christmas festivities at Turku County Prison, 1892. The religious pamphlet was written by Mathilda Wrede, a noblewoman who was involved in the Free Mission and became famous for her philanthropic work among male prisoners.

it appears that she nevertheless found Christmas Eve in prison a heart-breaking lonely experience.

Compiling a letter in these dire circumstances, Ida expressed her longing for her mother, whom she had let down by running away from Mäkinen's shelter and ending up in prison. However, the main theme in Ida's letter was the shelter and the people she had met there: the directress, other staff members, and the "girls." Ida assured that she remembered Emma Mäkinen's advice and prayers, "although it is too late now," and stated that she missed the directress very much, especially as they had "had to part ways on such bad terms."<sup>41</sup> Similar intimate and remorseful tones can be found in the letter of another former resident of the shelter, Amanda Storränk.<sup>42</sup> The only thing these two women asked in their letters for was Mäkinen's forgiveness—and perhaps a letter in return.

Finnish historian Pirjo Markkola has suggested that Emma Mäkinen's shelter was a prime example of caring power: Women were helped only if they obeyed the directress and complied with her set of norms.<sup>43</sup> As Swedish historian Anna Jansdotter has pointed out, caring power was balanced by the intimacy of the relationship between the rescue worker and the woman she was trying to "save."<sup>44</sup> Emma Mäkinen, who seems to have grown rather fond of her "girls," was not immune to their disobedience, mean words, and indifference toward eternal life in Christ. Thus the protégées could challenge the existing power relations by appealing to Mäkinen's emotions or hurting her feelings.<sup>45</sup>

This appears to have been the case with Ida, who had turned her back on the shelter in anger, and Amanda, who had conducted herself arrogantly and scorned Mäkinen's offers of help. It seems, however, that life in carceral TimeSpace had softened the women so that they were willing to surrender the power they had usurped from Emma Mäkinen. Did Ida and

<sup>41</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Ida Somppi to Emma Mäkinen, 24 December, no year.

<sup>42</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Amanda Storränk to Emma Mäkinen, 27 May 1904.

<sup>43</sup> Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*; Annola, "Minulle eläminen on Kristus"; Annola, "Minulle eläminen on Kristus" Jansdotter, *Ansikte mot ansikte*. The term "caring power" was first introduced by historians Annemieke van Drenth and Francisca de Haan in their analysis of women's philanthropic work in Britain and in the Netherlands. Van Drenth and de Haan, *The Rise of Caring Power*.

<sup>44</sup> Jansdotter, *Ansikte mot ansikte*, 292–3.

<sup>45</sup> Annola, "Minulle eläminen on Kristus," 167–8.

Amanda miss the sense of belonging and togetherness they had experienced in the shelter? Did they try to reconcile with Emma Mäkinen to bring some of that experience into prison TimeSpace? If so, then their letters can be interpreted as an attempt at fighting the isolation of prison life.

At the same time, Ida's and Amanda's surrender can also be seen as their way of adapting to prison life, and as such, a sign of the carceral layers these women carried. While still in the shelter, Ida and Amanda had been offered a specific script, the role of an obedient woman, but they had abandoned it upon their return to vice. Now, in carceral TimeSpace, the script was valid again. Emma Mäkinen's moral guidance and emotional presence were needed: she was to help Ida and Amanda follow the script. Both women begged Mäkinen to reply, as if to find out if she would accept their surrender and re-establish her role as their mentor. Thus, the carceral layers Ida and Amanda had agglomerated during their lives may have had a brighter side: The women were aware of a script that was shared by the shelter and prison, and they could use their familiarity to develop coping methods.

### COMMUNICATING IMPROVEMENT

All four writers used religious or Biblical references in their letters to verbalize their alleged downfall or their hopes for a brighter future. For example, Katriina described herself as "deeply fallen in the eyes of the world" and explained that God had given her "this lovely hope that I will be allowed into the safety at Missus'."<sup>46</sup> Ida rued the day when she had given "sin such a Great power" over herself.<sup>47</sup> Religious vocabulary was available to the writers because of the mandatory confirmation classes they had attended in their home parishes in their youth, and possibly also because of the spiritual guidance given to them by prison chaplains or visiting preachers.

However, only Amanda and Helena associated their hopes for improvement with the actual spiritual awakening that had taken place in prison.

<sup>46</sup>NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Katriina Komi to Emma Mäkinen, 17 January 1886.

<sup>47</sup>NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Ida Somppi to Emma Mäkinen, 24 December, no year.

Amanda offered Emma Mäkinen an account of the exact moment of conversion:

[T]he first rays of God's light dawned on the first Sunday in advent it was a glorious day and since then I have diligently sought for more light in the word of God [...] and I may also tell missus that I have here the bible I got from missus and it is my only comfort here in prison and if I live I hope it will be [so] all my life[.]<sup>48</sup>

In her letter, Amanda stressed how she now understood her punishment as God's way of teaching her a lesson. Quoting Hebrews and Revelation, Amanda explained that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth," and that God had seen it fit to chasten her one more time with a "rod of iron" so that she would humble herself "under the almighty hand of God."<sup>49</sup> Helena, in turn, explained how God had opened her eyes to the crushing number of sins for which she had to atone. In Helena's words, borrowed from Revelation and Genesis, her sins were a load "as heavy as a thousand *talents*," and their number was as high as "the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore."<sup>50</sup> Helena asked Emma Mäkinen to pray for her, so that God would always help her forward in her life. The two writers clearly wished to include Emma Mäkinen in their spiritual lives.

Amanda's and Helena's way of describing their awakening resembles the rhetoric used in Emma Mäkinen's evangelical Christian circles. In that community, the story of spiritual conversion was a recurrent narrative, a cultural script that defined how an individual was expected to live religion. Conversion, a decisive moment when a sinner repented and opened her heart to God, marked the beginning of a new life in which religion was to have a tangible role.<sup>51</sup> It is likely that Amanda and Helena were not so much inspired by the religious teachings of the Lutheran prison chaplain

<sup>48</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Amanda Storränk to Emma Mäkinen, 27 May 1904.

<sup>49</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Amanda Storränk to Emma Mäkinen, 27 May 1904.

<sup>50</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Helena Lindström to Emma Mäkinen, 31 January 1886.

<sup>51</sup> Jansdotter, *Ansikte mot ansikte*; Markkola, *Women's Spirituality*; Annola, *The Conflict Between Lived Religion*; Annola, "Tehe minusta itselles"; Markkola, *Working-Class Women Living Religion*.

than by the evangelical Christian script they had probably adopted through their acquaintance with Mäkinen and her shelter. The women knew how to “speak religion” in a way that Emma Mäkinen would recognize and that was likely to spark a sympathetic response from her.<sup>52</sup> Especially Amanda compiled a perfect conversion narrative by stressing her sinful life as her own choice, on the one hand, and her discovery of God’s gratuitous mercy, on the other—as if to underline her surrender to Emma Mäkinen’s caring power.

While Amanda and Helena associated their improvement with faith, Katriina was preoccupied with diligence. She wrote to Emma Mäkinen six months prior to her release from Hämeenlinna Penitentiary. Similar to Helena’s attempts at getting hold of her daughter, Katriina’s letter suggests that it was difficult for an inmate to contact people outside the prison walls. For Katriina, getting in touch with Emma Mäkinen had been a tedious process. The difficulties seem to have arisen from Katriina’s own shyness, on the one hand, and from the tardiness of prison authorities, on the other. In her letter to Emma Mäkinen, Katriina described her mixed feelings in detail—her hesitation, her frustration, and her anticipation:

[I] have worried about this and almost did not dare to say anything to anybody but at last I talked to the chaplain to no avail again I thought about this alone for a long time and then I asked Mister Governor’s permission to write to Missus and I will be out of here 23 June and all I am asking is that Missus would send a note to Mister Governor if Missus welcomes me and some information also to me as I am looking forward to it so badly[.]<sup>53</sup>

By letting Emma Mäkinen know how difficult the writing process had been, Katriina was able to show the directress that she was serious about improvement. She tried to demonstrate her worthiness of Mäkinen’s help also by explaining that she had “been in the 4. class for almost a year now,”<sup>54</sup> which meant that Katriina had conducted herself extremely well in prison and that prison authorities had classified her as capable of development. Katriina’s choice of expression indicates that she had internalized

<sup>52</sup> For other examples of a correct way of “speaking religion,” see Markkola, *Working-Class Women Living Religion*.

<sup>53</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Katriina Komi to Emma Mäkinen, 17 January 1886.

<sup>54</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Katriina Komi to Emma Mäkinen, 17 January 1886.

the classification system that structured the inmates' daily lives in carceral TimeSpace. Moreover, it appears that she expected Emma Mäkinen to be equally aware of it—almost as if the directress should have had accumulated several carceral layers in *her* mind.

It is likely that Katriina had learned of the shelter from Helena Lindström, whom she had befriended “in the workshop.”<sup>55</sup> By this, Katriina probably meant the prison’s knitting workshop, which was one of the places of forced labor in Hämeenlinna Penitentiary. Female inmates span wool, hackled flax, dyed yarn, manufactured clothes for other state-managed institutions, and took care of daily chores in prison, because contemporary penal ideologists believed that hard work would encourage moral improvement in deviant individuals. Emma Mäkinen’s shelter relied on the same principle: women were expected to work for their keep so that they would learn how to lead a decent life and find employment outside the shelter. Their work—making handicrafts, baking, doing laundry, and ironing—was also a source of income for the shelter.<sup>56</sup>

The idea of work as an integral part of decent life was another script that was shared by prison and the shelter. Forced labor was also something that contributed to the accumulation of the institutional burden in the minds and bodies of those women who served several prison sentences or traveled between the prison and the shelter. However, Katriina’s case is another example of the ways in which institutionalized women could use the information embedded in carceral layers to develop survival strategies. Katriina had probably learned from Helena that the women in the shelter were expected to do sewing, quilting, and carpet weaving. Hence, Katriina knew which script to follow to demonstrate to Emma Mäkinen how well she would adapt to the practicalities of everyday life in the shelter. “I sure am used to working,”<sup>57</sup> she assured and went on to emphasize her current specialization in handicrafts, almost as if her time in prison had been a vocational school for her:

[I] have mostly worked [here] in the knitting workshop and on the [knitting] machine and I have to say dear Missus that I sure am used to working

<sup>55</sup>NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Katriina Komi to Emma Mäkinen, 17 January 1886.

<sup>56</sup>Annola, “*Minulle eläminen on Kristus*,” 40; Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 236–7.

<sup>57</sup>NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Katriina Komi to Emma Mäkinen, 17 January 1886.

but I would rather not go back home to the heavy farm work there as I have grown used to handicrafts and my chest has become so weak[.]<sup>58</sup>

The fact that Katriina was able to benefit from Helena's carceral layers points to intercommunication between the prisoners. Moreover, it appears that in return, Helena had confided her worries to Katriina—at least Katriina promised to pass on Helena's greetings to Wilhelmina. All this hints that there existed the inmates' own community within carceral TimeSpace—a community that overlapped the one in the shelter and probably followed its own cultural scripts. Previous research has shown that the contemporaries regarded these communities as mostly harmful: according to their understanding, solidarity between prisoners or “fallen” women in shelters, poorhouses, and hospitals for venereal diseases undermined the impact of disciplinary measures. Older women taught young girls how to be “street smart,” and those who showed any signs of improvement were ruthlessly mocked.<sup>59</sup> However, as Katriina's letter indicates, women may also have exchanged tips on survival strategies or potential ways to live a decent life.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The four female prisoners discussed in this chapter each wrote a letter to the directress of another institution, a shelter for so-called fallen women. These marginalized women fell between two institutions: the prison was their present institution and the shelter was an absent institution—either something the women remembered from their past or something they imagined as a part of their future.

The chapter shows that while the writers did not give long descriptions of their lives in carceral TimeSpace, their experiences of prison are nevertheless embedded in their letter performances. The four women discussed in this chapter wrote to solve pressing issues: to find out if their child was still alive, to apologize for their past wrongdoings, or to prepare for a life outside prison walls. These worries, and the women's plausible reasons for writing, reveal some of their experiences of prison life: loneliness,

<sup>58</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Katriina Komi to Emma Mäkinen, 17 January 1886.

<sup>59</sup> Häkkinen, *Rabasta—vaan ei rakkaudesta*; Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*; Annola, “Minulle eläminen on Kristus”; Harjula, Annola, and Ekholm, *Etniset ja sosiaaliset vähemmistöt*.

isolation, loss, lack of emotional and spiritual support, tardiness of communication, and the severance of family ties. At the same time, their letters show glimpses of developments that can be regarded as more positive from the inmates' perspective, such as new friendships forged behind bars and the acquisition of new professional skills in handicrafts.

However, the question of how the writers expressed themselves provides another way of tracing their experiences of prison. Letter performances do not come into existence from a void but are instead steered by the writers' understanding of the recipient and the situation in which writing takes place—including cultural scripts, models for communicating in a particular cultural context. The four writers used cultural scripts in three different ways. First, in discussing their own deviancy, the writers preferred a script that was supported by prison officials over the one that was favored by philanthropic workers. In other words, the women presented their deviant lifestyle as their deliberate choice, not as an accident or somebody else's fault. Second, in describing their moral improvement, some writers followed a script, a conversion narrative, that was characteristic of the evangelical Christian community of the shelter but still not at odds with the ethos of carceral TimeSpace. Third, some writers followed a script that emphasized obedience or work as an integral part of decent life. These scripts underpinned everyday life in both the prison and the shelter.

Hence, it appears that although the writers expected the directress of an absent institution to alleviate their pressing concerns, they nevertheless kept the present institution foremost in their mind when choosing which cultural script to follow. This points to their experience of constant surveillance and their awareness of what was expected of female inmates—transformation from unwanted norm-breakers into obedient and diligent working-class women. The writers seem to have known that inmates' development was assessed by their correspondence among other things and that letter-writing could be one means of securing better prospects within carceral TimeSpace. The existence of cultural scripts that were shared by the prison and the shelter alike may have contributed to the accumulation of carceral layers in the minds and bodies of those women who traveled between the two institutions. It appears that although these layers probably produced an institutional burden, they also carried information. Women could use this information to develop coping methods and survival strategies.

What, then, became of the writers? So far, I have been unable to find any further information about Ida Somppi and Helena Lindström. It is



also not known whether Katriina Komi stayed in the shelter for a while after being released from prison in June 1886. The following spring, she was back in her home parish Kirvu, where she married a crofter. Judging from newspaper articles, Katriina did not altogether manage to keep on the straight and narrow: in the winter of 1896 she was again sentenced to two years' imprisonment for selling butter she had stolen from a crofter who lived in the same village.<sup>60</sup> Amanda Storrank's sentence was commuted, and she was released from prison in September 1905. Amanda died in her hometown of Vaasa a couple of months later.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> FFHA, Archives of Kirvu Parish, communion book 1881–1890, 555; *Wiipurin* 29 January 1896; *Wiipurin* 15 April 1896.

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## CHAPTER 4

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# Re-negotiating Single Motherhood Within the Helsinki Mother and Child Home in Post-War Finland

*Riikka Suominen*

### INTRODUCTION

The problem of the single mother and her child still requires the serious and compassionate attention of all socially awakened people. The news about how some young, “brutal” mother took the life of her newborn baby, hid the body, and only after being strongly pressured to answer confessed her crime is still repeated too often in the columns of our newspapers. It seems horrible to think that in the midst of all our welfare systems and institutions, a young human being had to fight her desperate battle so alone and without any outside support and end it in such a fatal way.<sup>1</sup>

The issue of unmarried mothers and their “illegitimate” children was a heated topic in the first half of the twentieth century and remained as such

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<sup>1</sup> Martta Salmela-Järvinen, Yksinäisen äidin ongelmia. *Huoltaja*, 11 September 1952, 432.

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in post-war Finland. Working-class women sought actively to solve the problems of single mothers. In the quote above from *Huoltaja*, a professional magazine for the social sector, a working-class female politician justified the need to reduce the social and material hardship of “lone mothers”: In the worst-case scenario, the prevalent stigma could lead to desperate actions. From the upper- and middle-class perspective, single parenthood—especially single motherhood—was connected to an immoral, obscene lifestyle, and the intersection of gender and class was evident in that framing.

Medical, demographic, and political experts defined single mothers as a threat to child welfare, morality, and the nuclear family. In the post-war era, concerns about the declining birth rate and the quality of the population were emphasized. Due to this, population policies were realized as a mixture of pronatalist views (for the health of the nation) and the Swedish family policies outlined by Alva and Gunnar Myrdal (for the health of the family). Since infant mortality was higher in Finland during the 1940s compared to the other Nordic countries, child welfare was the main problem to be solved through maternity care. Nascent welfare policies were put into laws that mandated municipal midwives, postnatal clinics, and district nurses in 1944. These welfare policy steps were organized mainly for nuclear families, and they represented the continuity of interwar bourgeois social policy.<sup>2</sup> Citizens had varying access to health services depending on their status, and in the history of the welfare state certain groups had been neglected or stigmatized.<sup>3</sup> Single women with a low income were one such stigmatized group who were left on the margins of family legislation. Women with limited means had only a few options to support themselves and their children. They were entitled to maternity allowance (1938) and child benefit (1948),<sup>4</sup> but these benefits were not necessarily sufficient to cover monthly expenses. The remaining options were to give up their children for adoption or foster care, or else to resort to municipal poor relief. As a solution, working-class women established *Helsingin Ensikoti* (the Helsinki Mother and Child Home, henceforth Home) in 1942 for “lone” mothers expecting a child.

<sup>2</sup> Bergenheim, *Yhteiskunnan, kansakunnan ja kansan asialla*, 46–7, 291; Harjula, *Terveysten jäljillä*, 59–60. On Swedish family policies, see also Ohlander, *The Invisible Child?*

<sup>3</sup> Harjula, *Health Citizenship*, 573–4.

<sup>4</sup> See Minna Harjula’s chapter, *Encountering Benefits for Families*, in this book.



In this chapter, I study encounters between the Home and single mothers in post-war Finland—a time period when single motherhood was connected to shame and immorality but contraceptive guidance was reserved for married couples and abortion was illegal.<sup>5</sup> I am especially interested in the *process of becoming* a resident. What kind of actions by the woman and the institution did the process include on an ideal, individual, and socio-material level? To answer this question, I use the surviving records of both the Home and the Federation of the Mother and Child Homes (henceforth Federation). In addition to these, I use the related records in the archive of Miina Sillanpää,<sup>6</sup> the founder of both the Federation and the Home. To contextualize single motherhood in 1940s and 1950s Finland, I rely on contemporary magazines and newspapers.

I use experience and the lived institution as both the methodological tools and the subject of my research. In the conceptualization of experience, I rely on “the new history of experience.” Instead of trying to find anecdotal examples of what “really” happened, experience can be understood as a process in which language, social relations, and cultural meanings become intertwined.<sup>7</sup> Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo approach experience on three levels: as a part of social reality (what happens to people), as a cultural process (how to give meaning and explain what happens), and as an analytical category (a way to analyze the first two). As they highlight, experience is something that needs to be conceptualized analytically to understand the connection between ideas, structures, and individuals in which the culturally, socially, and situationally bound experiences are constructed.<sup>8</sup>

I approach the institution from a combination of ideal, individual, and sociomaterial dimensions to study the history of experience and the lived institution (Fig. 4.1). I see these dimensions as overlapping and the lived institution as an entanglement of all three.

By the ideal dimension, I refer to the imagined, “pre-material” time when the institution was not yet founded but existed in the discussions,

<sup>5</sup> On contraception guidance and abortion, see Helén, *Äidin elämän politiikka*, 239–40; Helén and Yesilova, *Shepherding Desire*, 258–9.

<sup>6</sup> Sillanpää was a Social Democrat Member of Parliament and the first chairperson of the Federation. She kept her position until 1952, when she passed away. See, for example, Korppi-Tommola, *Miina Sillanpää*.

<sup>7</sup> The definition “new history of experience” is used by Rob Boddice and Mark Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, 18. See also Kivimäki, *Reittejä kokemushistoriaan*, 30.

<sup>8</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 12.

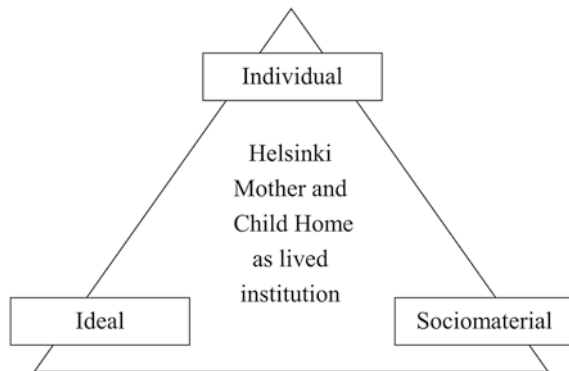


Fig. 4.1 The dimensions of experience

demands, and intentions of working-class women. In this dimension, the linguistic constructions of unmarried motherhood are placed in the center—namely how the understanding of single motherhood was constructed and how the discourse possibly shaped the narrative of single motherhood. The individual dimension provides a way to explore the views of single mothers, the potential residents of the home. How was the institution encountered and understood in their letters and how did the women articulate and appeal to their experiences to obtain residency? With the dimension of sociomateriality, I expand on the construction of the lived institution. Besides language, experience was constructed in the material reality through buildings, spaces, objects, and regulations, among others. With the ideal, individual, and sociomaterial dimensions, it is possible to build a bridge between individuals, the structures in which they act, and the institution they encounter.

Mother and child homes are a significant part of the history of Finnish maternity care, yet these institutions and the experiences related to them have seldom been studied. The surviving archival material has mainly been used in a few institutional and biographical studies,<sup>9</sup> and, for example, the correspondence is mainly unexplored. My chapter will thus shed new light on the ways in which single motherhood was re-negotiated in mid-twentieth-century Finland.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Heinänen, *Lapsen tasa-arvoa tavoittamassa*; Korppi-Tommola, *Miina Sillanpää*; Mälikossa, *Yhteiskunnalle omistettu elämä*.

## THE IDEA OF A SEPARATE HOME

It must be ensured that it is possible for mothers to raise their children as worthy members of society. We *have* maternity care and maternity allowances—and there are not enough of those yet, I know that by numerous delicate examples—but we must also create *mental* possibilities for this matter.<sup>10</sup>

In April 1941, MP Miina Sillanpää gave an interview to the women's magazine *Eeva*, where she determinedly underlined improvements to maternal and child care and continued how the mother and baby home for “unsafe” mothers would be one solution to this problem. Before the concrete building, experiences of the lived institution were constructed in this liminal space where social aspects were present but the concrete materiality was still yet to come. This so-called pre-material time shaped the realities of single motherhood and could be seen as an essential part of the process where the lived institution was produced. As Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo argue:

Experience is not just something that exists or that one is given, it needs to be got and gained, produced even. As experience is produced, the observation of the world through one's senses—and the interpretation of that world through understanding and previous knowledge—also shapes one's expectations of the future.<sup>11</sup>

Discussions and ideas of municipal mother and baby homes were an important part of the linguistic preconditions—which Joan Scott suggests should be examined more precisely—in which experiences are partly constructed.<sup>12</sup> Shifts in attitudes toward unmarried motherhood could be detected, for example, in the language used in initiatives, ideas, and discussions. In this section, I analyze the ideal level and the process of creating a shelter for pregnant unmarried women. What was the context of single motherhood and progress of the women's shelter before the built institution?

Attitudes toward unmarried mothers tightened in the first half of the twentieth century in Europe. The social context of single motherhood was

<sup>10</sup>Naisia, joiden ääni kuuluu. *Eeva*, 1 April 1941, 8.

<sup>11</sup>Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 13.

<sup>12</sup>Scott, *The Evidence of Experience*.

overlooked, and public discussion pointed toward bad judgment and emotionally disturbed women. Single mothers were also framed as unfit to raise children.<sup>13</sup> Stigmatization emerged on several levels of society, but from slightly different angles. As different actors tried to solve the problems of single mothers, the negative echoes of unmarried motherhood were defined from above and outside the subjects themselves. The issue of single motherhood raised a broader question: What kind of motherhood should be supported by the state? As historian Pirjo Markkola has shown, maternity policy was an issue that both unified and separated bourgeois and working-class women in the Finnish Parliament. The conservative parties were reluctant to acknowledge the socioeconomic problems caused to women by single motherhood. Instead, in the spirit of moral reform, they suggested illegalization of extramarital relationships. Working-class women took a more realistic stance: Unmarried motherhood would not disappear by prohibiting it, but the state could reduce social problems by providing financial and material support for single women.<sup>14</sup> Working-class women persistently proposed initiatives for municipal homes for unmarried mothers and their children, but the propositions did not lead to concrete actions.<sup>15</sup>

The child allowance and separate homes for single mothers were both on the agenda of the *Sosiaalidemokraattinen työläisnaisliitto* (Social Democratic Women's Union) in 1929. At its convention, representatives discussed the special need for a specific building and criticized how all the state-funded kinds of homes and institutions were established by the bourgeoisie. Because initiatives for municipal homes did not seem to gain success in parliament, working-class women decided to establish such homes privately.<sup>16</sup> A group of women from the labor movement founded the first local Mother and Child Home association in Helsinki in 1936 under the name *Työläisäitien ja lasten kotiyhdistys* (Association for the working-class mothers' and children's home). In the constitutive meeting, the main purpose of the association was to establish a home for "lone mothers" and

<sup>13</sup>In Britain and Germany, for example, they were pushed to give their children up for adoption. See Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe*, 215–16.

<sup>14</sup>Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 276.

<sup>15</sup>Heinänen, *Lapsen tasa-arvoa tavoittamassa*, 12.

<sup>16</sup>The Labour Archives of Finland (LAF), Social Democratic Women's Union, Folder C22, Minutes of the XII convention of Finnish Social Democratic Women's Union, 1929.

their children.<sup>17</sup> Board members made field trips to similar kinds of institutions in Denmark and Sweden to see how the living conditions, childcare, and maintenance fees of the residents were organized. The importance of the women's ability to work outside the home was recognized, and for that reason the location in an urban, working-class area of Helsinki was essential.<sup>18</sup> The first home was opened in 1942, and at the same time the association changed its name to *Helsingin Ensikoti* (Helsinki Mother and Child Home) leaving any reference to the working class out of the name. A few years later, in September 1945, the national umbrella organization, *Ensi Kotien Liitto* (Federation of Mother and Child Homes)<sup>19</sup> was established. The City of Helsinki provided a building lot for the association, and the government allocated some funding for the Home. Besides that, funding was mainly raised from the Finnish Slot Machine Association, and international support helped to provide clothing and goods.<sup>20</sup>

However, the idea of a separate home for unmarried mothers was not totally new. The Christian shelter movement was popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and one target group of the international movement were "fallen" women—single, usually working-class women, who were caught having extramarital sexual relationships. These relationships became a public matter especially if it led to pregnancy.<sup>21</sup> As historian Pat Thane has noted, not all single mothers were from the working class, but the working class was often the target of control and regulation. This has produced material whereby access to the lives of the lower classes can be gained. Compared to the lower classes, middle-class citizens were less often limited by social control. Not all non-working-class families were particularly well-off, but better-off families could more easily support their daughter financially or arrange a discreet adoption or abortion.<sup>22</sup>

In post-war Finland, single mothers were understood either as heroic war widows or unmarried, working-class women who had strayed from the narrow path of decent sexuality.<sup>23</sup> Single motherhood existed on the

<sup>17</sup> LAF, Helsinki Mother and Child Home (HMCH), Folder CA1, Minutes of the constitutive meeting, 11 December 1936.

<sup>18</sup> LAF, HMCH, Folder CA1, Minutes of the board meeting, 12 November 1938.

<sup>19</sup> At present *The Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters*.

<sup>20</sup> LAF, HMCH, Folder UA1, Printed publications, "Ensi koti. Työläisäitien ja lasten yhdistyksen uusi koti äideille ja lapsille," 5–8 and Folder CA1, Minutes 1936–41.

<sup>21</sup> Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 212–14.

<sup>22</sup> Thane, *Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth-Century England*, 12–16.

<sup>23</sup> May, *Lone Motherhood Past and Present*, 28.

margins of new legislation, and this was an issue left-wing female politicians wanted to change. Sillanpää appealed several times to Members of Parliament and demanded changes in attitudes and in legislation toward “lone mothers.” Sillanpää, along with others working for the cause, emphasized the father’s responsibility and questioned why women were seen as unrespectable when pregnancy was the consequence of a relationship between two people, a woman and a man.<sup>24</sup>

Despite working-class women’s active efforts, governmental support remained mainly aimed at nuclear families. In Finland, as well as in the wider Nordic context, members of the bourgeoisie saw single motherhood as a threat both to marriage and to the existing class structure.<sup>25</sup> Working-class women, on the other hand, wanted to bridge the gap between respectable and unrespectable motherhood. In this process, the conceptual choices appeared to be thought-out decisions. In the source materials, the concept of the “fallen” woman was replaced with new terminology: single mothers were described as “lone,” “unsafe,” or “extra-marital” mothers, or simply just “mothers.”<sup>26</sup> Another fracture point can be seen in the relation between religion and the institution. Instead of spiritual guidance, the association board and its members stressed single mothers’ “mental” preconditions and how their improvement was possible by carrying out educational work. That does not mean that the working class was particularly unreligious.<sup>27</sup> However, whereas Christian shelters for “fallen” women emphasized the link between God’s omnipotence and decent work, the Mother and Child Home concentrated on the role of labor and excluded the evangelical views of salvation in its intentions.

### IMAGINED AND ASPIRED INSTITUTION IN WOMEN’S LETTERS

When the first facility opened in June 1942 in Helsinki, single women’s interest toward the home exceeded expectations. Nationwide interest was understandable, since it was the first concrete, built institution for unmarried working-class mothers-to-be. Potential residents had high hopes of

<sup>24</sup> LAF, Archive of Miina Sillanpää (AMS), Folder HB4, Speeches and writings. Women’s issues. 1907–50.

<sup>25</sup> Peterson, *Maternity Policy and the Making of the Norwegian*, 104.

<sup>26</sup> LAF, HMCH, Folder CA1, Minutes 1936–41, Folder H11, Annual reports 1941–42.

<sup>27</sup> On the evangelical shelter movement, see Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 211–14. On the lived religion of the working-class, see, for example, Markkola, *Working-class Women Living Religion in Finland*; Markkola, *Uskon paikat*.

the Home, which can be read from the application letters written to the Home or directly to MP Miina Sillanpää. From the correspondence, it is possible to analyze how women pursued residency. I understand this as an individual dimension in order to shed light on the lived reality of single motherhood in twentieth-century Finland. Women from all over the country approached the Home, and it seemed to be somewhat unclear both from the perspective of the individual and the institution how the home municipality affected possible residency. In newspapers, the Federation promoted accessibility, and in the organization's action plan women "from Helsinki and elsewhere" were welcomed to the Home.<sup>28</sup> However, applicants from Helsinki were favored unless a "particularly touching" case from elsewhere arose.<sup>29</sup> Based on annual reports, usually approximately half of the residents came from places other than Helsinki. For example, in 1942 there were 86 residents in total, and 42 of them came from other municipalities. This distribution followed the same pattern in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>30</sup>

The letters addressed to Sillanpää and the Home show that even though single motherhood was stigmatizing, this stigma was also a key to gaining residency. In addition to the hometown, another significant—perhaps more important—factor seemed to be women's ability to describe their living conditions touchingly enough. They articulated their experience very openly and straightforwardly when they appealed to Sillanpää. For example, a 23-year woman from the region of Oulu wrote:

I hereby most humbly turn to you to inquire if there would be room and opportunities to come to this home of yours over the bad times. I'm expecting a child at the turn of March and I have no security for that time. I have still tried to be in service, but it seems to be getting too heavy, I've been having such bad days. I am 23 years old and enrolled at [--]. For the past 3 years I have been working near Helsinki in [--], which is also my place of registration. I left from there in the Fall in the hope that I would be allowed to stay at my late mother's sister's place over this time, but I was not welcomed there at all so I have to go into service with a lower salary than usual. I have no savings because the money has been spent very carefully on the necessary clothing, and the father of the child has gone to sea, I don't know

<sup>28</sup> LAF, HMCH, Folder H11, Action Plan 1942.

<sup>29</sup> LAF, HMCH, Folder CA1, Minutes 1936–41.

<sup>30</sup> LAF, HMCH, Folder H11, Annual reports. 1942–59. In 1959, 68 out of 133 residents were out-of-towners.

where he is. I have been without my parents since I was 1 ½ years old and I have been raised by strangers, and now I, poor thing, have no place to sleep when I leave this [work] place. I can't do it longer than this month because it always makes me so tired. There's always some worries. I'm asking for a quick answer from you whether I'll get in or not, and in a positive sense I would like to know how much before labor I can come, because I'm so hopeless and this if anything wears a person down and keeps the mood low.<sup>31</sup>

The living conditions of single mothers who entered the Home were portrayed as serene while staying at the institution, but the correspondence from non-residents reveals another kind of reality outside of the institution. Women opened up about events that had led to their unmarried pregnancy and referred also to the father's responsibility. In cases where the extramarital relationship was with a married man, it was also mentioned as a reason for the lacking alimony. Writers describe how they had read about the Home in newspapers and how in their hometown they have been advised to contact Sillanpää directly in these matters. Sillanpää was known as a person who had political leverage, and it seems that the writers trusted her and the idea that the Home was established for them. Residency was seen as a solution to a difficult social and economic situation, and women pursued this through articulating their (bad) life experiences in application letters. Single motherhood was often described through the concept of unsafety, but the framing and tactics women used varied. One aspect occurring in the letters is the fear of paternal power. For example, one advocate wrote on behalf of a woman under 20 years of age:

There is such a case that the daughter of a working-class family will become a mother in February. She has a home. Father, mother, and a brother. But the father does not understand the difficult situation of his daughter and therefore she would like to get out of the home before the labor begins. Her father always speaks with threats that if it happens to his daughter, that she becomes a mother of a lonely child, so then she must leave the home.<sup>32</sup>

In this case, the pregnancy was kept as a secret from the woman's father and the correspondence does not reveal how things resolved. There were most likely other similar cases, and the threat of homelessness was real.

<sup>31</sup> LAF, AMS, Folder F8, Applications to the HMCH. December 1945.

<sup>32</sup> LAF, AMS, Folder F8, Applications to the HMCH. 1945.



Paternal power also affected families belonging to other social classes. For example, in Britain financial support for unmarried mothers was a heated question, and middle-class families were persuaded to support their pregnant daughters and take them home. Some fathers were described as particularly steadfast in their resistance.<sup>33</sup> This demonstrates how the question was both financial and social: the stigma of unmarried motherhood was a factor that extended also to the rest of the family.

Even though a typical resident of the Home was a young, primigravida woman, not all applicants fell into this category. Older unmarried women with children also approached Sillanpää. The purpose of the Home was not clear to everyone: some women hoped to get childcare organized through it. In one response, Sillanpää noted that mother and child homes were intended for first-time mothers and they were not children's homes nor places for mothers to leave their offspring.<sup>34</sup> This implies what it meant to be a single parent at that time: even though the paternal fear was not directly present for all single mothers, women were affected by society's patriarchal structures. Society's safety net was missing, and the future seemed hopeless if there was not a male breadwinner. In these situations, one possibility was to end up as a recipient of municipal poor relief.<sup>35</sup> One aim of the Federation was to prevent unmarried mothers from having to resort to poor relief. This was important for women of the labor movement because as a poor relief recipient, one lost one's right to vote.<sup>36</sup> The implication was that only the well-off were proper citizens. In the public discussion, unmarried motherhood was framed as a working-class issue, but the Federation emphasized the availability to all who felt "unsafe." There were, however, many more applicants than there were free beds. The "advertised" social security did not meet the realized accessibility. The Federation was aware of this, and in her letters back to applicants, Sillanpää lamented the lack of new homes.<sup>37</sup> Thus, a recurring worry for the Federation was the combination of the large number of newcomers compared to the lack of money to build new homes.

<sup>33</sup> Thane, *Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth-Century England*, 15–16.

<sup>34</sup> LAF, AMS, Folder F8, Applications to the HMCH. Response letter, 1951.

<sup>35</sup> Harjula, *Hoitoonpääsyn hierarkiat*, 221–2.

<sup>36</sup> This was removed from the law in 1945. See, for example, Harjula, *Hoitoonpääsyn hierarkiat*, 226.

<sup>37</sup> LAF, HMCH, Folder H11, Annual reports 1943–45 and LAF, AMS, Folder F8, Applications to the HMCH.

The harsh material and financial conditions are emphasized in the life stories of single mothers during the 1940s and 1950s. The main task of unmarried mothers was to guarantee maintenance for the child and to survive with shame and stigma, while the caring aspect of parenting seemed to come second.<sup>38</sup> In their letters, women appealed to the need for emotional support as well as insufficient living conditions, as an unmarried mother-to-be wrote when she applied for a place in 1942:

I would be unspeakably grateful and happy if I could spend my maternity leave from 1st April possibly till the end of June at the mother and child home. I'll pay everything myself. I'm more in the need of emotional support and guidance, and I believe I could get it there, where there are fellows with the same [mis]fortune and at the same time I would feel safe, knowing that appropriate help is near when needed at that very strange and often fatal time, too, for the first-timer.<sup>39</sup>

The need for emotional support and guidance appears as one strategy in applications, but it was often narrated together with other social, material, and financial worries. Women emphasized their lack of parents, supportive relatives, and concrete home and shelter, but on the other hand they described themselves as “otherwise healthy” and “proper” citizens in order to gain residency.<sup>40</sup> Despite the obvious distress, most of the letters had this suitably restrained tone, where the women described their despair in a civilized manner. Historian Johanna Annola has studied how lower-class “fallen” women had different written strategies when they approached their superiors when applying to Christian shelter homes. She describes these tactics as “letter performances” in which the phrases women used prove that they acknowledged the power structure that existed in the communication that came from “below.”<sup>41</sup> The women who approached Sillanpää used similar kinds of phrases, like “Honorable economic counsellor Sillanpää” and the friendly, but formal enough “Dear Comrade” and “Aunt Miina.”<sup>42</sup>

However, the letters also included impassioned descriptions of the women’s hopelessness. In some letters, the misery was expressed through

<sup>38</sup> May, *Changing Notions of Lone Motherhood*, 129–31.

<sup>39</sup> LAF, AMS, Folder F8, Applications to the HMCH. December 1942, Helsinki.

<sup>40</sup> LAF, AMS, Folder F8, Applications to the HMCH. April 1945.

<sup>41</sup> Annola, *Naisvankien kirjeet 1800- ja 1900-lukujen vaihteen Suomessa*, 38–9.

<sup>42</sup> LAF, AMS, Folder F8, Applications to the HMCH.

outbursts that did not meet the ideals of a caring mother. One mother-to-be described her miserable feelings during pregnancy as follows:

So I don't know who will take care of this child, because at least I don't feel any obligations to take care of or give birth to this child. [...] I am expecting [a child] losing my [vacancy] and there is no special place of residence so I thought I would run to the maternity home. I would most politely ask the Honored Economic Counsellor Sillanpää for a quick answer because there is no permanent residence.<sup>43</sup>

What happened to the applicant if she did not frame herself as “poor but decent”? In her two-page reply, Sillanpää stated that the application was incoherent. Nevertheless, she worried for the unborn child and gave instructions about what to do if the woman did not want to keep the child. On the other hand, Sillanpää described how many women's maternal instincts had awakened at the Home, but how in this case there would be no free beds available. Instead, she encouraged the woman to apply to some other Mother and Child Home.<sup>44</sup>

In several letters, women wrote how despite their poor living conditions, they would pay the expenses themselves. It was nevertheless possible to apply for financial assistance for the fees from the municipal welfare board. However, if a woman was indigent and forced to apply for public assistance, she faced the risk of being considered a recipient of poor relief. This could cause a long-lasting stigma.<sup>45</sup> Women's reference to healthy, proper, and hard-working citizens discloses that although the stigmatized pregnancy and indigency were keys to get residency, they were often expressed through the ideals of bourgeois femininity. Sociologist Beverley Skeggs outlines how formations of shame are essentially linked to class and

<sup>43</sup> LAF, AMS, Folder F8, Applications to the HMCH. June 1951.

<sup>44</sup> LAF, AMS, Folder F8, Applications to the HMCH. Response letter. April 1945. New homes opened at the turn of the 1950s in Oulu (northern Finland), Imatra (eastern Finland), and Turku (western Finland).

<sup>45</sup> Social assistance was discretionary and remained rather a loan than a benefit; hence it had to be repaid. If a person was unable to repay, they could be judged as a regular recipient of poor relief. The boundary between occasional and permanent poor relief was dependent on the authorities of different municipalities. Until 1945, recipients of poor relief lost their right to vote. However, the 1945 amendment was somewhat artificial because permanent recipients of poor relief were placed under guardianship, which also led to the loss of the voting right. The situation remained as such from the Poor Relief Act of 1922 (in effect till 1956). See Harjula, Köyhä, kelvoton, kansalainen?, 11–12.

gender; it involves awareness of social norms and is shaped by the recognition and judgment of others. Respectability is often pursued through actions that are equated to the imaginary middle class, which is often seen as the embodiment of elegant and sophisticated behavior.<sup>46</sup> Historians Minna Harjula and Heikki Kokko have theorized on the temporality of experience by showing how experiences are layered and overlapping within the present and previous generations.<sup>47</sup> The ways in which women approached the institution can be understood through this kind of layered, societal knowledge, which working-class women used to operate with when they dealt with people that represented their superiors.

### ENCOUNTERS WITH BUILT AND REGULATED SPACE

The materiality and material culture of an institution are always connected to its social conditions. In this section, I analyze encounters between unmarried mothers and the built institution from the perspective of sociomateriality. Paul Leonardi describes how sociomateriality can be studied in practices where material elements of the institution overlap with phenomena we typically define as “social,” such as institutions, norms, and discourses.<sup>48</sup> Single mothers’ encounters with the Home were practices or moments in which the lived institution was produced. What kind of (material) institution did women encounter when they applied for residency and lived at the Home?

The Mother and Child Home was a new, four-story building that provided facilities for 40 women. As described earlier, before the house was built, the Federation actively sought to be displayed in the media, especially magazines and newspapers. After opening the first Home, the Federation continued to put forth this public image. The Finnish family and women’s magazine *Kotiliesi* wrote about the institution in 1942:

But the Mother and Child Home is not only thought of as a place of safety and recreation. In addition to the home, it will also give its protégées

<sup>46</sup> Skeggs, *Formations of Class & Gender*, 93, 123–4. See also Morris and Munt, *Classed Formations of Shame*, 231–2.

<sup>47</sup> Harjula and Kokko, *The Scene of Experience*. See also Kokko, *Temporalization of Experiencing*, 114; Harjula in this book.

<sup>48</sup> Leonardi, *Materiality, Sociomateriality, and Socio-Technical Systems*, 34–8. See also De Moura and De Souza Bispo, *Sociomateriality*, 352. On materiality, see, for example, Barad, *Posthumanist Performativity*; Vahtikari, *Reminiscing about the Baby Box*.

professional guidance and training in all the most important duties of a homemaker, which especially most young unwed mothers have never been familiar with before. In order to fulfill both of these purposes, the building of the Mother and Child Home, from the basement to the attic, has required its unique and careful planning. Together with Miina Sillanpää, architect Elna Kiljander designed the house, and the architect then realized the plans in a successful final solution. Air, sun, and light, which are important for children's growth, have been the builders' first goal.<sup>49</sup>

The article exemplifies how the Federation presented the Home as a sanctuary and an educational institution for single mothers. The importance of modern material elements were presented from the perspective of child welfare, whereas the women's place of safety and recreation were connected to the institution's wider societal function: producing adequate homemakers. This was understandable, since often the hardest time was after leaving the institution, and the staff of the Home also seemed to be worried about this. In their letters to former residents, typical questions concerned alimony matters and information about possible marriage. Socioeconomic questions, such as sorting out income, child care, and housing, caused troubles. These concerns can be noticed in the correspondence with former residents:

When Muhammad does not come to the mountain, the mountain will come to You. It has been such a long time and nothing has been heard of You and your little one, so I will take to inquire. It would be so interesting for us to know how you have begun to cope in your life with your child. As I recall, you went to your former position and got someone to take care of the child. Has everything now gone as you thought it would, roughly well? Maybe you've already got married. You could have had time to do that too during this time.<sup>50</sup>

The inquiry and information of a realized marriage itself is interesting. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the marital status of former residents was also compiled in annual reports along with other statistical information on their background. Besides that, it was also listed separately how many women managed to get married after they had left the institution.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Turvattomien äitien ja pienokaisten oma ensikoti toimii. *Kotiliäsi*, 14 July 1942, 388–9.

<sup>50</sup> LAF, HMCH, Folder FB1, Letters 1946–50. A letter for a former resident, July 1949.

<sup>51</sup> LAF, HMCH, Folder H11, Annual reports, 1942–59.

Education was a fixed part of daily life in the Home, and the main purpose was after all to train women to be not only good mothers but also acceptable wives. This fits the wider North American and European context. During the inter- and post-war era, the emerging social, behavioral, and human sciences started to regulate the family, and it was viewed both as a source of morale and a site for concern. In Finnish context also, the period was strongly dominated by the male breadwinner model and housewife ideology.<sup>52</sup> As Bergenheim argues, in post-war Finland matrimony and family was placed at the center of the “population question.” The post-war peak in divorces was seen as an unwanted sign of loosening family ties. Especially women were accused of neglecting their “reproductive duty.”<sup>53</sup> In this framing, single mothers did not represent the desired example of the fulfillment of that duty, and issues of single motherhood were not on the priority list of the emerging welfare state. In this sense, it is understandable that women were pushed toward marriage. The reality was that marriage was often the best way to avoid the economic and social hardship of single motherhood.

To promote the social and material conditions of single mothers, the Federation addressed its message through the media.<sup>54</sup> For this purpose, the Federation commissioned a short film that was shot in the Home and featured Sillanpää. The documentary took a stand on behalf of unmarried mothers. It starts with a quite dramatic setting, where a young, presumably unmarried pregnant woman considers jumping off a bridge but ends up at the doors of the Mother and Child Home. The life and atmosphere inside the Home is cheerful compared to the opening scene, and the building is pictured as modern, spacious, and bright. Happy mothers are portrayed with their newborn babies, who nap on a balcony called the “sundeck.” The film was a clear attempt to create a shelter and social acceptance for single mothers. The Federation’s purpose was narrated as follows:

<sup>52</sup> Michel, *Moving Targets*, 122–9. About Finland, see, for example, Lindberg, *Mannen som objekt och problem*, 102–3; Hytönen and Rantanen, *Onnen aika?*, 163–4.

<sup>53</sup> Bergenheim, *From Pronatalism to Salvaging Relationships*, 146–7.

<sup>54</sup> Turning to the media was a common practice, for example, in Britain as well as in Finland. The British organization the National Council for Unmarried Mother and her Child (NCUMC) was a voluntary organization founded in 1918 to work “with and for all single mothers,” originally to prevent high infant mortality. The organization published, for example, a film called “Unmarried.” See Thane, *Voluntary Action in the ‘Welfare State,’* 133, 137–8.

Until these days, the heavy burden of life has been on the shoulders of the lone mother. While the father of the child, free of shame, bears the name of an honorable man, the mother of the child has been stigmatized with the brand of shame. The Federation of the Mother and Child Homes fights against this double standard.<sup>55</sup>

Working-class women regularly criticized the gendered double standards and saw them as a form of class oppression.<sup>56</sup> The Federation fought against structural discrimination by offering both material and social welfare for women. The institution operated at the interface between the state and the citizen, and it can be seen as an early form of social services that promoted maternity and reproductive health care for single mothers from the lower classes. As Harjula and Kokko have theorized on encounters with welfare state institutions, the Home can be understood as “scene” in which social change was experienced, but simultaneously its principles relied and built on the previous practices of social care.<sup>57</sup> Everyday life within the Home included mandatory elements that can be compared with Christian shelters. Markkola conceptualizes daily life in Christian shelters as “caring power.” Despite the Home metaphor, the women’s everyday life was strictly regulated, and re-emerging as a member of society was possible through hard work.<sup>58</sup> Caring power bound support and control together. In institutional care, it was (and is) used as a means to modify the behavior of the individual. By conforming to the caring power, “fallen” women adapted to their caregivers’ perceptions of a respectable way of life.<sup>59</sup>

A similar kind of power structure can be seen in the principles of the Mother and Child Home: Women’s rights and duties inside the institution were listed carefully, and the importance of carrying out domestic education can be seen from the structure of the building. The annual reports of the Home described how every mother had to carry out household work, which included tasks such as cleaning and laundry. For example, the statute of 1950 placed women as subordinates to the rules and personnel of

<sup>55</sup> Yle, Elävä arkisto. Quotation from the short film *Ensi koti*, 7:40–7:56. A short film ordered by the Federation. 1948.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Nätkin, *Kamppailu suomalaisesta äitiydestä*, 33–40.

<sup>57</sup> See Harjula and Kokko, *The Scene of Experience*.

<sup>58</sup> Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 211, 237.

<sup>59</sup> Annola, *Naisvankien kirjeet 1800- ja 1900-lukujen Suomessa*, 33; Siippainen, *Sukupuolisuhteet, hallinta ja subjektifikaatio*, 18–19.

the Home: “Mothers in the Home need to behave tidily and decently. A mother who has received a reminder from the Director due to bad behavior or is otherwise unfit to be in the home is at the Director’s order immediately obliged to leave the home.”<sup>60</sup> Women were allowed to work outside the Home, but they had a curfew and still had to carry out their duties as residents. Sillanpää frequently emphasized the importance of the educational aspects of these tasks.<sup>61</sup> She said the following to the family and news magazine *Suomen Kuvalehti*:

In addition to theoretical and educational lectures on practical work, teaching includes childcare, tailoring, housekeeping, cleaning, cooking, and laundry. We need better mothers and better maintained homes. It is really time to get past this outdated belief that a woman, because of her sex, can be a child- and housekeeper without education. And society is obligated to give the necessary education.<sup>62</sup>

Notable is especially the sentence where Sillanpää states that the purpose of domestic education is to generate “better” mothers. This was understandable in the sense that presumably many of the residents would be young women with a child, possibly living for the first time on their own. The ethos of work was connected to decency, and it could be assumed that the Mother and Child Homes would, for example, more likely get aid for their work through emphasizing that the institution guided women to successful motherhood.

According to Kirsi Saarikangas, who has studied suburban post-war Helsinki, space, time, inhabitants, and material elements of the environment act together and shaped the Homes as a lived space. In new modern apartments, rooms were organized according to bodily functions (separation of eating, sleeping, and “leisure”). Young mothers in particular praised the new amenities, which produced feelings of joy and happiness with their spaciousness and modern conveniences.<sup>63</sup> The material elements of the Helsinki Mother and Child Home followed these bodily functions. In the light of the source material, the hierarchy of caring power did not

<sup>60</sup> LAF, HMCH, Folder H11, Annual reports, 1948, 6–7; Folder HD1, Statute, 1950.

<sup>61</sup> LAF, AMS, Folder HB4, Speeches and writings. Women’s issues. 1907–50.

<sup>62</sup> Äidit ja lapset saavat kodin, *Suomen Kuvalehti*, 25 April 1942, 530–1.

<sup>63</sup> Saarikangas, Multisensory Memories and the Space of Suburban Childhood, 30–1, 35. See also England, Fannin, and Hazen, *Reproductive Geographies*, 1–10. On bodily organizing, see Männistö-Funk, Rykelmät, 183.



seem to cause conflicts between the residents and personnel of the Home in the 1940s and 1950s. The earlier poor living conditions of the residents and encounters with modern spaces together with the Federation's policy of dismantling the stigma can explain the absence of conflicts. Aid was perhaps experienced more horizontally among single mothers, since the forces behind the Home represented the needs of the same social group: the Home was organized by working-class women for working-class women.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have studied how experience and the lived institution were constructed within encounters between single mothers and the Helsinki Mother and Child Home. My interest lies especially in the "process of becoming" a resident, which I have studied from the ideal, individual, and sociomaterial dimension. With these dimensions, I have analyzed the way in which the judgmental narrative of single motherhood changed toward more a permissive one (ideal), the tactics women used while applying to the home (individual), and the material, built environment the women encountered (sociomaterial). These dimensions are entangled and overlapping, but they also reveal what processes were connected to the history of single motherhood, the women's shelter, and maternity care. By analyzing the preconditions through these dimensions, it has been possible to contextualize the shifting sphere of single motherhood in post-war Finland.

Based on my analysis, I have examined three main processes that happened within the home. First, the discursive preconditions of unmarried motherhood changed. The establishment process was preceded by a vivid discussion of the status of unmarried mothers, which shaped the new public conception of single motherhood. Working-class women replaced the concept of the "fallen" woman with a less evaluative terminology while debating the rights of "lone" mothers. With this conceptual change, they also tried to detach shame, immorality, and unrespectability from single motherhood. Although the political language became more respectful toward single mothers, the experiences of shame, together with the material and social problems, did not vanish along with the establishment of the institution. Shame can be seen as a part of the layered experiences that were connected to single motherhood. Even the structures and institutions of the society changed, and these changes were reflected in personal

attitudes and experiences slowly and not necessarily linearly with the development of welfare state institutions.

Second, the Home was one important milestone for working-class women's maternity policy, but due the lack of governmental support, women had to organize the institution privately. This meant limited funding and new homes being built slowly, but on the other hand it enabled the independence to draw up the institution's rules. Within the Home, the role of religion diminished. Compared to Christian shelters for "fallen" women, where through hard work and by God's mercy women were able to return to society, religion was conspicuously absent. Instead of being the regulator of daily life, religion was transformed into a private matter.

Third, the Mother and Child Home both influenced and serve as an example of the wider societal change that was connected to nascent welfare policies. Questions like what kind of motherhood should be supported by the state arose in public discussion in the early twentieth century, and in post-war Finland, these matters started to be addressed as social services, which are at present seen as an integral part of the welfare state. The Helsinki Mother and Child Home was one institution that contributed to, was connected to, and continued this development.

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PART II

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Lived Social Citizenship



## CHAPTER 5

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# The Construction of Early Social Citizenship: The Lived Institution of Poor Relief in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Finland

*Heikki Kokko*

### INTRODUCTION

The Gracious Act, given on March 22, 1852 [...] ordained that every parish had to take care of its own poor people and thus made this poor relief legal.<sup>1</sup>

In 1856, when four years had passed since the enactment of the poor relief reform, the historian Georg Zacharias Forsman described its significance in the above-mentioned way. By “legal” poor relief, Forsman referred to two novel aspects of the reform. First, it was the first socio-political effort to create a comprehensive subsistence system with a harmonized set of

<sup>1</sup>Forsman, Vaivaisuus ja vaivaiholho. *Suometar*, 13 March 1857 no 11.

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norms.<sup>2</sup> Second, the Act recognized poverty as a societal problem that was to be remedied by legislation. Forsman, who later became a professor of history and the leader of the nationalist movement in Finland, was not alone in his conceptualization that emphasized the revolutionary idea of the Poor Relief Act of 1852. The experience that the Act legalized poverty in Finland was often repeated in the contemporary public debate at the end of the 1850s.<sup>3</sup>

In Finnish historiography, the Poor Relief Act of 1852 has not been seen as a major milestone in welfare state development. The Act has been mainly analyzed by comparing it with earlier legislation and the Poor Relief Act of 1879. The latter Act has been regarded as harsher toward poverty but more liberal regarding individual rights, thus paving the way for modern citizenship in Finland.<sup>4</sup> Interpretations of the 1852 Act, in turn, are more contradictory. While some scholars have seen the Act as a philanthropic reform that diminished the stigma of poor relief,<sup>5</sup> others have emphasized its patriarchal character, stressing the fact that the Act was passed together with the Act on Forced Labor and Vagrancy, which heavily restricted the individual freedom of mobility. The two acts of 1852 (henceforth referred to as “poor relief reform” or “poor relief legislation”) were introduced to prevent beggary and the unrest that had been experienced elsewhere in Europe since the revolutions of 1848.<sup>6</sup>

The view changes if the top-down perspective is replaced by a from-below approach. Due to new digital research material, it is possible to move the focus from legislation to the everyday experience of the poor relief reform. I will assess the significance of the poor relief reform by looking at the societally shared experiences of the people who lived through it, as well as at the social structures of the era—the very elements that constructed the social institutions of the time. In other words, my interpretations are not based on the future chronology of poor relief and welfare

<sup>2</sup> Aerschot, *Köyhät ja laki*, 77.

<sup>3</sup> O. B. [Oskar Blomstedt], Vaivaisholhosta Ilmajoella m. m. *Suometar*, 5 May 1857 no 17; S. P. S. Talonpoika, Ylikannukselta. *Suomen Julkisia Sanomia*, 11 May 1857 no 36.

<sup>4</sup> Jaakkola, Sosiaalisen kysymyksen yhteiskunta, 110–13.

<sup>5</sup> Piirainen, *Kylänkierrolta kunnalliskotiin*, 80–1; Haatanen, *Suomen maalaisköyhälistö*, 61.

<sup>6</sup> Pulma, Vaivaisten valtakunta, 59–61; Pulma, Köyhästäkö kansalainen?, 165–7. According to Markkola, it preserved the chief maintenance of the poor people as the responsibility of the family, which included the servants. Markkola, *Työläiskodin synty*, 25; Markkola, *Changing Patterns of Welfare*, 229; ALS 1852.

state development but are instead guided by the moment of experience. This is the basic schema of the social history of experiences.<sup>7</sup>

In this chapter, I ask what kind of citizenship was constructed in the wake of the poor relief reform of 1852. In a wider sense, I use Finland as a case study to examine how early social citizenship was formulated in the interplay between the local, societal, and transnational. While the classic approach to citizenship focused on a formal status as defined by legislation,<sup>8</sup> more recent scholarship has extended the definition of citizenship to social practices, stressing the role of informal citizenship or lived citizenship.<sup>9</sup> The novel concept of *lived social citizenship*, which focuses on from-below everyday experiences, allows for an analysis of the early local practices of citizenship. As a historical layer, early lived citizenship may have influenced later social citizenship in the welfare state.<sup>10</sup>

At the heart of my chapter lies the understanding that the implementation of the poor relief reform coincided with the first rise of the Finnish nationwide public sphere. Public discussion on legislation was limited because the country's legislative body, the Diet of the Four Estates, did not convene between 1809 and 1863, and the Finnish-language press was under strict censorship until the period that followed the Crimean war.<sup>11</sup> However, the nationwide culture of readers' letters to newspapers that developed during this first rise of the Finnish press from the 1850s onward makes the analysis possible.

The letters were usually written in the name of local communities. In their local letters to the newspapers, hundreds of ordinary people documented their experiences of the societal change that occurred in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> The culture of the letters to newspapers was truly nationwide, because the early Finnish-language press was not local or regional but nationwide in its character. Because of the societal circumstances, the vast majority of the newspaper issues were delivered to the rural areas by the mail service.<sup>13</sup> These local letters were not usually

<sup>7</sup>I have developed this methodological-theoretical approach with Minna Harjula. See Kokko and Harjula, *Social History of Experiences*; Harjula and Kokko, *The Scene of Experience*; Kokko, *Temporalization of Experiencing*; Harjula, *Eletty hyvinvointivaltio*; Harjula, *Framing the Client's Agency*; Minna Harjula's chapter, *Encountering Benefits for Families*, in this book. See also Kettunen, *The Nordic Welfare State*, 226–7.

<sup>8</sup>See Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, 1–85.

<sup>9</sup>Lister, *Engendering Citizenship, Work and Care*, 11–2.

<sup>10</sup>Kallio, Wood, and Häkli. *Lived Citizenship*, 713–29; Lister et al., *Gendering Citizenship*; Harjula's chapter.

<sup>11</sup>Tommila, *Yhdestä lehdestä sanomalehdistöksi 1809–1859*, 167–71, 175–8.

<sup>12</sup>Kokko, *From Local to Translocal Experience*, 181–3.

<sup>13</sup>Kokko, *Suomenkielisen julkisuuden nousu 1850-luvulla*, 11–12, 16–19.

censored, because they often reported only local issues. Thus, these letters express experiences of the local implementation of the poor relief reform. This material has not been systematically used in the earlier research considering the reform of 1852.<sup>14</sup>

As historical evidence, the letters have social representativeness because public writing in the name of the community exposed the authors to criticism in their local communities. Other writers from the local community usually corrected any errors of fact that were published in the press. Furthermore, hundreds of writers and thousands of readers across the country cautiously controlled what the other authors wrote. The debates and comments on other authors' letters were a characteristic feature of this culture of letters to the press. As the debates were public and spread nationwide, control by the peer group was societal in character.<sup>15</sup>

In this chapter, I use the Translocalis Database of readers' letters and the general discussion on poor relief in the Finnish-language press in 1853–1860 as my main research material. Furthermore, I use the official material—legislation and statistics—to outline the formal structure and preconditions of citizenship in the era. I will periodize my analysis in two phases: the era of 1853–1856, when the censorship was strict and 1857–1860, when it loosened. I will end my analysis in 1860, when other social issues started to dominate the public debate.<sup>16</sup>

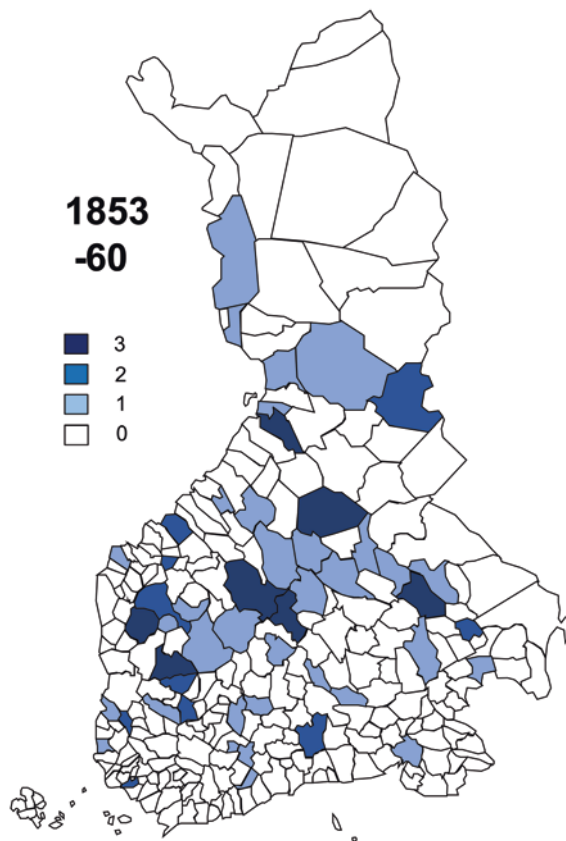
The main argument of this chapter is based on the quantitative analysis of the Translocalis digital database and qualitative analyses of the approximately 5000 local letters dating from 1853 to 1860.<sup>17</sup> The letters were written all across the country (see Fig. 5.1).

<sup>14</sup>I have collected the readers' letters written in the name of local communities into the *Translocalis Database* at the Finnish Academy Centre of Excellence in the History of Experiences (HEX). The database contains all readers' letters written in the name of local communities and published in the Finnish-language press during the period 1850–1885, gathered from the fully digitalized newspaper collection of the National Library of Finland. The database includes some 72,000 letters, which are OCR-recognized. Kokko, Suomenkielisen lehdistön paikalliskirjekulttuuria.

<sup>15</sup>See Kokko, Suomenkielisen lehdistön paikalliskirjekulttuuria.

<sup>16</sup>The debate on January committee started in 1860. It prepared for the legislative assembly, the Diet of Finland that convened in 1863 after a break of over a half a century.

<sup>17</sup>The letters that include information about the poor relief were first filtered with the digital word searches that cover the Finnish words for poor relief. The results were then manually filtered to correct errors in the OCR recognition. In this process, 117 letters from 77 different locations that mention the poor relief in 1853–1860 were found. These letters included 8 variants from other newspapers and 11 anonymous letters. Most of the signed letters are written under pseudonyms. It could be assumed that there are at least 77 different writers. Translocalis Database.



**Fig. 5.1** The circulation of local letters that mention poor relief in 1853–1860

The local letters could be published under a pseudonym or with no signature at all.<sup>18</sup> Generally, the social background of the writers of the letters varied. Although the Lutheran church taught everyone to read to some extent, only a small percentage of the people in the Finnish-speaking countryside could write.<sup>19</sup> Full literacy was rare, and many writers were pastors and civil servants who had received an education. However, among

<sup>18</sup> Kokko, *From Local to Translocal Experience*, 185–7.

<sup>19</sup> See Leino-Kaukiainen, *Suomalaisten kirjalliset tiedot autonomian kaudella*, 422–4.

the writers were many from the lower strata of society—freeholder peasants, crofters, and even workers—who usually can be identified by their style of writing. In general, it seems that many ordinary people who had the rare ability to write contributed to the culture of local letters.<sup>20</sup> It could be assumed that at least some writers were involved in the reform of their own community. Due to the low literacy rate in the countryside, the writers were a special group whose skills were undoubtedly used in the implementation of local reforms. As the poor could seldom write, the general voice in the letters was rather the payer than the receiver of poor relief.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I will indicate how the Finnish poor legislation of 1852 defined a new kind of formal “local citizenship,” which extended the basis of the membership of the community from the level of the household to the level of the parish. Second, I will show how this citizenship extended beyond the local level and formed a new kind of nationwide informal lived citizenship. My main argument is that the emerging poor relief institution became the first modern nationwide societal institution that had the potential to reach most of the population in Finland via the reciprocal circulation of knowledge in the establishment of the Finnish-language press. Third, I demonstrate how poor relief became the first social institution that channeled broad-scale public social critique toward the authorities. Altogether, I argue that the poor relief institution in 1850s Finland constructed an early social citizenship that was based on the interaction between the legislation, local experiences of civil society, and transnational circulation of knowledge concerning the rights and responsibilities of the citizen.

### LOCAL CITIZENSHIP

In mid-nineteenth-century Finland, the status of an individual in relation to the state and authorities was defined by the system of the four estates: the nobility, clergy, urban burghers, and freeholder peasants. In this patriarchal system, rural landless people—domestic servants, temporary farm laborers, cottagers, and crofters—lacked political power, as they were represented by landowners in the legislative bodies. In the mid-nineteenth century, rural landowners, their servants, and other groups of landless

<sup>20</sup> Kokko, *From Local to Translocal Experience*, 191–2.

people made up 97 percent of the population,<sup>21</sup> which points to the agrarian economy of Finland, as well as the wide-reaching societal significance of the 1852 poor relief reform.

Rapid population growth increased the number of landless farm laborers and resulted in rural poverty from the eighteenth century onward. As the pre-1852 poor relief system only recognized those poor who were unable to work for their living (the infirm poor), vagrancy and beggary became the only survival strategies for those capable of work (able-bodied) but were unemployed. Even though the mobility of the poor from one parish to another was restricted by legislation, vagrancy became a problem especially in the frequent years of crop failures.<sup>22</sup> The Poor Relief Act of 1852 was passed to remedy this very issue.

With the passing of the new Act, the main responsibility for the maintenance of the poor remained with the family. Only those poor whose parents, grandparents, children, or grandchildren were not able to provide for them were entitled to poor relief.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the landless were often those who did not have the safety-net of the family because of multi-generational deprivation, which was a growing social problem in the Finnish countryside due to rapid population growth, frequent years of crop failures, and self-subsistent households. Furthermore, social decline to this stratum was not unusual even from the position of a landowner.<sup>24</sup>

However, from the perspective of citizenship studies, it can be argued that the Act constructed a new kind of formal citizenship in Finland with new rights and responsibilities that bypassed the old system of estates. First, the legislation guaranteed basic subsistence against extreme poverty to all inhabitants for the first time in Finland. In addition to the infirm poor, the able-bodied poor in need of temporary aid (and without a provider) were also now entitled to public support.<sup>25</sup> The aid was meant to be given in exchange for work, but in reality there were often no suitable work tasks available. The passing of the Act indicates that the legislators were aware of the fact that there were individuals who were unable to earn

<sup>21</sup> SVT VI 1865, 34–5.

<sup>22</sup> Piirainen, *Kylänkierrolta kunnalliskotiin*; Haatanen, *Suomen maalaisköyhälistö*, 44–7.

<sup>23</sup> VHA 1852.

<sup>24</sup> Frigen, Hemminki, and Nummela, *Experiencing and Encountering Impoverishment*, 8–13, 23; Haatanen, *Suomen maalaisköyhälistö*, 44–53; Haapala, *Maaseudun liikaväestöongelman syntyminen 1800-luvulla*, 297–9.

<sup>25</sup> VHA 1852, §1, §20–23; Pulma, *Vaivaisten valtakunta*, 59–60.

their living despite their ability to work and that society had to take responsibility for them by providing them with work and a basic income.<sup>26</sup>

Second, the Poor Relief Act of 1852 guaranteed a new kind of civil right that protected the individual against the administrative system. While the earlier poor relief legislation had not provided the recipients with a legal right to complain about poor relief, the new Act granted them the right to make a complaint to the governor of the province in question against the local poor relief board.<sup>27</sup> As such, the new Act acknowledged the subjectivity of these disadvantaged societal groups and recognized the human dignity of the individual recipient of poor relief.<sup>28</sup>

Third, the Poor Relief Act of 1852 gave a right to the new stratum of society to participate in the government of the state that was partly disengaged from the Lutheran church administration. Earlier, besides his work as the head of the local church, the pastor directed the rural communities by chairing the parish meetings. The Poor Relief Act of 1852 continued this tradition by placing the pastors as the heads of the local poor relief boards, but a new aspect of the Act was that also freeholder peasants, tenant farmers, and artisans were eligible to be chosen for membership of the board. Furthermore, they could become supervisors of the poor relief districts, which had to be established.<sup>29</sup> Landowners had similar tasks earlier in the church administration, but a novelty was that the specific orders were now given by the central government.<sup>30</sup>

The rights ordained by the Act were balanced by new duties. Participation in the official poor relief administration was not only a right but also a responsibility for the landowners, tenant farmers, and craftsmen. Furthermore, significant for the development of lived citizenship was that every adult person had the responsibility to pay poor relief fees to the parish. This created a rudimentary but coherent system of compulsory local taxation.<sup>31</sup> The poor relief fees recognized the landless people as subjects in a new way. Thus, the system constructed a new kind of relationship between the individual and the society that differed from the old patriarchal system where the human being was defined through his or her status

<sup>26</sup> Piirainen, *Kylänkierrolta kunnalliskotiin*, 80–1.

<sup>27</sup> Pulma, *Vaivaisten valtakunta*, 59–61; Piirainen, *Kylänkierrolta kunnalliskotiin*, 63–7.

<sup>28</sup> Soikkanen, *Kunnallinen itsehallinto kansanvallan perusta*, 79.

<sup>29</sup> Soikkanen, *Kunnallinen itsehallinto kansanvallan perusta*, 78–9, 99–100.

<sup>30</sup> The position of the trust system of the church continued alongside the new system of supervisors, whose orders were given by the central government.

<sup>31</sup> Soikkanen, *Kunnallinen itsehallinto kansanvallan perusta*, 78–9, 99–101.

in the system of estates. This was especially significant because the recognition of each individual as a subject was aimed at disadvantaged people.<sup>32</sup>

However, the intention of the authorities who passed the Poor Relief Act of 1852 was to prevent vagrant beggary, not to construct any kind of modern liberal citizenship. The conservative intention of the legislators becomes clearer when the Act on Forced Labor and Vagrancy of 1852 is examined. It obliged landless people to place themselves under somebody's legal protection, who, in the case of Finland, was usually a freeholder peasant. The Act on Forced Labor and Vagrancy ordered vagrant people who failed to get this kind of legal protection to be reassigned to public workhouses. The intention of the Act was to prevent vagrant beggary by binding poor people spatially to the sphere of locality. This was done by strengthening the old patriarchal order by emphasizing the position of the landowner over the landless people. In the post-1848 world, this was an attempt to prevent agrarian poverty that had the potential to cause societal disorder.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, the implementation of the Act on Forced Labor and Vagrancy was unrealistic and even impossible because there were neither enough places of employment nor public workhouses for the independent landless or vagrant people. Indeed, the Act was widely evaded by registering the landless people, for example, as crofters, mainly because the landowners did not want to give up their temporary labor force. Furthermore, the Act was unpopular among the higher strata of society, because as it restricted freedom of movement, it impaired the industrial development of the country by restricting the labor market. Therefore, the efforts to reform this legislation began shortly after it was enacted.<sup>34</sup> The significance of the Act on Forced Labor tied the poor spatially to the sphere of locality, because although the legal protection did not work properly, the right to move was strictly regulated.<sup>35</sup> As the Act on Forced Labor and Vagrancy's responsibility to obtain patriarchal legal protection became a dead letter, the new rights and responsibilities ordained by the Poor Relief Act became emphasized. This was undoubtedly one reason for the unpopularity of the reform among the propertied classes.

<sup>32</sup>This relates to the breakthrough of the modern subject in Finland. See Kokko, *Kuviteltu minuu*.

<sup>33</sup>Pulma, *Vaivaisten valtakunta*, 59–61.

<sup>34</sup>Haatanen, *Suomen maalaishöyhälistö*, 61, 152; Pulma, *Vaivaisten valtakunta*, 60–1. See, for example, A. B. Jalasjärveltä. *Oulun Viikko-Sanomia*, 18 June 1859 no 24.

<sup>35</sup>Pulma, *Vaivaisten valtakunta*, 59–61.



From the perspective of lived citizenship, the poor relief legislation of 1852 as a whole could be seen as a process that slowly constructed a new kind of formal citizenship in which the rights and responsibilities guaranteed by the state were universal but spatially tied to the sphere of locality. This “local citizenship” concerned especially the lowest strata of society that had no independent status in the system of the estates. However, it had an influence also on the landowners, tenant farmers, and craftsmen, who found themselves with a new position in relation to the central government.

Indeed, the Poor Relief Act of 1852 advanced the formulation of formal “local citizenship” by defining the relationship between the church and state. Earlier, the local administration—the poor relief included—was under the control of the church and, in practice, the parson of the parish. The new opportunity for the applicants of the aid to complain about their treatment to the governor meant bypassing the ecclesiastical local government, which earlier had the decisive power in this issue. This change highlighted in a new way the role of the governor in the local poor relief, which meant that the upper-level control of the administrative organization had a more solid and integrated foundation.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the participation of the landowners, tenant farmers, and craftsmen in the administration of poor relief was the first step toward a new municipal administration that was not organized via the Lutheran church. Even though the pastors still acted as the heads of the local poor relief boards, the organization was now more a part of the central government than the old ecclesiastical order. Indeed, the administrative change caused by the Poor Relief Act of 1852 prepared people for the municipal reform (1865) and the Church law (1869), which separated the church from the state in legislation.<sup>37</sup>

The formal “local citizenship” had far-reaching effects in the everyday life of local agrarian communities. It began to construct new kinds of social practices, the informal part of citizenship. The poor relief legislation of 1852 transformed the social dynamics of giving and receiving the aid especially in the case of poor people who were able to work. Earlier, most of such aid was given and received within the household and therefore through face-to-face interaction. The people in need asked for aid personally and the aid was in turn given personally. Now it was the responsibility of every adult person to pay poor relief fees to the parish within a system

<sup>36</sup> Aerschot, *Köyhät ja laki*, 77.

<sup>37</sup> Soikkanen, *Kunnallinen itsehallinto kansanvallen perusta*, 78–81, 99–101.

that was authorized by the state and its legislation.<sup>38</sup> The need for help was estimated by the poor relief supervisor, who now acted with the authorization of the parish and state. A writer of a letter to the press summarized this change from the perspective of a rural landowner in 1854 by writing that the giving of bread and transportation by horse for poor people had changed for the community into paying in money and grain.<sup>39</sup> This undoubtedly strengthened the idea of the parish not only as an ecclesiastical community but also as a lay administrative district. Furthermore, it reinforced the construction of local lived citizenship as local action legitimated by the central administration.

The lived experience of the poor relief reform of the 1850s became visible also at the more general cultural level as new conceptualizations. The early Finnish concept for poor relief used in the Act of 1852 was “vaivaisholhous.” In this compound word, the latter word, “holhous,” referred to being under guardianship. In the Poor Relief Act of 1879, the central concept was “vaivaishoito,” in which the word “hoito” signified care.<sup>40</sup> Simultaneously, the first word of “vaivaishoito” (basic form “vaivainen”) began slowly to be replaced by the concept of “köyhä” in public language when the Poor Relief Act of 1852 was put into practice in the 1850s. As “vaivais” referred originally only to the people who were not capable of work because of their age or sickness, the new concept “köyhä” referred to all poor people, regardless of the cause of the poverty. In the common speech, the new concept of “köyhäinhoito” slowly began to take over from “vaivaishoito” as the dominant concept of poor relief.<sup>41</sup> As Reinhart Koselleck has argued, the change in the concepts of language indicates a change in shared experiences.<sup>42</sup> In this case, the experience of placing the sick, underaged, and old under the guardianship of the household began to be transformed into the experience of poverty as a more general societal problem, the care of which took place within the municipal community.

<sup>38</sup> See Aerschot, *Köyhät ja laki*, 80–2.

<sup>39</sup> S., Nilsiästä, *Suometar*, 16 June 1854 no 24.

<sup>40</sup> VHA 1852, VHA 1879.

<sup>41</sup> Based on word searches in the digital collections of the National library of Finland, [digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi](http://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi). The service includes the Finnish-language press of the era digitized and OCR-recognized. See also Harjula, *Vaivallisuuden vaivatut*, 25–32; Harjula, *Köyhä, keltovoton, kansalainen?*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Koselleck, *Social History and Conceptual History*, 35–7.

## BEYOND LOCALITY

The Poor Relief Act of 1852 provided only a legal framework for the reform and left a lot of room for its implementation to the local communities. This is understandable because of the structural factors of Finnish society. The Russian emperor had been the supreme authority since 1809, and the Grand Duchy of Finland was directed from the top down, as the legislative assembly, the Diet of Finland, was not convened until 1863. This led to the accumulation of power by the central administration and its officials, who carried on the legacy of the earlier Swedish reign. The entire central administration functioned in Swedish, although 85 percent of the population were Finnish-speaking and only 14 percent Swedish-speaking.<sup>43</sup> Swedish, which is linguistically unrelated to Finnish, was the language of the educated classes and a minority of the common people. There were no state schools in Finnish, and Finnish-language literary culture was still thin. The only institution that worked in Finnish was the Lutheran church, which was in charge of local administration in the agrarian parishes and worked as a link between the state administration and the Finnish-speaking majority.<sup>44</sup> As a result of these societal, administrative, and linguistic factors, Finland consisted of numerous different local communities in which the interaction was based mainly on local oral cultures.

The linguistic and educational situation was well visible in the planning and implementation of the Poor Relief Act. When the proposal for the new Poor Relief Act was circulated for comments in the 1840s, only one of the 49 official comments was written by a Finnish-speaking freeholder peasant, even though comments were requested at the parish meetings.<sup>45</sup> According to one of the most active public commentators of the reform, Georg Zacharias Forsman, it was difficult for the freeholder peasants to oversee and investigate the common activities in the parish, as hardly any of them were literate. If a freeholder peasant was chosen for a position of trust in the parish, he would have to employ a scribe for help. As the official documents were written in Swedish, the freeholder peasants got their information only via verbal translations. The poor relief regulation of the parish that was sent to the governor's office for validation was written both in Swedish and Finnish, but only the Swedish text was officially

<sup>43</sup> SVT VI 1865,1.

<sup>44</sup> See Kokko, *Kuviteltu minuus*, 67–74.

<sup>45</sup> Piirainen, *Kylänkierrolta kunnalliskotiin*, 67–81.

confirmed. According to Forsman, the Finnish-speaking freeholder peasants, who since the Act of 1852 were obliged to participate in the implementation of the poor relief, had to trust these oral translations and simply draw their mark under a text written in an unfamiliar language.<sup>46</sup>

However, Finnish society had social dynamics that bubbled under the surface in the mid-nineteenth century. Both the circulation of the Finnish-language press and the number of Finnish-language newspapers and journals increased tenfold between 1850 and 1860, and the press became established as a societal institution during the poor relief reform in the 1850s. The first media that worked in the majority language significantly increased the circulation of knowledge in society. Furthermore, the distinctive culture of local letters to newspapers made this circulation a two-way phenomenon.<sup>47</sup>

The poor relief reform of 1852 was discussed in a lively manner in these local letters. The Translocalis Database includes 27 letters that commented on the poor relief reform in 1853–1856. The 27 letters are signed by 21 different signatories, while four letters are unsigned. The geographical distribution of the letters includes 23 different locations of Finland (see Fig. 5.2). The inland areas are emphasized because these were the areas where the Finnish-language population mainly lived.

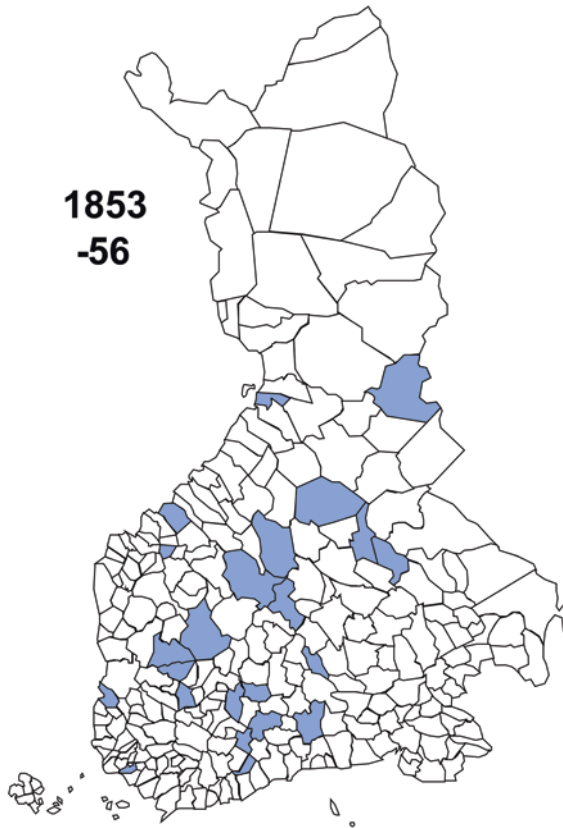
Even though censorship prevented general criticism toward the poor relief reform, a collection of letters commented on the reform from a local point of view. The discussion started in 1853, when Georg Zacharias Forsman, who at that time was a 25-year-old teacher, wrote two local letters from the parish of Hämeenkyrö, where he was visiting. In the first letter, he wondered about the general conservatism of the common people, who had not yet understood the advantage of the new Act.<sup>48</sup> Three months later, he reported that the Poor Relief Board of Hämeenkyrö had done what it could with its limited funds. According to Forsman, the poor relief reform showed that everyone was in need of receiving aid, but no one was in need of giving aid.<sup>49</sup> At the end of the year, an anonymous writer from Ikaalinen, a parish neighboring Hämeenkyrö, wrote how the

<sup>46</sup>Y. K. [Forsman, Georg Zacharias], Hämeenkyröstä. *Suometar*, 6 July 1855 no 27.

<sup>47</sup>Kokko, Suomenkielisen lehdistön nousu 1850-luvulla ja sen yhteiskunnallinen merkitys, 19–21. On Finnish modernization, see Haapala, *Modernisation of Finland 1800–2000*.

<sup>48</sup>Y. K. [Forsman, Georg Zacharias], Hämeenkyröstä. *Suometar*, 15 April 1853 no 15. Georg Zacharias Forsman was the son of Georg Jakob Forsman, the parson of Hämeenkyrö.

<sup>49</sup>Y. K. [Forsman, Georg Zacharias], *Suometar*, 30 July 1853 no 30.



**Fig. 5.2** The circulation of local letters that mention poor relief in 1853–1856

new poor relief had been put into effect in this parish.<sup>50</sup> In the next year, a writer from another neighboring parish and two more writers from Ikaalinen joined the discussion.<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, these first letters all came from the same region of western Finland, indicating a kind of competition between neighboring parishes. The writers constructed their local

<sup>50</sup> Suomalainen Ikaalisista, Ikaalisista. *Suometar*, 23 December 1853 no 51.

<sup>51</sup> M. H-l-n., Kurusta. *Suometar*, 3 March 1854 no 10; S:n J,a., Ikaalisista *Suometar*, 28 April no 17.

identities by presenting how progressive and pioneering the people in their parish were.

The Act of 1852 gave the parishes great liberty to pass their own poor relief regulations. Therefore, many local letters included a detailed description of local practices. In the parish of Alavus, the old system that was based on beggary continued regarding the poor who were able to work. They were licensed to wander from household to household. They were aided with food, and the amount of aid was up to the aid givers.<sup>52</sup> In the parish of Hämeenkyrö, the landlords had to pay an old-age pension to the crofters and tenants, and their wives, who had farmed on the landowner's soil all their life.<sup>53</sup> In Viitasaari, the poor relief regulations ordained two silver roubles to be paid from the poor relief fund to a person who would teach another to read. This cost was then charged to the guardian of the person who had learnt to read.<sup>54</sup> A writer from Padasjoki wrote how the property of a new poor relief recipient was auctioned off as a precondition for receiving aid.<sup>55</sup>

According to ten of the 27 letters, the new Poor Relief Act worked well in its main intention of preventing beggary. Already in 1853, two writers from Ikaalinen wrote that beggary had almost vanished,<sup>56</sup> and even though there were a lot of poor people, they were not wandering around as they were cared for by the parish.<sup>57</sup> Similar experiences were reported by many other writers around the country.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, there were several letters in which the writer expressed deep contentment with the new poor relief. A commentator from Ikaalinen wrote how delightful it was to see poor children being brought up decently and crippled elderly people receiving shelter.<sup>59</sup> A writer from Kiuruvesi bragged how the poor relief in the parish was the best in the province. According to the writer, its blessed fruits would be revealed as time passed.<sup>60</sup> A writer from Tuusula wrote that

<sup>52</sup> K. -k., Alavuudesta. *Suometar*, 7 November 1856 no 45.

<sup>53</sup> Y. K. [Forsman, Georg Zacharias], Hämeenkyröstä. *Suometar*, 6 July 1855 no 27.

<sup>54</sup> K. S., Viitasaaresta. *Suometar*, 16 November 1855 no 46.

<sup>55</sup> Padasjoelta. *Suometar*, 14 December 1855 no 50.

<sup>56</sup> Suomalainen Ikaalisista, Ikaalisista. *Suometar*, 23 December 1853 no 51.

<sup>57</sup> S,n J,a., Ikaalisista. *Suometar*, 28 April 1854 no 17.

<sup>58</sup> Ylihärmästä. *Suometar*, 13 April 1855 no 15; Tuulokselainen, Tuuloksesta. *Suometar*, 25 January 1856 no 4; E. B. [Bisi, Erik], Kiannolta. *Oulun Wiikko-Sanomia*, 13 March 1856 no 29; J. F. G-n., Oulunsalosta. *Oulun Wiikko-Sanomia*, 5 January 1856 no 1.

<sup>59</sup> S,n J,a., Ikaalisista. *Suometar*, 28 April 1854 no 17.

<sup>60</sup> S. P. Kiuruvedeltä. *Suometar*, 25 August 1854 no 34.

everyone in this parish had made their contentment known and expressed no objections.<sup>61</sup>

However, not all letters were positive. There were also descriptions of the contradictions that arose due to the reform. A letter from Kuru told how the landless people in the parish were unhappy because they had to pay extra fees that should have been the responsibility of the freeholder peasants. According to the writer, this was due to the fact that the reform was still in the making.<sup>62</sup> There were several letters concerning general discontent about the high fees of the new poor relief.<sup>63</sup> A writer from Nilsiiä stated how the inhabitants who grumbled about high fees to the poor relief fund did not understand that payment to the community replaced the earlier practice of feeding the needy people in their households.<sup>64</sup> In Laukaa, there was strong resistance when the amount of the poor relief fee was revealed in the parish meeting. According to the writer, the people who made a big fuss about the payments thought that “the Act of the authorities is a lie of the gentry.” According to the writer, the governor had to ordain the poor relief fees of Laukaa, because the parish meeting could not agree on the decision.<sup>65</sup>

Because the implementation of the reform happened simultaneously with the rise of Finnish-language publicity and its culture of local letters, the significance of the discussion about poor relief in 1853–1856 local letters is clear. It made the reciprocal circulation of knowledge about the practical implementation of the reform possible. A larger part of the population than ever before could follow this debate as it received nationwide publicity. The public discussion had the potential for social change, because many readers and writers of the Finnish-language press were people involved in the implementation of the reform in their own local community. Furthermore, via this circulation of knowledge, the standardization of the poor relief institution went further at the societal level. The variety of different practices diminished when knowledge about the most efficient measures spread.

The extent of the societal circulation of knowledge can be estimated statistically. In 1856, about 0.8 percent of the Finnish population over the

<sup>61</sup> P—r., Tuusulasta. *Suometar*, 2 February 1855 no 5.

<sup>62</sup> M. H-ll-n. Kurusta. *Suometar*, 10 March 1854 no 10.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, S,n J,a., Ikaalisista *Suometar*, 28 April 1854 no 17.

<sup>64</sup> S., Nilsiiästä. *Suometar*, 16 June 1854 no 24.

<sup>65</sup> Laukaasta. *Suometar*, 14 December 1855 no 50.

age of 15 subscribed to newspapers. Readership was, however, a wider phenomenon: There were multiple readers and listeners for each newspaper subscription. It is commonly estimated in the history of the press that each newspaper issue was read by approximately ten people. This means that in 1856, the Finnish-language press reached about 8 percent of the Finnish population over 15 years old. This does not include the listeners; it was usual to read the newspaper aloud, and, of course, there were many people who received second-hand information about what was published in the press.<sup>66</sup> At first glance, these figures seem rather low, but the comparison to the only nationwide mass organizations of the 1890s puts this in context. The total number of members of *Kansanvalistusseura* (the Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation) and temperance societies reached only 0.6 percent of the whole population in 1892 during the golden age of mass organization.<sup>67</sup> Although these numbers are not fully comparable, it indicates that in 1856, the Finnish-language press already had a remarkable role in the circulation of societal knowledge, at least compared to the earlier times when this kind of information channel was non-existent.<sup>68</sup>

Although the purpose of the 1852 poor relief legislation was to prevent the uncontrolled mobility of the people by emphasizing the role of local communities, the simultaneous rise of the Finnish-language press and its culture of local letters pushed the development in another direction. It created a new kind of public and translocal space in which the poor relief reform was debated and negotiated.<sup>69</sup> In this new sphere, poor relief could become the first nationwide and societal institution that had the potential to reach most of the population in Finland. In this public sphere, the local citizenship defined by the poor relief reform could now extend beyond the boundaries of local communities via the circulation of knowledge and become a “translocal” citizenship. Lived citizenship was still based on membership of the local community, but it was now negotiated in the budding nationwide civil society, which became a noteworthy factor for the first time in the Grand Duchy of Finland.

<sup>66</sup> Circulation data: Tommila, *Suomen lehdistön levikki ennen vuotta 1860*, 328–35; Population data: SVT VI 1865, 12, 25, XI.

<sup>67</sup> Alapuro and Stenius, *Kansanliikkeet loivat kansakunnan*, 50; population data SVT VI:37, 1.

<sup>68</sup> See Kokko, *Suomenkielisen lehdistön nousun yhteiskunnallinen merkitys*, 7–9.

<sup>69</sup> Kokko, *From Local to Translocal Experience*, 193–4.



## TOWARD THE SOCIETAL AND UNIVERSAL LEVEL

The local letters published in the Finnish-language press concerning the poor relief reform increased significantly from 1857 onward. In 1857–1860, there were 90 local letters that mention poor relief in the Finnish-language newspapers. This is more than three times more than the previous four-year period (see Fig. 5.3).

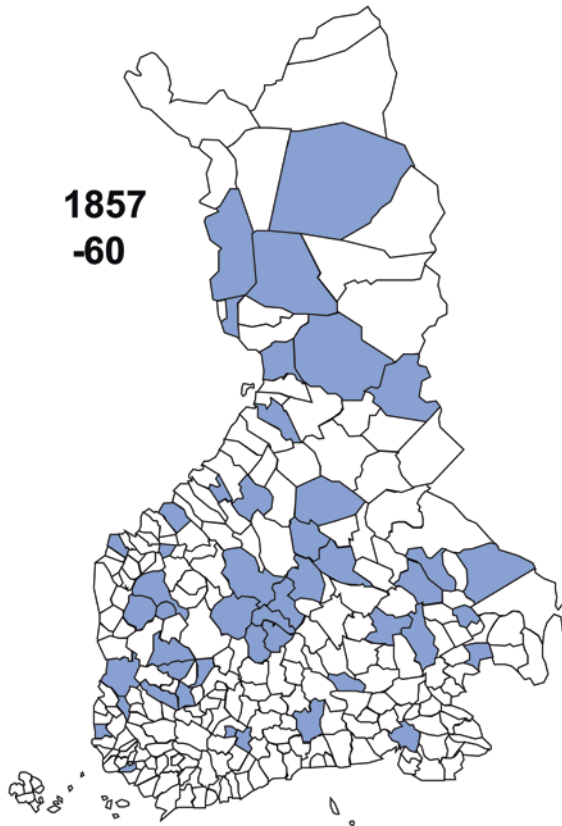
The social atmosphere in Finland changed significantly in 1856 and 1857. The Crimean war (1853–1856) ended with the defeat of Russia, and Emperor Alexander II initiated liberal reforms in Finnish society. As the censorship of the press loosened, newspapers began to publish articles in which the educated elite both praised and criticized the poor relief reform of 1852. The debate, which started in Swedish, spread rapidly to the pages of Finnish-language newspapers.<sup>70</sup> It was especially fueled by the first crop failure since the new poor legislation, in 1857. The hard times meant that a great number of beggars from northern Finland once again wandered south.<sup>71</sup>

Public attitudes toward the poor relief reform changed rapidly in this new atmosphere. Georg Zacharias Forsman, who as recently as in 1855 described the new poor relief in Hämeenkyrö as successful with no vagrant beggars in the parish,<sup>72</sup> published a long article in 1857 titled “Poverty and Poor Relief” in which he argued that poor relief in Finland should be restored to its pre-1852 mode, when its basis was private mercifulness. Forsman argued that official and legal poor relief resulted “in the miserable fruits” of “poverty, shortage, and pauperism” both in Finland and elsewhere in the world. Forsman justified his argument with economics, which for him proved that official poor relief suppressed the poor people’s willingness to plan for the future. Furthermore, for him legalized poor relief was against the principles of Christianity. According to Forsman, Christianity gives no right to the poor people to demand aid, but it tells the wealthy people to give aid, not as the right of the needy people, but for Christ. The aid given by the wealthy people could be seen as aid given to Christ. Ultimately, Forsman leaned in his argument on the right of

<sup>70</sup>X, Några ord om fattigvården. *Borgå Tidning*, 6 December 1856 no 49. *Borgå Tidning*, 13 December 1856 no 50; M. J., Vaivais-hoidosta. *Suomen Julkisia sanomia*, 19 January 1857 no 5.

<sup>71</sup>See Newby, “Acting in Their Appropriate and Wanted Sphere,” 110–11.

<sup>72</sup>Y. K. [Forsman, Georg Zacharias], Hämeenkyröstä. *Suometar*, 6 July 1855 no 27.



**Fig. 5.3** The circulation of local letters that mention poor relief in 1857–1860

ownership. According to him, receipt of poor relief is no one's right so long as there is the right to possess property.<sup>73</sup>

Soon J. W. Murman, the assistant editor of the government's new official newspaper, replied to Forsman with an article titled "Is there reason to abandon the poor relief or improve it?" For Murman, Forsman

<sup>73</sup>Forsman, Georg Zacharias, Vaivaisuus ja vaivaisholho. *Suometar*, 13 March 1857 no 11. *Suometar*, 20 March 1857 no 12. *Suometar*, 27 March 1857 no 13. *Suometar*, 3 April 1857 no. 14.

represented the voice of the wealthy. According to him, legalized poor relief produced poverty only by making visible groups of poor people who had earlier stayed hidden. In Murman's view, the further poor relief was improved, the less poor people were exhausted to deprivation. Murman's argumentation in the poor relief question resembled a Marxist approach. According to him, "the power of wealth is always against the poor people's human dignity," and "the self-interest of the wealthy people has twisted the most advantageous inventions of mankind not for the common profit, but for the profit of individual human beings." Murman referred to factory workers in industrialized countries but also to agrarian workers in Finland. According to him, they were under the power of the wealthy. As the legislation threatened vagrants with workhouses and prisons, indigent people had to bind themselves to the service of a wealthy person for a whole year. For Murman, the poor relief reform protected poor people from the arbitrariness of the wealthy, who according to him had robbed the poor people's participation "in any other human rights except death."<sup>74</sup>

The radical opinions of both Forsman and especially Murman were something that had never been seen before in the Finnish-language press. Indeed, it was a very early socio-political debate in the Finnish-language press, because generally this kind of public discussion did not begin in Finland until the 1870s.<sup>75</sup> The debate is also interesting, because the writings of Forsman are not included in his collected works that have been put together in the twentieth century, when he was promoted as one of the great men of Finnish nationalism.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, Murman is not a well-known figure of mid-nineteenth-century Finnish history.<sup>77</sup> Thus, this early socio-political debate has remained mainly unknown in Finnish historiography.

However, the debate between Forsman and Murman had the potential to be influential on the societal level in the 1850s not only because it was published in the pages of the two largest Finnish-language newspapers but also because of the social positions of the discussants. Forsman was already a prominent figure in the Finnish-language press and Murman edited the

<sup>74</sup> J. W. M. [Murman, Johan Vilhelm], Onko syytä vaivaishoidon hylkäämiseen vain parantamiseen? *Suomen Julkisia Sanomia*, 26 March 1857 no 24.

<sup>75</sup> See Jaakkola, Sosiaalisen kysymyksen yhteiskunta, 91–2.

<sup>76</sup> See Yrjö-Koskinen, *Kansallisia ja yhteiskunnallisia kirjoituksia*.

<sup>77</sup> See Kokko, *Kuviteltu minuu*s, 172–88.

official newspaper *Suomen Julkisia Sanomia*. In this position, his published article represented the official voice of the authorities. However, Murman seemed to realize that his writing was too radical, because in the same issue of the newspaper, he published a poem in which he wrote that he would move his pencil to a place where it had more freedom.<sup>78</sup> This was Murman's last contribution to the newspaper, and he resigned immediately after publishing the article.<sup>79</sup> Next, it seems that censorship stepped in, as the public discussion was terminated until 1860.<sup>80</sup> Only the governmental newspaper published a moderate editorial, in which it defended the Act of 1852 but in additionally condemned the laziness of the poor people and their tendency to take advantage of the poor relief system.<sup>81</sup>

However, from the point of view of the authorities, the damage was already done. Even though the debate was presumably silenced, the discussion about the poor relief that challenged the legitimacy of the authorities spread to local letters in 1857. In most letters published in 1857–1860 (63 percent), the writers had a neutral or positive attitude toward poor relief. However, there is a clear difference in the letters of this period in comparison to 1853–1856. An interesting proportion of the letters was now more critical. A total of 37 percent discussed the poor relief with a critical tone. What is significant, most of the critical letters (71 percent) were directed toward the Poor Relief Act of 1852 itself. The remainder (29 percent) were usually critical toward the implementation of the reform in the local community.<sup>82</sup>

The first critical local letters were written by members of the Finnish-language elite. In May of 1857, the assistant editor of the newspaper *Suometar*, Oskar Blomstedt, wrote that people in the parish of Ilmajoki had begun to doubt the benefit and expedience of the legalized poor relief due to the constantly increasing number of beggars even when there was a local surplus of grain. According to Blomstedt, earlier the poor trusted in God, the work of their own hands, and the mercifulness of wealthier people. If they noticed in the autumn that their annual income was low, they started to produce something and tried to sell the product to those wealthier. After the legalized poor relief, poor people remained lazy and

<sup>78</sup> Murman J. W., Kynän muutos. *Suomen Julkisia Sanomia*, 26 March 1857 no 24.

<sup>79</sup> Vastaus. *Suomen Julkisia Sanomia*, 30 March 1857 no 25.

<sup>80</sup> Forsman did not reply until May 1860: Forsman, Georg Zacharias, La'illisesta vaivais-holhosta. *Mehiläinen*, 1 May 1860 no 5.

<sup>81</sup> Vaivaisholhaus. *Suomen Julkisia Sanomia*, 23 April 1857 no 32.

<sup>82</sup> Translocalis Database.

turned to poor relief in order to get help.<sup>83</sup> In June 1857, a well-known representative of the nationalist elite, doctor Wolmar Schildt, complained how poor people were rolling into the town of Jyväskylä. Schildt was afraid that the number of poor people would increase, and the town would be in trouble. According to Schildt, this happened everywhere where poor relief fed lazy people.<sup>84</sup> The next year, the pastor of Liperi, Anders Josef Europaeus, demanded that the legalized poor relief be stopped and no new fees set; voluntary ecclesiastical poor relief had to be established alongside legal poor relief.<sup>85</sup> In 1860, Aron Gustaf Borg, a dean from Kuopio, proposed that a deaconess' institution should be established as a solution to the problems caused by the official poor relief.<sup>86</sup>

The critical opinions of the elite spread to local letters written by the ordinary people. In February 1857, H. Tikkanen and Juhana Väisänen wrote from Kiuruvesi that the hungry poor wretches who wandered in large flocks had stolen food. According to the writers, this movement of the crowds could not be prevented by any kind of legislation.<sup>87</sup> J.J. from Kauhajoki wrote that it would be better to change the poor relief to its former model, because now in addition to paying the fees, people still had to feed the beggars.<sup>88</sup> According to N.J., a writer from Kiukainen, there were hardly any poor people at all prior to the Poor Relief Act. The writer described how the Act had produced poor people.<sup>89</sup> A writer from Ilomantsi claimed the “regulations of the Gracious Poor Relief Act are something that only one in a thousand can understand.”<sup>90</sup> Another writer from Kiuruvesi stated how the members of the poor relief board were accused of abusing the fund. According to the writer, people who blamed the board members did not understand that the fault was with the Poor Relief Act itself.<sup>91</sup> In 1859, S. Hrn from Tohmajärvi wrote that the Act of 1852 had caused beggary and pushed all people into poverty. According to this writer, people complained in the press to catch the attention of the

<sup>83</sup> O. B. [Oskar Blomstedt] Vaivaisholhosta Ilmajoella m. m. *Suometar*, 1 May 1857 no 17.

<sup>84</sup> W. K. [Schildt, Wolmar], Jyväskylän kaupunnista. *Suometar*, 26 June 1857 no 25.

<sup>85</sup> Eur-s. [Europaeus, A. J.] *Suometar*, 5 February 1858 no 5.

<sup>86</sup> A. G. B. [Aron Gusfuf Borg] *Kuopion Hippakunnan Sanomia*, 3 March 1860 no 12. On the Deaconess movement in Finland, see Markkola, *Promoting Faith and Welfare*.

<sup>87</sup> Tikkanen H., and Väisänen Juhani, Kiuruvedeltä. *Suometar*, 2 February 1857 no 9.

<sup>88</sup> J. J., Kauhajoelta. *Suomen Julkisia Sanomia*, 12 March 1857 no 20.

<sup>89</sup> N. J., Kiukaisten kappelista Tammikuussa. *Suometar*, 12 February 1858 no 6.

<sup>90</sup> Wilunen, Ilomatsista. *Suometar*, 8 October 1858 no 40.

<sup>91</sup> Kiuruvedeltä. *Suometar*, 15 October 1858 no 41.

authorities.<sup>92</sup> In the same year, a writer from central Finland stated that the Poor Relief Act should be obeyed only when it is necessary and according to the spirit—not the letter—of the law.<sup>93</sup>

Significantly, in the societal context of nineteenth-century Finland, the critique toward the Poor Relief Act was not only about the evaluation of a single law. In an authoritarian country, a public critique of the legislation implied a public critique of the state and its authorities. The Acts in nineteenth-century Finland were declared in the name of the two strongest authorities that could be imagined: God and the Emperor. The Poor Relief Act of 1852, like every other Act and law, began with the words “We Nicholas the first, from the grace of God, the emperor and despot over Russia, The Grand Duke of Finland.”<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, the Lutheran state religion had taught everyone in obligatory confirmation classes that the power of the authorities was God-given and thus holy. God had placed the sword in the hands of the authorities. This had been imprinted in the mind of every adult by the Lutheran Catechisms, a core part of which was written originally by Martin Luther himself and which everyone had to know to be treated as an adult person before the law and the community.<sup>95</sup> As the power of the authorities was understood as divine, public critique toward the Poor Relief Act challenged an order that was widely conceived to be God-given.

Besides challenging the authorities, it is significant that the press debate between Forsman and Murman connected the poor relief reform of 1852 to the discussion of the universal rights and responsibilities that had been going on in the Western world since the French Revolution. In this way, the debate linked the poor relief reform more directly than ever before to the relationship between the individual and society. Social citizenship, which was originally based on locality, was now defined at the societal level via values that were understood as universal. The poor legislation of the authoritarian state, whose purpose was to prevent beggary and social unrest, had been transformed in civil society into a vehicle that challenged the top-down relationship between the individual and society.

In 1857–1860, public discussion about the poor relief had become an arena in which individuals around the country defined their relationship to

<sup>92</sup> S. Hrn, Tohmajärveltä. *Suometar*, 1 April 1859 no 13.

<sup>93</sup> -t -n, Vaivaishoidosta. *Suometar*, 29 July 1859 no 29.

<sup>94</sup> VHA 1852.

<sup>95</sup> Laine and Laine, *Kirkollinen kansanopetus*, 259, 272–4.

the state and its authorities. This meant that the poor relief had become the first institution that mediated the broad-based social criticism that had grown in the nationwide and population-wide civil society. In this institution, modern social citizenship also began to take shape.

### EARLY CITIZENSHIP OF MODERN SOCIETY

The early contemporary upper-class interpretation of the poor relief reform of 1852 was that it made poverty and poor relief legal. However, from the perspective of lived citizenship, it seems that it rather legalized poor people. My analysis shows that the implementation of the legislation quite accidentally made underprivileged people legal subjects by giving them a new status in society. The unintended outcome resulted because, first, the other side of the reform, the Act on Forced Labor and Vagrancy, was impossible to put into effect. Due to this, the new rights and responsibilities ordained by the Poor Relief Act instead of the patriarchal order of the Act on Forced Labor and Vagrancy became emphasized in local daily practices. Second, it occurred because the first rise of Finnish nationwide civil society in the Finnish-language public sphere allowed a new kind of participation in defining the relation between the individual and society as lived citizenship.

The poor relief legislation of 1852 and the development of the poor relief institution in the 1850s created an early social citizenship in Finland that was societal and nationwide in its character. The Poor Relief Act of 1852 began to construct modern citizenship in Finland in four different ways. First, it gave poor people an official position by admitting that poverty was a social problem in Finland. Second, it created social rights and responsibilities by securing a basic livelihood for poor people against the poor relief fees and work. Third, it gave the basic civic right to appeal to the higher levels of the administration about the decisions of the local poor relief board. Fourth, it offered freeholder peasants, tenants, and craftsmen a new right to participate in the administration of society. These changes in legislation bypassed the centuries-old system of the estates, in which the state administration independent of church was in the hands of the educated civil servants and where the underprivileged people of society had no proper legal status.

The citizenship that the poor legislation constructed could be described as local citizenship, because despite the new rights and responsibilities granted by the Poor Relief Act, the Act on Forced Labor and Vagrancy

heavily restricted the individual freedom of mobility by binding the landless people strictly to their local community. Initially, the citizenship that the poor relief reform constructed was local, but the rise of the Finnish-language press and its culture of local letters extended the experiential basis of this citizenship from local to “translocal” and toward societal in 1853–1856. Via the critique toward the Poor Relief Act from 1857, the poor relief became the first institution that was disengaged in public debate from the order that was understood as God-given, and it was viewed as a human-made social structure. Local citizenship was transformed into societal citizenship via the public debate that connected the poor relief reform to the transnational discussion of the universal rights and responsibilities of the citizen. This early lived social citizenship emerged during the 1850s in the interaction between legislation, budding civil society, local experiences, and the transnational circulation of knowledge.

The early social citizenship based on the poor relief reform of 1852 impacted the development of Finnish society for almost 30 years until it was replaced with the new Poor Relief Act (1879). As a lived institution, the poor relief reform of 1852 was present when the large social reforms—the municipal reform (1865), the primary school reform (1866), and the separation of the church and the state (1863)—changed everyday life and the Great Hunger years (1866–1868) killed 10 percent of the population. Thus, the individual-society relationship that was constructed in the practices and debates of the poor relief formed the basis for the later social citizenship and civil society in Finland. Both the early citizenship and the early civil society of the mid-nineteenth century had not been visible for research until the recent digitalization of the historical press material.

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# Encountering Benefits for Families: Layers of Lived Social Citizenship in Finland in the 1930s and 1940s

*Minna Harjula*

## INTRODUCTION

Benefits for families with children were among the first reforms which broadened social legislation beyond the stigmatized poor relief in Finland in the late 1930s and 1940s.<sup>1</sup> Concepts such as social security and the welfare state were not yet established,<sup>2</sup> but these early benefits can be seen as a part of the institutionalization of the idea of social rights. The local practices and encounters between families and local authorities in applying

<sup>1</sup> Niemelä and Salminen, *Social Security*, 9–24.

<sup>2</sup> Kettunen, *Conceptual History of the Welfare State*.

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for and receiving the benefits open a view to how the emerging institution of social benefits was lived.<sup>3</sup>

My focus in this chapter is on three early benefits: the maternity benefit for pregnant women (1938), the family benefit for large low-income families (1943), and the child benefit for all children (1948). The maternity benefit and child benefit—both of which still exist—have been seen as symbols of the universalistic Finnish welfare state. The family benefit, which was abandoned in 1974, has been mostly ignored in both research and public discussion.<sup>4</sup> Instead of looking at these benefits from the perspective of the established welfare state, my starting point is to analyze the everyday experience in the 1940s, when practical solutions were taking shape and the future development of social rights was unknown.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of *lived social citizenship* structures my approach. My basic assumption is that the societal framework for social security represents a particular individual-society relationship, which becomes concrete in daily life as lived social citizenship. Besides formal citizenship as a status that defines the legal rights and responsibilities of the citizen and the state, the lived social citizenship includes informal citizenship as belonging and participation. Additionally, a focus not only on the substance of citizen rights but on the procedures, practices, and acts of citizenship as well brings everyday life into the analysis.<sup>6</sup> Thus, lived social citizenship opens a perspective to analyze how the experiences of the individual-society relationship took shape as the institution of social benefits and how the emerging welfare state was shaped by these early experiences. The institution in focus is not only the concrete organization that implemented the benefits for families. More broadly, the focal point is how the idea of social rights was *institutionalized* via the new benefits.

<sup>3</sup> Kumlin and Rothstein, *Making and Breaking*, 347. Satka, *Making Social Citizenship*. On local approach: Peterson, *Maternity Policy*, 10; Gunn et al., *Cities, Infrastructure and the Making of Modern Citizenship*.

<sup>4</sup> *How Social Security has Built Finland*; Kangas, *Politiikka ja sosiaaliturva Suomessa*; Vahtikari, *Finns Start Life Safe*; Peräläinen, *Yhteiskunnan tuki*.

<sup>5</sup> Kettunen, *The Nordic Welfare State in Finland*, 226–7.

<sup>6</sup> Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*; Helén and Jauho, *Terveyskansalaisuus*; Ryymin, *Health Citizenship*; Kallio, Wood, and Häkli, *Lived Citizenship*; Isin and Nielsen, *Acts of Citizenship*; Lister et al., *Gendering Citizenship*; Harjula, *Health Citizenship*.

I will combine the analysis of Finnish newspapers and journals<sup>7</sup> with official material—legislation, statistics, and guidebooks—to give a structural framework for my analysis. Instead of focusing on individual experiences, I will approach the encounters between families and local authorities as *scenes of experience* that as situational frames set limits for the possible experience. As an analytic tool for the social history of experiences, the *scene of experience* was introduced and elaborated on in my collaboration with Heikki Kokko. In the scene of experience, Reinhardt Koselleck's temporal conceptualizations, *space of experience* and *horizon of expectation*, are developed further in the framework of Peter Berger's and Thomas Luckmann's social construction of reality. Analytically, the scene of experience is the interface that links the space of experience and the horizon of expectation. While the Koselleckian concepts refer to the variety of possible experiences and future horizons available in the present, the *scene* turns the focus to the concrete situational occasions where the active "framing" of social reality takes place as the tension between experiences and expectations.<sup>8</sup>

The thorough sociality of experiences is captured in the scene of experience as situational moments in which the socially shared experiences emerge in social interaction. The scene of experience is a combination of the socio-physical environment and the social preconditions—such as social class, education, and gender—that structure the social interaction and agency in these situations. In the scene, the societal *layers of experience* that the people and the socio-physical environment carry in the encounter are present in the framing of the individual-society relationship. This means that in the encounter between the families and the local authorities, the scene of experience brings forth the societal context and the social policy rationale of the early social benefits as a part of the analysis of lived social citizenship.<sup>9</sup>

By comparing the criteria of deservingness, organizational settings, and conceptual and procedural practices in the social interaction between the families and the authorities, as well as the temporalities carried by the

<sup>7</sup>The digitized collection is not exhaustive since 1940 but includes the main newspapers and journals of public welfare and administration, see *Digital Collections. National Library of Finland*. Besides, non-digitized volumes of *Meidän Perhe (MP)* and *Sosiaalinen Aikakauskirja (SA)* were accessed.

<sup>8</sup>On the theoretical-methodological framework, see Kokko and Harjula, *Social History of Experiences*; Kokko and Harjula, *The Scene of Experience*.

<sup>9</sup>Kokko and Harjula, *Social History of Experiences*.

benefits as a part of the *scene of experience*, this chapter nuances the macro-level interpretations of the welfare state and indicates the multi-layered historicity of the lived welfare state.<sup>10</sup> Generally, social benefits have been interpreted as a breakaway from the earlier poor relief tradition toward the welfare state. I will argue that the early social benefits were characterized by many institutional and ideological continuities from poor relief. As a mixture of “old” and “new,” the early benefits carried and framed parallel and contradictory lived social citizenship. I will conclude by presenting how these competing citizenships as historical layers of experience had a presence in the later structures and practices of the Finnish welfare state.

### MATERNITY BENEFIT FOR LOW-INCOME MOTHERS: EARLY POST-POOR RELIEF CITIZENSHIP, 1938–1948

[F]or the first time, our legislation contains the idea that a woman becoming a mother is not just a matter of a private person but an issue for society as a whole.<sup>11</sup>

Rakel Jalas, a physician and psychiatrist, whose administrative tasks at the Ministry of Social Affairs broadened from poor relief to the new family benefits, saw the recently enacted Maternity Benefit Act as groundbreaking in 1937. According to her, the new benefit for pregnant women who had limited means started to construct a new kind of individual-society relationship based on motherhood.

The receipt of maternity benefit became a common experience among the women with newborns. The percentage of newborns benefitting from the new allowance varied between 64 and 75 percent until 1945 and reached 85 percent by 1948.<sup>12</sup> The maternity benefit introduced two groundbreaking features: the idea of mothers being entitled to the benefit and the fixed amount of the benefit. First, in contrast to the assessment of individual needs in poor relief or personally paid contributions in early social insurance, the eligibility for maternity benefit was basically built on clear criteria: Finnish citizenship and residence, pregnancy, and income

<sup>10</sup> Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 267–88; Koselleck, *Sediments of Time*; Kettunen and Petersen, Introduction.

<sup>11</sup> Rakel Jalas, Äitiysavustuslaista ja sen huoltolautakunnille aiheuttamista toimenpiteistä. *Suomen Kunnallislehti* 9/1937, 145.

<sup>12</sup> M. J-o, Äitiysavustukset v. 1950. *Huoltaja* 7/1952, 174.



judged by taxation. Significantly, the legislation did not differentiate between married and unmarried women. Because of the decreasing birth rate, the population-political aim rose above any moral judgment of the marital status of the mother, especially during the war.<sup>13</sup> Second, the amount of the benefit was similar for all and not based on case-by-case discretion, as was the case with the Finnish poor relief.<sup>14</sup> Besides these features, which have been seen as characteristic of modern social allowances, the maternity benefit contained contradictory elements that produced complex lived social citizenship.

The practical application of the eligibility criteria indicates just how ambiguous were the new ideas of the citizen's entitlements. As the Maternity Benefit Act introduced the "woman of limited means" as a new target group, it expanded the supported groups beyond poor relief that was limited only to those without means. At the same time, the Act explicitly excluded from the benefit those women whose children were born during a period when they were placed under the "permanent, i.e. continuous full care of poor relief" or confined to a workhouse or prison. The main argument was that those women and their newborns were taken care of by the poor relief or prison.<sup>15</sup> However, the exclusion indicates that criminals and permanent poor relief recipients were perceived as a special, bottommost category, and their motherhood did not warrant a special social benefit from the state.

The maternity benefit also excluded women of wealth. The criteria of taxes in defining the economy of the applicant meant that only one-third of urban mothers qualified, while among the rural population the average figure was over 70 percent in the late 1930s.<sup>16</sup> After the taxation criteria were abandoned in 1945, women "who, considering [their] wealth and other possibilities for livelihood, [are] not considered to need the benefit" were excluded.<sup>17</sup> In the judgment of individual cases, the Ministry of Social Affairs advised denying the benefit when "considering the economic status of the applicant, it would very likely give general offense among the

<sup>13</sup> AsK 322/1937; Äitiysavustuslaki nyt voimassa. *Kansan Lehti*, 4 January 1938 no 2, 3; *Huoltolautakunnan lakikirja*, 492–3. See also Peterson, *Maternity Policy*, 7–8.

<sup>14</sup> Böök, *Suomen huolto-oikeus*, 289–90. Unlike in Sweden, for example, the Finnish poor relief did not have fixed norms for giving aid. Yrjö Harvia, *Yleiset leski- ja orpoavustukset. Sosiaalinen Aikakauskirja (SA) 1/1931*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> AsK 322/1937 § 1, § 9: *Huoltolautakunnan lakikirja*, 481, 489.

<sup>16</sup> Äitiysavustukset v. 1938. *SA 10/1939*, 551–2.

<sup>17</sup> Böök, *Suomen huolto-oikeus*, 287–9.

locals.”<sup>18</sup> This indicates how strange and unacceptable the idea of a universal, non-income-related social right based on motherhood was in the mid-1940s Finland.

An internationally exceptional feature was that the delivery of Finnish maternity benefit was closely connected to poor relief. For example, the neighboring country of Sweden—generally seen as a model for the social development of Finland—had chosen a different policy by keeping the new benefits separate from the poor relief institution.<sup>19</sup> As there was no national health insurance in Finland, and the coverage of factory worker’s relief funds was low in the still agrarian country, the Finnish maternity benefit was not related to social insurance.<sup>20</sup> Instead, the implementation was connected to the concept of *huolto* (welfare), which had widened the sphere of poor relief to cover areas such as child protection and the control of alcoholics and vagrants since the 1930s. *Huolto* was literally attached to care, support, maintenance, and supply. The concept of *huoltotyö* (welfare work) was used to describe the practice of the institution that was called *huoltotoimi* (public welfare). The institution was locally led by the organ that was previously called the poor relief board but renamed as *huoltolautakunta* (public welfare board). In fewer than ten larger towns, a special child protection board had the responsibility for all welfare work that was connected to children.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the new vocabulary, the stigma of poor relief still dominated the field. For most people, poor relief was the only social security system available in the late 1930s. Compared to modern social benefits, poor relief that investigated the needs and the deservingness of every applicant case by case was not a social right enriching the status of the citizen. Long-term receipt of poor relief was grounds for exclusion from universal suffrage in national and local elections. It even restricted civil rights, as all long-term poor relief recipients were under the guardianship of the local board of public welfare and the board got the ownership of their

<sup>18</sup> Aune Mäkinen-Ollinen, Varattomuus-, vähävaraisuus- ja verorajamääräyksistä huolto- ja avustuslainsäädännössä. *Huoltaja* 1–2/1947, 18–19.

<sup>19</sup> Niilo A. Mannio, Äitiysavustus. *SA* 11/1937, 601.

<sup>20</sup> Niilo A. Mannio, Äitiysavustus. *Huoltaja* 5/1937, 113–14; Niilo A. Mannio, Äitiysavustus. *SA* 11/1937, 592–4; Lehtimäki, Äitiysavustus; Lister et al., *Gendering Citizenship*, 36–7.

<sup>21</sup> Satka, *Making Social Citizenship*, 62–3, 89; P. Mla, Huomioita huoltolakien täytäntöönpanosta. *Huoltaja* 21/1938, 399; Alpo Asteljoki, Sosiaalihuollon järjestelykysymyksiä. *Huoltaja* 21/1948, 332.

belongings. Basically, poor relief was not a benefit but a loan that the recipients or their relatives were obliged to pay back. Similarly, the institution of child protection in towns carried negative connotations that were linked to coercive measures, such as children's care orders and the control of delinquent children.<sup>22</sup> Significantly, the negative legacy of these local institutions was present when they framed the lived social citizenship of maternity benefit recipients.

The priority of an in-kind maternity benefit was another Finnish specialty, as other European countries usually granted social support for families in cash.<sup>23</sup> In Finland, the non-cash aid closely resembled the poor relief that favored grain, flour, clothes, and medication instead of money.<sup>24</sup> Because of the poor living conditions, the maternity package containing baby clothes and products became the norm of the maternity benefit in Finland.<sup>25</sup> Actually, the idea of a maternity package had a direct link to poor relief: the early local initiatives called "circulating baskets" that were given to families with a newborn as a form of poor relief were seen as an inspiration for the national maternity benefit.<sup>26</sup>

During the early years, the recommendation was that at most two-thirds of the maternity benefit was given as products and one-third as cash to every mother. Individual and local exceptions were allowed especially because the war caused a shortage of textile goods. Three different in-kind packages were available in 1938: one included products for both the mother and the child, and two of them were targeted either at the baby or at the mother.<sup>27</sup> Since 1941, the maternity package contained a cardboard box to be used as the newborn's bed (Fig. 6.1). The educational aim was to indicate to the mother that the baby needed a place to sleep separated from others. Furthermore, a guidebook for the mother was included in the package.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *Huoltolautakunnan lakikirja*, XVIII–XXVII.

<sup>23</sup> Böök, *Suomen huolto-oikeus*, 290; *Huoltolautakunnan lakikirja*, 480; R.J., Äitiysavustuslain soveltamisen antamat kokemukset. *Huoltaja* 3/1939, 69.

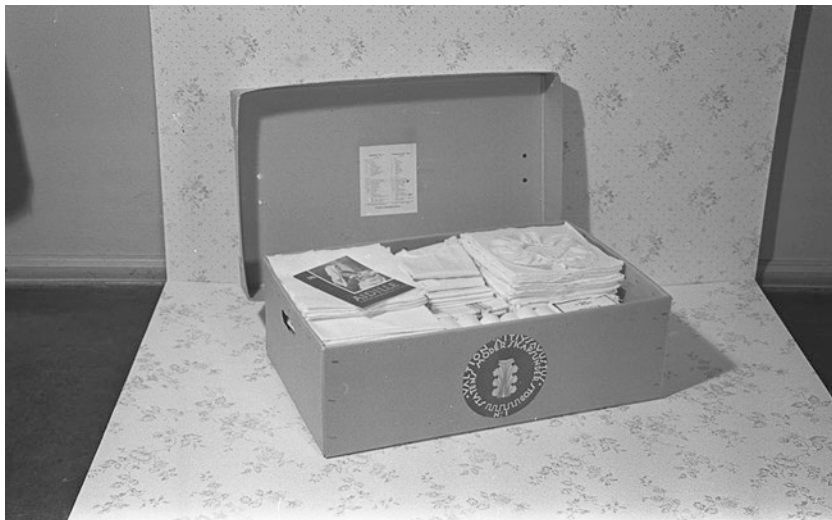
<sup>24</sup> Jaakkola, *Sosiaalisen kysymyksen yhteiskunta*, 140.

<sup>25</sup> R.J., Äitiysavustuslain soveltamisen antamat kokemukset. *Huoltaja* 3/1939, 69; Äitiysavustuslaki voimassa. *Loviisan Sanomat*, 5 January 1938 no 1, 1; *Huoltolautakunnan lakikirja*, 480.

<sup>26</sup> Vahtikari, *Finns Start Life Safe*.

<sup>27</sup> AsK 393/1937 and 425/1941 §1; Heikki Setkänen, Äitiysavustukseen oikeuttavasta vähävaraisuudesta. *Maalaiskunta* 3/1938, 55; Lehtimäki, Äitiysavustus, 150–1.

<sup>28</sup> 90.000 äitiyspakkauksen hankinnasta tehty sopimukset. *Helsingin sanomat (HS)*, 11 January 1943 no 9, 2; Jalas, Pikkukansalaisen tervetuliaiset. *Kotiliesi* 13/1941, 428–9; Rakel Jalas, Radiolähetys suoraan Amerikkaan. *Huoltaja* 9/1943, 240.



**Fig. 6.1** Maternity package from 1947, including a cardboard box to be used as the first bed for the newborn, sheets, napkins, clothes, and a guidebook for the mother. (Photo: Atte Hyvärinen. The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas)

The Ministry of Social Affairs emphasized the significance of the positive experience of receiving the benefit: “One important feature is [...] how the benefit is delivered to the mother. Like any gift, even the gift from the state to the mother is more valuable if the mother herself receives it,” wrote Rakel Jalas in 1938.<sup>29</sup> The allegory of the gift highlighted the gratitude and appreciation for mothers. Furthermore, the agency of the mother as the applicant and the receiver of the benefit emphasized the new societal significance of the mother-citizen.

As the maternity benefit was based on an application form that could be delivered personally or by a close relative or via mail, it differed from the tradition of having the individual seeking the aid be present at the meeting of the poor relief board.<sup>30</sup> Still, a principle resembling the poor relief was that the public welfare board made the decision on the quality of the

<sup>29</sup>Rakel Jalas, Katsaus kuluneeseen “äitiysavustusvuoteen.” *Huoltaja* 2/1939, 34.

<sup>30</sup>*Huoltolautakunnan lakikirja*, 483–6; AsK 322/1937 §5; Satka, *Making Social Citizenship*, 49; Jaakkola, *Sosiaalisen kysymyksen yhteiskunta*, 140.

maternity benefit, because “mothers are not capable of judging what kind of clothing they need.”<sup>31</sup>

The alleged ignorance and immaturity of the lower classes and the need to elevate them to become responsible citizens and adopt healthy lifestyles had been the basis for middle-class-based health education since the late nineteenth century. Besides the educative contents of the maternity package, the application procedure that involved guidance clearly indicates that women were seen as incapable of decent motherhood without counseling and supervision. In order to shepherd the uneducated public, the growing profession of municipal midwives and the emerging institution of cost-free municipal maternity clinics were given a dominant role in suggesting the quality of the benefit for each mother.<sup>32</sup>

In practice, the use of health services became a precondition for the maternity benefit. The mother needed a statement of the duration of the pregnancy from a doctor, midwife, or maternity clinic—or from two reliable persons in cases of low access to medical professionals—to be eligible for the benefit. Thus, the maternity benefit was a tool for guiding the mothers to healthcare services.<sup>33</sup>

Consulting medical professionals during pregnancy or in childbirth was not a self-evident practice. Some 30 percent of women gave birth without any professional help in 1930. In 1938, the average figure was 17 percent, but it was significantly higher in rural areas.<sup>34</sup> The social distance to the educated midwife, the fear of their remarks on inadequate hygiene, and the impossibility of meeting their demands for white sheets made poor women reluctant to consult them.<sup>35</sup> Besides, the lack of decent underwear made women avoid the required medical checkup.<sup>36</sup> Since the checkups made pregnant women leave home, it made pregnancy more public and changed the tradition of keeping it hidden in private.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Äitiysavustuslaki voimassa. *Loviisan Sanomat*, 5 January 1938 no 1, 1.

<sup>32</sup> Harjula, Health Citizenship, 578–9, 581; Hallituksen esitys. *Kättilölehti* 3/1937, 59–60; Niilo Mannio, Äitiysavustus. *Huoltaja* 5/1937, 114–15. The accessibility of municipal midwives was increased by law (1937, 1944), and educative tasks in maternity care were included in their duties. Harjula, *Hoitoonpääsyn hierarkiat*, 141–54, 193.

<sup>33</sup> *Huoltolautakunnan lakikirja*, 471, 484; Harjula, *Hoitoonpääsyn hierarkiat*, 193–6.

<sup>34</sup> Harjula, *Hoitoonpääsyn hierarkiat*, 83; SVT XI 551938, 57–9.

<sup>35</sup> Helsti, *Kotisyntyysten aikaan*, 348–52; Harjula, *Hoitoonpääsyn hierarkiat*, 84.

<sup>36</sup> K. L., Vieläkin äitiysavustuslain määräysten täyttämisestä. *Työkansan Sanomat*, 30 December 1950 no 302.

<sup>37</sup> Helsti, *Kotisyntyysten aikaan*, 254–95.

A closer look at the local practices shows that the procedure of applying for and receiving the benefit was not uniform in 1938. For example, in the metropolitan Helsinki, the child protection board was the authority in charge, but both municipal and private maternity clinics delivered the application forms. These clinics even delivered the in-kind benefit, but for the in-cash share of the benefit, the mothers had to go to the former poor relief cashier office.<sup>38</sup> In the small town of Heinola, the municipal midwife had a special office hour for the applications on the premises of the old poor relief office. In rural Loimaa, the general municipal office together with a municipal midwife and a layman elected to a position of trust as the supervisor of public welfare took care of the delivery of the benefit.<sup>39</sup> The mixture of different authorities produced local variations in the lived social citizenship of the maternity benefit recipients. As a socio-physical scene of experience, the new maternity clinic with a special shelter for prams and functional consulting rooms was more acceptable for the families than the stigmatized poor relief and child protection premises.<sup>40</sup>

In general, the maternity package was not self-evidently accepted by mothers in the early 1940s. The quality of the products got worse during the war. The paper sheets and clothes only lasted for a short time, which made mothers reluctant to use them.<sup>41</sup> Since the quality improved after the war—including flannel and even soap donated by the US Red Cross—the maternity packages became more popular. Significantly, the benefit gave access to products that were not available in shops because of the shortage of goods.<sup>42</sup> “During the war there was not much to boast about [...], now [...] every mother receives the maternity package with pleasure,” wrote the newspaper *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* in 1947.<sup>43</sup>

The information campaign for the new benefit emphasized the difference between poor relief and the maternity benefit and encouraged mothers to use their right. The mothers were repeatedly informed that the

<sup>38</sup> Äitiysavustuksen järjestely Helsingissä. *HS*, 3 January 1938 no 2, 2; Tiedonanto. *HS*, 3 January 1938 no 2, 10.

<sup>39</sup> Tiedonanto. *Heinolainen*, 4 January 1938 no 1, 3; Kuulutus. *Loimaan lehti*, 5 January 1938 no 1, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Ahola, *Terveystalot ja kunnanlääkärintalot*, 27–8.

<sup>41</sup> Paperiset kapalot. *Eteenpäin*, 31 January 1942 no 12, 6.

<sup>42</sup> 188 äitiysavustusta. *Laatokka*, 25 May 1946 no 119, 4; Äitiyspakkausten. *Laatokka*, 2 September 1946 no 201, 3; Äitiysavustusten kysyntä. *Laatokka*, 10 October 1946 no 234, 2; 5390 äitiyspakkausta. *Itä-Häme*, 12 April 1947 no 39, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Äitiysavustusanomuksia. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 13 November 1947 no 261, 3.

maternity benefit did not cause the same control that was targeted at poor relief recipients or an obligation to pay it back.<sup>44</sup> As the main message was that the maternity benefit does not “lower the dignity of the applicant,”<sup>45</sup> this indicates the mixed fears and hopes that were connected to the lived practice of the new benefit. As a scene of experience, the early maternity benefit was often framed as a local extension of poor relief. This undermined the experience of the benefit as a new kind of national gift for the mother-citizen.

### FAMILY BENEFIT: A MORAL BOND BETWEEN SOCIETY AND THE DECENT FAMILY

The first regularly paid mass-scale allowance, the family benefit (1943), was a step forward in the path opened by the maternity benefit. The new benefit shared many of the same features: it was conditional and selective, and the use of the benefit-in-kind was controlled by the public welfare board.<sup>46</sup> While the maternity benefit was characterized as a one-time “societal first-aid,”<sup>47</sup> the new family benefit created a long-term relationship between the family and the local authorities.

Compared to the maternity benefit, the family benefit, which was decreed during the war, had an even stronger pronatalist aim.<sup>48</sup> Only large low-income families with at least five children under 16 years of age were eligible in 1943. The minimum number of children was lowered to four in 1946, and even widows with three (1945) or two (1946) children, as well as those providers of two children who were incapable of work (1946), became eligible for the benefit. The lowered qualification for widows did not apply to single mothers, who had to have four children to meet the requirements.<sup>49</sup>

Basically, the deservingness was based on the civic duty of reproduction, and the amount of the benefit was based on the number of

<sup>44</sup> Äitiysavustus ei tuo mukanaan korvausvelvollisuutta. *Turun sanomat*, 4 January 1938 no 3, 4; F. A.s, Äitiysavustusta ryhdytään antamaan. *Uusi Aika*, 4 January 1938, no 2, 3. Äitiysavustuslaki tullut voimaan. *Sosialisti*, 4 January 1938 no 2, 8.

<sup>45</sup> K. S., Äitiysavustus. *Savon Sanomat*, 4 January 1938 no 2, 5.

<sup>46</sup> AsK 375/1943.

<sup>47</sup> Böök, *Suomen huolto-oikeus*, 285.

<sup>48</sup> On pronatalism, Bergenheim, *Yhteiskunnan, kansakunnan*, 46–111.

<sup>49</sup> Niilo Salomaa, Lapsiavustusjärjestelmämme kehitys. *Huoltaja* 6/1960, 159; Kysymyksiä ja vastauksia. *Huoltaja* 4/1948, 64.

children.<sup>50</sup> Because of the transnational eugenic fear of degeneration in Western countries in the early twentieth century, the quality of the new generation became a special focus. In Finland, the Marriage Act (1929) and Sterilization Act (1935) were used to prevent the reproduction of the “unsuitable” population.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, the family benefit was granted only to families “which raise mentally and physically healthy members of society.” For example, mental illness, epilepsy, and other diseases that were considered hereditary—as well as infectious diseases like tuberculosis or venereal diseases—made the family unsuitable for the benefit.<sup>52</sup> According to the administrative instructions, such large families whose physical or mental health “did not meet the moderate demands” belonged in the sphere of poor relief.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, it was hoped that the family benefit would rescue “fit” families from ending up on poor relief.<sup>54</sup> This clearly indicated the hierarchies of citizenship created by the new social benefits.

The model of maternity benefit was developed further, as the family benefit was delivered basically only as products.<sup>55</sup> The variety of possible items ranged from pigs and vegetable seeds to beds, linen, clothes, and kitchenware (see Fig. 6.2).

Similarly to the maternity benefit, the starting point was that the families themselves were not capable of judging their needs.<sup>56</sup> Because of this, five different expert groups were involved in helping the local public welfare board to make the decision. First, a doctor, midwife, or public health nurse gave a statement of the family members’ health. Second, a regular home visit by a hired social worker or a layman who was elected to a position of trust in the public welfare board was the rule. Just like in poor relief, the applicants were expected to let their home be regularly evaluated by the local officials. Third, the new profession of municipal home helper focused on supporting low-income families with children. Fourth, voluntary associations for agriculture and housekeeping organized

<sup>50</sup> Salomaa, Lapsiavustusjärjestelmämme kehitys. *Huoltaja* 6/1960, 162.

<sup>51</sup> Bergenheim, *Yhteiskunnan, kansakunnan*, 1–111.

<sup>52</sup> *Huoltolautakunnan lakikirja*, 508–9.

<sup>53</sup> V. J. Sukselainen, Kunnalliset elimet väestöpolitiikan hoitajina. *Maalaiskunta* 8/1943, 114.

<sup>54</sup> Perhelisäjärjestelmällä. *Aamulehti*, 10 January 1943 no 8, 5.

<sup>55</sup> Niilo Salomaa, Luontoissuoritukset perhekustannusten tasauksessa. *Huoltaja* 24/1962, 858–9.

<sup>56</sup> *Huoltolautakunnan lakikirja*, 511.



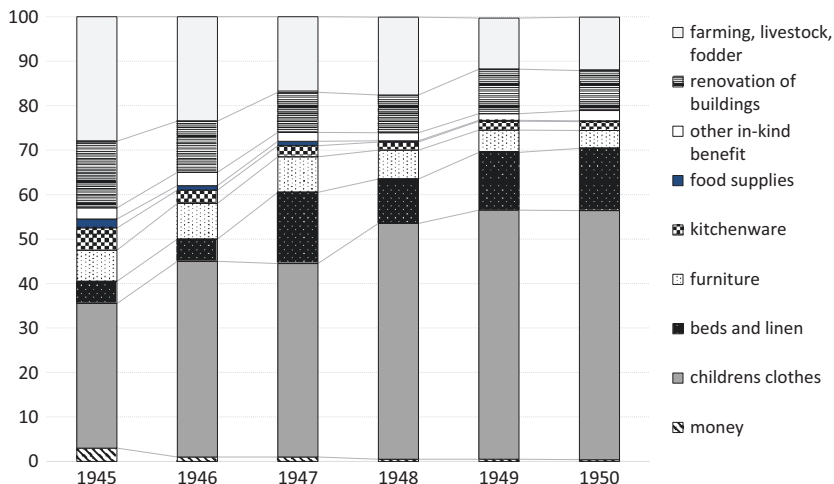


Fig. 6.2 Different forms of family benefit 1945–1950, percentage of the total amount. (SA 5–6/1948, 174; SA 7–8/1949, 266; SA 1–2/1951, 29; SA 1–2/1952, 40; SA 7–8/1952, 305)

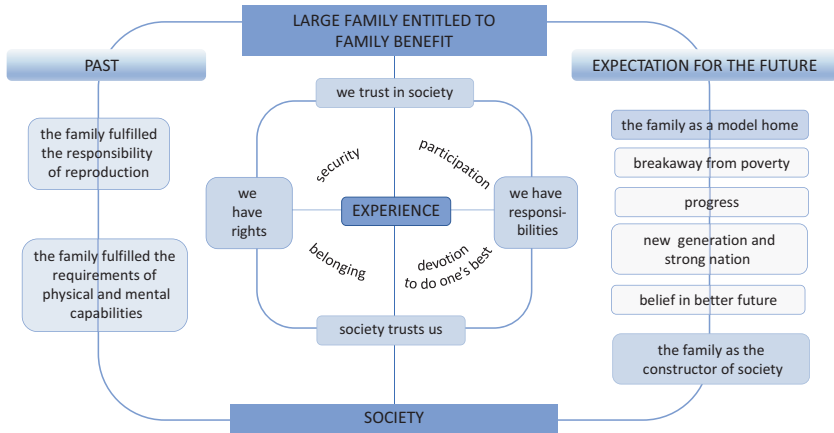
guidance for the benefit recipients.<sup>57</sup> Fifth, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs, the national “semi-governmental” association *Väestöliitto* (the Finnish Population and Family Welfare League, henceforth abbreviated to the Population League) organized the production and logistics of the in-kind benefit and published a journal called *Meidän perhe* (*Our family*) that was delivered free to the recipients of the benefit.<sup>58</sup>

The families encountered a variety of different actors representing “society” in the application process. Compared to the maternity benefit, the scene of experience extended as a multi-locational setting in which the local and national associations were intermediary actors in the triangle of the home, municipality, and state.<sup>59</sup> The special journal for the family

<sup>57</sup> AsK 375/1943 § 10; AsK 427/1943 § 3; AsK 272/1950; *Huoltolautakunnan lakikirja*, 509, 512–4. Niilo Salomaa, Viljelys- ja kotitalousneuvonta. *Huoltaja* 8/1953, 215–6, 226; Veikko Ryyttäri, Kunnallinen kodinhoitaja sosiaalihuollon työntekijänä. *Huoltaja* 15–16/1962, 492–4. On agriculture associations and peasantry as the ideal Finnishness, see Markkola and Östman, *Guardians of the Land*.

<sup>58</sup> Peräläinen, *Yhteiskunnan tuki lapsiperheille*, 81–4.

<sup>59</sup> Official English name: Family Federation of Finland. Nieminen, *Viisi vuotta toimintaa*, 86–95; Bergenheim, *Yhteiskunnan, kansakunnan*, 25–8, 40–1, 72–3, 286.



**Fig. 6.3** The ideal experience of the bond between the family and society carried by the family benefit in the 1940s

benefit recipients was exceptional.<sup>60</sup> It made a new nationwide societal sphere beyond the local present and concrete for those receiving the benefit.<sup>61</sup> The journal had a strong educational aim in indicating how the receipt of the family benefit should be experienced. Figure 6.3 summarizes the ideal experience of receiving the benefit that the practices of the benefit and the expert-led discussion fostered.

Reciprocity was the main message carried by the family benefit. Although giving aid to people who were able to work was generally considered “objectionable” in Finland in the late 1930s and early 1940s, support to large families was seen as a recognition and reward for fulfilling the civic duty of raising the future generation.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, the societal aid set new demands of agency and responsibility on the family: “Since the society is ready to act to support those who raise children, the families

<sup>60</sup>The journal *Kansaneläke* (National Pension) was targeted at the officials, not at the pensioners. *Kansaneläke* 1/1938.

<sup>61</sup>See Kokko, Temporalization of Experiencing.

<sup>62</sup>Erkki J. Kinnunen, Huollon johtaminen nykyistä enemmän oma-apuisuuteen. *Maalaiskunta* 2/1941, 50; Väestöliitto r.y., Edelläolevan johdosta. *Huoltaja* 5/1943, 134; Bergenheim, *Yhteiskunnan, kansakunnan*, 56–68.

themselves for their part are ready to do their best to improve their conditions.”<sup>63</sup>

The aim was to elevate the families as model homes and construct new norms for family life with the benefit. It was planned to integrate the whole family as the heralds of the population policy. Daughters were recommended to choose municipal home helper as their future profession.<sup>64</sup> As the children would grow up as hard-working citizens in the model homes, the family benefit was predicted to be a benefit for society:

Work for the family-benefit families is work for the future. These families’ own work and eagerness ensures that the money that have been given for their good will earn interest at such a rate that the society will someday be very grateful for it.<sup>65</sup>

The family benefit constructed a new temporal logic for societal aid, which combined the ideas of past and future reciprocity.<sup>66</sup> The fulfilled responsibility of having a large and healthy family in the past produced the right to receive support from society. Similarly, being entitled to the benefit gave the family the responsibility to become a model home and to work for the best of the society in the future. A specific two-way idea of trust was crucial in the family benefit. First, trust in society as the caretaker was expressed in the journal *Meidän Perhe* by citations from the benefit recipients, such as “It is a big thing that even we who have a large bunch of children are being taken care of. It feels like someone is holding your hand.”<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, in a story of a small-farmer’s daughter and a wife-to-be, she commented on the new legislation for the family founding loan (1944–1957) for decent young couples, emphasizing trust: “There is something [...] quite beautiful in it. Don’t laugh! It is marvelous that society trusts us and our good intentions that way.”<sup>68</sup>

The trust in the recipients of the benefit was a central feature in the new moral bond between the family and society. The trust was especially manifested on a rare occasion in 1943, when the leading figures of the Population League and National Board of Health met recipients in remote

<sup>63</sup> *Meidän Perhe* (MP) 1/1944, 3.

<sup>64</sup> MP 4/1944, 13–15; MP 5/1945, 7–8; MP 4/1946, 18–19; MP 1/1947, 3–4.

<sup>65</sup> MP 3/1944, 10.

<sup>66</sup> Laenen, Rossetti, and van Oorschot, *Why Deservingness Theory*.

<sup>67</sup> MP 3/1944, 9.

<sup>68</sup> MP 2/1948, 13.

areas for “shared talks.” The journal *Meidän Perhe* described the occasion as a lively discussion in which both the fathers and mothers eagerly participated: “Even the wife from the most remote village deep in the forest put her point clearly and with thought and brought up many noteworthy views.”<sup>69</sup> This kind of trust in those parents who were usually seen as the most ignorant constructed new experiences of societal participation and belonging.

Furthermore, new models and terminology for approaching the authorities were presented in *Meidän Perhe*. This implied a more interactive idea of the relationship between the family and the authorities. Instead of talking about an *application*, the journal published *order forms* in which the family could *notify* the public welfare board of whether they wanted to have “an overall or a change of underwear” as the family benefit.<sup>70</sup>

In general, the family benefit indicates that a societal relationship of recognition—as Anna Metteri has put it—was central in the promise of the emerging welfare state. This means that the social right was linked to the recognition of the experience and importance of the families.<sup>71</sup> The two-way idea of trust was crucial in creating expectations of a better future for society and for the family as a part of society.

For the ideal family, the family benefit was a scene of experience that both presumed and produced an active participatory role in society. It is noteworthy that the ideal experience of receiving the family benefit hid the flip side of the selective and conditional benefit. A crofter who refused the benefit because he saw it as a “scrap from poor relief” was deemed as ignorant and in need of education in the social workers’ journal.<sup>72</sup> The continuous control from the representatives of the public welfare board may have produced experiences of being unsafe and not being heard. For the excluded families, the denial of the benefit implied they were worthless outsiders. As exclusion defined the family as a burden on society, it maintained the cycle of poverty and hopelessness for the future. In the local community, the benefit that categorized families into fit and unfit was not only a source of trust, pride, and safety, it also produced lived social citizenship that was characterized by envy, shame, bitterness, and inequality.

<sup>69</sup> MP 4/1945, 6–9.

<sup>70</sup> MP 2/1944, 14; MP 5/1945, 11, 13; MP 2/1947, 9.

<sup>71</sup> Metteri, *Hyvinvointivaltion lupaukset*, 192.

<sup>72</sup> Eemil Tolonen, Havaintoja perhelisää koskevalta katsastusmatkalta. *Huoltaja* 2/1944, 498–9.

## HESITANT RECEPTION OF THE UNIVERSAL CHILD BENEFIT

The child benefit was a radical reform, as it was granted to every child under 16 years of age in cash from 1948. It replaced the short-lived family wage (1947), which was considered unsuccessful as it excluded the small-farmer majority of the population.<sup>73</sup> What made the child benefit exceptional was its mass scale: in a country of 4 million people, the benefit became a shared experience of half a million families and a million children (see Fig. 6.4). The child benefit presented a new interpretation of the criteria and practice of social support. As a scene of experience, it started to shape a new individual-society relationship.

Unlike the earlier benefits, the universalistic child benefit did not categorize children or families into the deserving and undeserving. The only limitation concerned children in institutions: the expenses of a child's institutional care for the local government had to be covered from the benefit, but it was advised the residual amount be saved for the child. In rare cases when the care was provided by the state, for example based on the new Care of the Disabled Act (1946), the benefit was not paid. However, for example, if the child was in a tuberculosis sanatorium that had free beds or in a school for the deaf or the blind, the benefit was granted.<sup>74</sup>

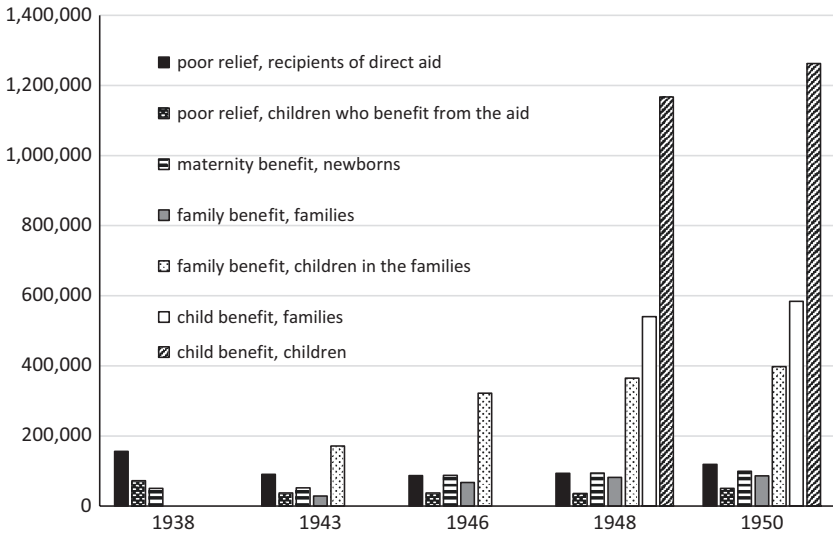
Compared to the family benefit, the non-selective child benefit carried a significantly weaker linkage to past reciprocity between the family and society. Even future reciprocity as a moral bond was not the guiding principle, because the child benefit did not require the recipient to show any special signs of decency in the future. Basically, the target of the child benefit was the child as an individual, and the main idea was that supporting any child will benefit the whole society in the future.

The Population League saw the new child benefit as a basic feature of a modern society, indicating a complete break away from the poor relief referred to as *huolto*:

In an industrialized and monetary society, the child benefit is a necessary arrangement to create a general economic basis for homes, families, and

<sup>73</sup> Bergholm, Työmarkkinajärjestöt; Peräläinen, Yhteiskunnan tuki, 89–91.

<sup>74</sup> AsK 541/1948, § 5–6. J.P., Lapsilisän maksaminen eräissä tapauksissa. *Huoltaja* 21/1948, 335–8; Usko Waismaa, Lapsilisämme pulmakysymyksiä. *Huoltaja* 20/1954, 522–3.



**Fig. 6.4** Numbers of recipients, poor relief, and benefits for families, 1938–1950. (SVT XXI A 21938–40, 13; SVT XXI A 31941–43, 10; SXT XXI A 41944–1946, 10; SVT XXI A 51947–48, 10; SVT XXI A 71950, 10; M. J-o, Äitiysavustukset vuonna 1950. *Huoltaja* 7/1952, 174; Perhelisät v. 1943. *SA* 3–4/1944, 88; Niilo Salomaa, Lapsiavustusjärjestelmämme kehitys. *Huoltaja* 6/1960, 159; *Tilastollinen selvitys lastensuojelutoiminnan* 1951, 68; M. J-o, Lastenvaatteet perhelisän ensisijaisena käyttömuotona. *Huoltaja* 21/1952, 536; Kelan lapsiperhe-etuudet [Allowances for families from Kela, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland].)

child raising. It has nothing to do with the ordinary principle of *huolto* and the means-testing linked to it.<sup>75</sup>

The new procedure manifested the child benefit as a right. The mother filled out a child benefit notification (*lapsilisäilmoitus*) and the in-cash benefit was delivered four times a year by a postal transfer at a post office.<sup>76</sup> As opposed to application, the concept of notification—that was earlier introduced as a part of the production of active citizenship in the journal *Meidän Perhe* for family benefit recipients—was now adopted in

<sup>75</sup> Alennetaanko perheellisten palkkoja 25 miljardilla? *Työkansan Sanomat*, 1 May 1948 no 98, 3.

<sup>76</sup> AsK 541/1948. Lapsilisälaki § 2–10.

legislation. The distribution of the notification forms took place not only in the public welfare offices but in maternity clinics and primary schools as well. Even non-municipal actors such as cooperative milk shops and post offices were involved. As the filled notification form could be either left with the public welfare board or sent via mail without any consultations, this was the first time the applicant did not necessarily encounter any representatives of the municipal board in the process.<sup>77</sup>

Instead of coming from the municipal government, the benefit was viewed as a caring effort by the state. In a bank advertisement for a savings account to deposit the child benefit, the expression *Ukko Kruunu* (*Old Man Crown*)—earlier used ironically especially referring to the coercive power of the state in taxation and imprisonment<sup>78</sup>—was inverted to signify a positive donator: “Your child will receive 1800 marks from Old Man Crown.”<sup>79</sup>

A national benefit paid in cash was a new phenomenon. For the first time, it brought a regular cash income to many families in the agrarian country.<sup>80</sup> As the annual amount per child was double compared to the family benefit,<sup>81</sup> the experience of economic security made long-term planning possible: “many providers in the family can look at the future perhaps in more secure spirit than ever before,” summarized *Meidän Perhe*.<sup>82</sup>

While the earlier family wage emphasized men as the breadwinner, the child benefit highlighted the role of women. As Tapio Bergholm has put it, this meant that in the family dynamics, fathers were defined as the irresponsible ones who would spend the benefit on drinking, while the mothers were the responsible ones who were in charge of bringing up the children. As the benefit was paid to the mother even in a family of two parents, it raised her status and gave her individual societal agency outside the home.<sup>83</sup> Compared to the earlier in-kind benefits, the trust in the mothers’ capability to use the new benefit was striking: “let the mother weigh it as best she can,” wrote *Meidän Perhe*.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Lapsilisät Helsingissä. *Suomen Sosiaalidemokraatti*, 22 August 1948 no 225, 9; Kuulutuksia. *Itä-Häme*, 26 August 1948 no 94, 4.

<sup>78</sup> *MOT Kielitoimiston sanakirja*, entries kruunu, ukko.

<sup>79</sup> Lapsenne. *Suomen Kuvalehti* 38/1948, 24.

<sup>80</sup> *MP* 4/1948, 3; Kuusi, *60-luvun sosiaalipolitiikka*, 180.

<sup>81</sup> Salomaa, Lapsiavustusjärjestelmämme kehitys. *Huoltaja* 6/1960, 162.

<sup>82</sup> *MP* 1/1949, 3.

<sup>83</sup> Bergholm, Työmarkkinajärjestöt, 69–71; Ask 541/1948 §3.

<sup>84</sup> *MP* 4/1948, 5.

Long queues in post offices became a part of the shared lived social citizenship that united mothers of all social classes. The common status and shared experiences reduced social differentiation and built trust and confidence.<sup>85</sup> A photographic studio advised the mothers to obtain a photo for an identity card to draw the benefit, and banks advertised for authorization to deposit the benefit in an account for the child to avoid queuing.<sup>86</sup> This made the mothers active consumer-clients with future expectations of increasing amounts of interest.<sup>87</sup>

Finnish welfare state research has characterized the child benefit as a breakthrough of modern social policy, but the tense and mixed reception indicates how the novel societal aid was contested.<sup>88</sup> First of all, the universal benefit differed radically from all early social legislation. Giving aid to children even in wealthy families challenged earlier ideas of what is fair and just. The appropriate roles of the family and society in child raising were questioned. Strikingly, high-income families were suddenly in the same position as the poorest as recipients of the new benefit. A sketch writer in the popular magazine *Suomen Kuvalehti* summarized the suspicions aroused by the benefit in 1948:

Mothers around Finland have wondered when scribbling down their heirs' names in the child benefit forms in the last couple of weeks. I wonder if this is true, has one and the other thought, the fear of socialization of homes has flashed through the minds of some of them—and the opposing side has wondered out what even the well-to-do wives will do with it [...]

And I will not fill in the form or take the money. Believe me, sure I will support my children by myself—as I have done up to the present! [...] this seems to be quite a common thought among the people in Finland [...] the idea, the stubborn urge to survive alone, it is plain Finnish [...] No benefits, no worries—unless we really must. So, when the society offers us something, we are ready to suspect that here we are again dealing with something that stinks bad.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Äideille. *Paikallissanomat*, 7 October 1948 no 40, 1.; See also Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, 56.

<sup>86</sup> Advertisements in *Yli-Satakunta*, 5 November 1948 no 44, 1–3.

<sup>87</sup> Sukselainen, Suomen lapsilisäjärjestelmä, 26–8.

<sup>88</sup> Anttonen and Sipilä, *Suomalaista sosiaalipolitiikkaa*, 70–1; Waris, *Suomalaisen yhteiskunnan*, 210–11; Hellsten, *Muuttuva yhteiskunta*, 143–4.

<sup>89</sup> Äidit, nostakaa palkkanne. *Suomen Kuvalehti* 37/1948, 22.



The sketch writer anticipated that both the political fear of socialism and the criticism of helping the rich would ease off when the first amounts of money were delivered. Attempts to reform the benefit were, however, continuous in the Parliament in the 1950s. The bourgeois parties—especially the agrarian party—aimed to restrict the benefit only to families with at least two children, while especially the communists—but many others too—wanted to exclude the rich.<sup>90</sup> The public welfare administration preferred an in-kind benefit and feared that the money would not be used for the good of the children.<sup>91</sup> A social worker who had started her career in the 1940s and retired in 1980 described how the child benefit represented new expectations which the “old-time” social workers found difficult to adjust to:

I strongly felt a change in the clients [...] as the child benefit was given to all children. [...] It was much easier to visit the social office because it had no stigma of poor relief. [...] We got new clients and younger clients. [...] It liberated people [...] in a way, it made our work more difficult, as we started to have cases which we old-time poor relief workers did not consider to be poor [...] people are more strongly aware of their needs and their rights and hold on to them.<sup>92</sup>

For the social worker, the child benefit challenged the individual-society relationship she had built her professional identity on. Furthermore, especially the elderly Finns expressed their irritation in readers’ letters to newspapers: child benefit was considered unfair as old people still had to survive without a national pension.<sup>93</sup> One mother wrote a response to describe how hurting it was to be the envy of others and “hear bitter words and sharp remarks on how easy it is for the mother to live on state aid.”<sup>94</sup> Despite the criticism, the benefit was praised as a source of security in everyday life. When frost damaged the crops in the late 1940s, “mothers

<sup>90</sup> Kolehmainen, Lapsilislain muutosesitykset, 151–62; Bergholm, Työmarkkinajärjestöt, 71–4; Peräläinen, Yhteiskunnan tuki, 91–3.

<sup>91</sup> J.P., Lapsilisän maksaminen eräissä tapauksissa. *Huoltaja* 21/1948, 338; Talousarvion menolisäykset. *Uusi Suomi* (US), 18 December 1948 no 342, 6; V.J. Sukselainen, Suomen lapsilisäjärjestelmä, 31.

<sup>92</sup> Citation from Harjula, Framing the client’s agency, 163.

<sup>93</sup> Lapsilisät ja vanhukset. *US*, 2 January 1950 no 1, 11; Sipra, Kuulumisia. *US*, 3 January 1950 no 2, 7; Lapsilisästä ja muustakin. *US*, 3 January 1950 no 2, 10; Loukkaus. *US*, 8 January 1950 no 6, 14.

<sup>94</sup> Äidit ja lapsilisät. *Länsi-Savo*, 9 February 1950 no 32, 6.

talk about child benefit with gratitude. Without it, the winter would have been insurmountable,” reported *Suomen Kuvalehti*.<sup>95</sup>

### CONTRADICTORY SOCIAL CITIZENSHIP AND LAYERS OF INDIVIDUAL-SOCIETY RELATIONSHIP

In the analysis of the emerging institution of social benefits, I approached the encounters between families and local authorities as scenes of experience. A common feature for the three early benefits—maternity benefit, family benefit, and child benefit—was that family and motherhood became crucial in defining citizenship. Especially the practice of granting the maternity benefit and child benefit to the mother made her an active agent in society. The institutionalized new societal responsibility for mothers and families was especially targeted at the well-being of children as future citizens. Compared to poor relief, this new temporality in the individual-society relationship with the focus on the future society characterized the new institution of social benefits.

Besides the similarities, as scenes of experience, the three early benefits structured divergent social interaction and agency. Thus, they started to construct an inconsistent individual-society relationship that resulted in contradictory lived social citizenship. The transition from poor relief to social benefits was not a sharp break, as the broadening poor relief organization became the venue for the old and new expectations of citizenship. Despite the new eligibility criteria, the early maternity and family benefits were characterized by many institutional and ideological continuities from poor relief. These benefits defined preconditions for decent citizenship, as they were granted only in exchange for fulfilled civic duties. The family benefit especially was aimed at constructing a moral bond between decent families and society, ranging from the past to the future, emphasizing reciprocity in rights, responsibilities, and trust.

Unlike these early benefits that expected parents to be ignorant and in need of guidance and control by the officials, the child benefit was based on the idea that parents can make rational decisions on how to use the in-cash benefit. Significantly, the unconditional child benefit carried the experience of an autonomous, ahistorical individual with social rights. Compared to the concrete reciprocity of the earlier benefits, the child

<sup>95</sup> Eila Jokela, Viime kesän katoaluen. *Suomen Kuvalehti* 8/1950, 14.

benefit started to construct citizenship that was based on an abstract idea of social rights and responsibilities.

Furthermore, the child benefit meant a breakaway from the local, face-to-face-based tradition of giving and receiving social aid. Within the earlier benefits, society manifested as a mixture of actors who guided, regulated, and controlled the receipt and usage of the benefit. Even though the agency of the Population League as the proponent of the state was a novelty in the delivery of the family benefit, it was the municipal officials—social workers, midwives, municipal doctors—and the local laymen of municipal boards and local associations who personified the early benefits. In contrast, the child benefit created a direct relationship between the individual and the state, and it made society-as-the-nation-state a crucial feature of the lived social citizenship.

Approached as scenes of experience, the three benefits indicate how the historical social change occurs through experiential change, as temporal layers of experience. The local practices in delivering maternity and family benefits carried the layer of experience of poor relief that had been institutionalized as a social structure since the late nineteenth century. A parallel institutionalization process of a new layer of experience, structuring a new individual-society relationship with new future horizons, was linked to the establishment of child benefit. Thus, as an analytic concept, the scene of experience can be seen both as a crystallization of the societal layers of experience and as the place where new societal layers of experience take shape.

The two temporal layers of experience were overlapping and parallel, which can be seen in the divergent development of the two earlier benefits after the introduction of the universal child benefit in 1948. From 1949, mothers regardless of their wealth were entitled to maternity benefit on condition that they visited a maternity clinic for a medical checkup—and a blood test for venereal diseases (1952)—during the four first months of pregnancy.<sup>96</sup> According to the official discussion, the renewed maternity benefit was internationally unique as it dropped “all the restrictions” and was granted to all mothers. Strikingly, the emphasis on universality brushed aside the fact that prisoners and permanent poor relief recipients still did not qualify to receive the “gift from the state.”<sup>97</sup> The restriction was not

<sup>96</sup> Harjula, *Hoitoonpääsyn hierarkiat*, 193–4.

<sup>97</sup> Uusi äitiysavustuslaki. *US*, 18 June 1949 no 144, 6.

abandoned until 1976, when it was revoked as unfair and unjustified without further discussion in the Parliament.<sup>98</sup>

The family benefit in turn remained basically unchanged, even though the removal of all economic criteria was suggested to make it administratively simpler in 1948. The planned reform was not expected to add costs, as it was predicted that “most of the wealthy” would not apply for the in-kind benefit.<sup>99</sup> By the 1960s, the professional debate deemed the family benefit an old-fashioned and patronizing relic that should not be a part of the welfare state. The features of discretion, conditionality, and the recipients’ control, and responsabilization were seen as contrary to the ideals of the welfare state. As a result, the family benefit was abandoned in 1974.<sup>100</sup>

Even though universalistic benefits for families gradually became the norm by the 1970s, the slow acceptance and the long-term parallel contradictory practices indicate the layered individual-society relationship. Still in the early 1960s, over 60 percent of urban people preferred a child benefit for low-income families only, and less than a third agreed with the principle of universalism.<sup>101</sup> Preconditions similar to the maternity benefit—medical checkups at child welfare clinics or adherence to advice given in school health care—were recommended to be set for the child benefit in governmental proposals.<sup>102</sup> However, the activism of mothers was seen as crucial in making the government give up the plans of cutting and restricting the child benefit in the late 1950s.<sup>103</sup> According to Pekka Kuusi—the main figure who sketched a plan for the welfare state in the 1960s—the survival of the child benefit revealed that the political democracy had developed into a “democracy of the social.” As “the people were no longer ready to give up the system of social security they have built,”<sup>104</sup> the social citizenship based on universal social benefit gradually became an institutionalized part of daily life.

<sup>98</sup> Harjula, *Hoitoonpääsyn hierarkiat*, 192.

<sup>99</sup> Sukselainen, Suomen lapsilisäjärjestelmä, 19.

<sup>100</sup> Waris, *Suomalaisen yhteiskunnan*, 207–9; Heikki v. Herten, Hyvästijätö köyhän-hoitoajattelulle. *Huoltaja* 5/1967, 152, 155; KM 1968: B 86. For responsabilization in the welfare state in the 2000s, see also Juhila, Raitakari and Hall, *Responsibilisation at the Margins*.

<sup>101</sup> Helenius, *Oma vastuu vai yhteisvastuu*, 161–6.

<sup>102</sup> Kuusi, *60-luvun sosiaalipolitiikka*, 286; Perhepolitiikan kokonaisuohjelma. *Huoltaja* 18/1966, 546; Harjula, *Hoitoonpääsyn hierarkiat*, 240–3, 281–2.

<sup>103</sup> Uljas, *Taistelu sosiaaliturvasta*, 29–37, 58–9.

<sup>104</sup> Pekka Kuusi, Ennen h-hetkeä. *Suomen Kuvalehti*, 20 June 1957 no 29, 14.

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## CHAPTER 7

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# From Humiliation to Compensation? Experiencing Poverty and Welfare Institutions Among Red Widows from the Civil War, 1918–1945

*Mervi Kaarninen*

### INTRODUCTION

During the Great War in Europe, the number of women wearing black increased year by year. In both France and Germany, 600,000 women lost their husbands, and in Italy and Great Britain, the number of widows increased by 200,000.<sup>1</sup> In Finland, the Civil War of 1918 between the White Army and rebellious Red Guards left approximately 13,500 war

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<sup>1</sup>Smith, *Discourses Surrounding British Widows*; Lanthier, *Women Alone*; Heatherington, *British Widows of the First World War*.

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widows. However, a total of 11,500, or about 85 per cent, were widows on the losing Red side.<sup>2</sup>

In Europe, various grant and pension schemes were created to assist war widows and war orphans.<sup>3</sup> In Finland, the Civil War had divided the whole nation and resulted in two divergent practices of aid and cultures of remembering. Only the widows and orphans of the White army soldiers were assisted by national pensions and honored for their self-sacrifice to the nation. The Red widows and orphans were stigmatized as the rebellious, defeated side of the war. They had to turn to the Finnish social welfare institution to survive. In practice, this meant poor relief.

In this chapter, I focus on the Red widows' encounters with poor relief from 1918 to 1945. The statistical accounts of the circumstances of the Red families proved that about 90 per cent were so poor that they needed support to survive. Unskilled workers formed the largest group among the male breadwinners on the defeated side, making up around 40 per cent. Skilled and industrial workers were together likewise, almost 40 per cent. I analyze the encounters of Red widowed mothers with social welfare institutions from three interlinked perspectives: first, how the widows understood and interpreted the measures the social welfare system directed to them; second, what kind of experiences of society these measures created; and third, how the two-way societal relationship affected the dense community of these widows. I mainly concentrate on the Tampere region. Tampere was a major industrial city in Finland where the consequences of the Civil War were felt heavily until the 1930s, being home to 150 Red widows and about 500 Red orphans.

In my analysis, I use the concepts of *emotional community* and *collective experience*. I suggest, first, that the Red widows formed an emotional community and that they shared a collective experience. As Barbara Rosenwein

<sup>2</sup>About the Civil War in Finland, see Tepora and Roselius (eds.), *The Finnish Civil War*; Haapala and Tikka, *Revolution, Civil War, and Terror*, 72–84. The Civil War began at the end of January 1918, and it was part of a wider process of political and social disintegration of the great European empires at the end of the First World War. Political divisions followed class boundaries, and in 1918, people were divided into the Reds and Whites along the class line between owners and non-owners. Officially, the war ended on 16 May, when the victorious White army marched to Helsinki. The White army had achieved the victory with the help of German troops.

<sup>3</sup>Kuhlman, *Of Little Comfort*; Holden, *Imaginary Widows*; Lomas, *Delicate Duties*; S.P. Breckinridge, *Widows' and Orphans' Pensions in Great Britain. Social Service Review* 1/1927, 249–257.

has defined it, “an emotional community is ‘a system of feeling’ based on a ‘social community’, when i.e. a relational group of people share the same economic, social, political interests. This community could be socially diverse and was not exclusive.”<sup>4</sup> The widows lived with their children in the densely populated working-class areas where people knew each other and shared the same kind of living circumstances. The widows could even share a place of work, as many of them managed to find work in textile factories in the 1920s. Second, I suggest that the widows’ negotiations with poor relief institutions had an influence on how the women understood Finnish society. Over time, their interaction with society formed a collective experience that defined their lives and their agencies.<sup>5</sup>

I will also look at how the local and state authorities handled the circumstances of Red families when many of them lived on the poverty line, and how the authorities understood the distressed state of the Red widows. Stearns and Stearns have created the concept of *emotionology*, which refers to “the attitude or standards that a society, or a definable group within society, maintains toward basic emotions and their appropriate expression and ways that institutions reflect and encourage these attitudes in human conduct.”<sup>6</sup> Their aim is to propose emotionology as a useful term with which to distinguish the collective emotional standards of a society from the emotional experiences of individuals and groups. In the case of the Red widows, this could mean how the local and state authorities expected the Red widows to behave: not as grieving widows and mothers but instead as humble, hardworking patriotic women who would campaign to get a livelihood for their children and to raise them as decent citizens.

The main body of the source material for this chapter consists of the letters of complaint the Red widows wrote to the chief inspector of the Ministry of Social Affairs from 1919 until the mid-1920s. If the mother was unable to earn her own and her children’s living through her own work, she had to ask for support from municipal poor relief. As the local authorities were in certain circumstances reluctant to assist, the widowed mothers wrote letters of complaint to the Ministry.

<sup>4</sup>Rosenwein, *Worrying About Emotions in History*, 842; Boddice, *History of Emotions*, 77–9.

<sup>5</sup>Kivimäki, *Reittejä kokemushistoriaan*, 18–19; Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Introduction to Medieval and Early Modern Experiences*.

<sup>6</sup>Stearns and Stearns, *Emotionology*, 813–36.

In addition, I use the letters of complaint and pension applications of Tampere-based widows written in the 1940s. At this point, the status of the Red widows had changed, following the 1943 decision of the Finnish Government on allowances<sup>7</sup> for the widows of the Civil War of 1918—hereafter named pensions for the Red widows. In the pension applications, the widows had to give detailed accounts of their living conditions from the Civil War until the 1940s. The material from this group of women, who had gone through a complete crisis and collapse and had to interpret their own lives almost a quarter of a century later, offers an opportunity to analyze the widows' experiences of long-term interaction with social institutions. I am interested in how these women with a working-class background and little education managed to organize their lives and to get support from the poor relief. Moreover, I utilize official documents on the Red widows' dealings with the Tampere poor relief and child welfare boards as well as parliamentary discussions concerning the social aid for the Red families.

In this chapter, I argue the Red widows formed an emotional community in which certain collective experiences were constituted via humiliation, resistance, compensation, and wounded confidence. These concepts describe the process of experience in the life course of the Red widows, and, as such, they structure my analysis.

## HUMILIATION

The Civil War was something that happened to the Red widows and changed their life. It condemned them to poverty and to a struggle to survive for the rest of their lives.<sup>8</sup> Half of the Red widows were, in 1918, between the ages of 30 and 40, and the average widow had three underage children. Statistics proved that living without a breadwinner's income was impossible for widowed mothers.<sup>9</sup> Red widows were not seen as mourning wives and mothers, and they did not have the opportunity for the official remembrance of lost husbands and family members, relatives, and friends.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, they did not enjoy the status of war widow. Instead, in the

<sup>7</sup>The official name was "The allowance of the widows of the war in 1918." I mainly use the concept of "pension" because this allowance was understood as a pension.

<sup>8</sup>*Suomen sotaorvot*, 375–95; Kaarninen, *Punaorvot*.

<sup>9</sup>*Suomen sotaorvot*, 375–95; Kaarninen, *Punaorvot*.

<sup>10</sup>Lintunen, *Älä anna surulle valtaa*, 194–206; Lintunen, *Filthy Whores and Brave Mothers*, 15–33; Peltonen, *Kirkko ja sisällissota työväen muistoissa*, 145–63.

middle of their sorrow, they had to battle against accusations, hunger, cold, and uncertainty for the future.

Public opinion had a great influence immediately after the war on the attitudes towards the Red widows and the families of the Reds. Accusations towards widowed mothers were presented in newspapers and magazines. According to the accusers, these women had betrayed the Finnish nation, and their status as mothers was questioned. They had failed to raise their children to become law-abiding citizens. Instead, this generation had started a revolt. *Kotimaa*, the magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and *Köyhäinboitolehti*, the poor relief magazine,<sup>11</sup> described Red widows as a social hazard from which children had to be rescued. The children had to be raised to be decent citizens of White Finland, and they had to be taught to forget their fathers' legacy.<sup>12</sup>

Humiliation can be seen as an act, an emotion, or both. It has also been defined as “the experience of some form of ridicule, scorn, contempt, or other degrading treatment at the hands of others.”<sup>13</sup> Moreover, humiliation can be defined as something that is actively done by one person to another. In the case of the Red widows, humiliation was exercised through institutions and directed at this particular group in society.<sup>14</sup>

The Poor Relief Act of 1879 stipulated the principles of poor relief, but local authorities—municipal boards or poor relief boards—had great discretionary power to decide on the form of the support. Especially in the countryside, the local poor relief boards were often dominated by White landowners.<sup>15</sup> The humiliation the Red widows experienced on the local authorities' part was both concrete and mental—and as such, it was an act experienced very differently than, for example, mere bureaucratic procedures.<sup>16</sup> Deciding on the support for the Red widows, both the state and the local authorities exercised power over the widows. As power is central

<sup>11</sup> The publication was intended for the staff of the municipal poor care organizations and the societies working in private charity. In 1919, its name was changed to *Huoltaja* (The Caretaker).

<sup>12</sup> Lintunen, *Women at War*, 222–3; Satka, *Making Social Citizenship*, 75–81; Frevert, *The Politics of Humiliation*.

<sup>13</sup> Elshout, Nelissen, and Beest, *Conceptualizing Humiliation*, 1581–94.

<sup>14</sup> Leask, *Losing Trust in the World*; Elshout, Nelissen, and Beest, *Conceptualizing Humiliation*, 1581–94.

<sup>15</sup> About the Poor Law, see Satka, *Making Social Citizenship*, 75–81.

<sup>16</sup> Elshout, Nelissen, and Beest, *Conceptualising Humiliation*, 1581–94.

to humiliation, the victim of an act of humiliation can be described not as *feeling* but as *being* humiliated—the victim of an act of power.

The humiliating experience of the Red widows was compounded by the fact that the poor relief authorities had the right to exercise power in organizing the livelihood of the Reds' families. This right gave them power over the mother. The widowed mothers experienced their conditions as mistreatment, as one mother wrote: "We have suffered so much all kinds of subjections that our nerves are polluted and we will lose the balance, both corporeal and mental, those who have it anymore. Health is not cared about."<sup>17</sup>

The support the local poor relief authorities gave could be granted as financial support, firewood, or a place in a foster home or orphanage. This meant that special statutes (decrees) were not needed if the childcare authorities wanted to move the children from their own home. In some cases, the mothers were obliged to give children up to a foster home because it was the only assistance the local poor relief board offered, and for the mother, this was the only possibility when she had to earn her living or find work.<sup>18</sup>

At the end of 1918 and in 1919, the Ministry of Social Affairs planned extensive child transfers because the abilities of the Red widows as caregivers were not believed in and trusted. The authorities wanted to take the children away from the Red mothers and place them in living conditions where they would receive a patriotic religious upbringing, and, in addition, the food situation in the rural areas would be better. Southern Finland and large cities suffered from food shortages after the war. However, the child transfers did not succeed to the planned extent.<sup>19</sup>

The widows toiled hard, and many of them worked shifts and at night. At the same time, they were overwhelmed with worries about how the children were doing at home. They struggled with health problems and suffered particularly from heart and lung disease. When the emergency was at its greatest and the local authorities did not assist, the widows tried themselves to write to the state authorities or asked other people who had the ability to write to people in high places.

<sup>17</sup>National Archives of Finland (NAF), Archive of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MSA), Department of the poor relief (DP), Private enquiries for poor relief. About humiliation, see Leask, *Losing Trust in the World*, 129–42.

<sup>18</sup>Satka, *Making Social Citizenship*, 75–81.

<sup>19</sup>Committee report 1919:11; *Huoltaja* 1919–1920; Bruno Sarlin, *Sotaorpojen huollon järjestely*. *Huoltaja* 1919, 69–72, 86–8; Kaarninen, *Punaorvot*.

I, widow Hilta Räsänen, ask for information about those orphans' papers I sent—have the papers arrived and have you dealt with the papers officially. I sent the papers this month to Helsinki. Soon the children's school will begin and I don't know from where I can get support. I ask you to send me a message if anything is missing from the papers. You have not answered my letter, so I ask that action be taken as soon as possible that I know what I must do with my children's schooling. From here I can't get help and I am in need with respect. Hilta Räsänen.<sup>20</sup>

Regarding the Red widows' difficulty in getting help and making their voices heard, one mother asked an elementary school teacher to contact a Social Democrat MP, hoping the MP could influence the widow's grants. According to the letter, the widow was in an unfortunate condition and asked someone for help through the teacher. The widow and her children had survived on their own for more than a year, but then their means had run out. The elementary school teacher wrote that the municipal poor care authorities were indifferent to the widow's circumstances.<sup>21</sup> Another widow, Hilma Savander, wrote a request for assistance directly to the Ministry, addressing it to "honorable gentlemen." Hilma explained that she had a small cottage where she lived with her five children. The cottage was in poor condition, and the roof was leaking. She had asked the local poor relief board for a grant, but the decision-makers refused to give a grant or a loan. Hilma Savander wrote to the Department of Social Affairs: "Gentlemen, please take note of my writing."<sup>22</sup>

The Ministry of Social Affairs had received alarming information about the conditions of the Red families across Finland, and the state authorities understood that the families had become a great financial burden for the local government. The Ministry of Social Affairs began in 1919 to pay subsidies to the municipalities for the poor relief costs of these families. This decision can be seen as a compromise where the municipalities and the state divided the poor relief costs of the Reds' children, and the Finnish state saw it as an obligation to help the Red families. When the municipality received the state subsidy, it meant the control by the Ministry of Social

<sup>20</sup>NAF, MSA, DP. Private enquiries. Hilta Räsänen's letter to the Ministry of Social Affairs, 29 July 1923.

<sup>21</sup>NAF, MSA, DP. Private enquiries. Elementary school teacher V. Pekkala's letter to Member of Parliament Taavi Pöyhönen, 11 November 1919.

<sup>22</sup>NAF, MSA, DP. Private enquiries. Hilma Savander's letter to the Ministry of Social Affairs, 22 July 1919.



Affairs both for the local poor relief authorities and the Red widows. The financial assistance was directed primarily to children, not to mothers. Childcare had to meet certain quality standards defined by the Ministry. However, not all municipalities were willing to accept the state subsidy because it would have meant tighter state control of the local poor relief board and authorities.

The Ministry of Social Affairs drew up written instructions for the use of the state subsidy, and these instructions formed the relationship between the mother, the local poor relief board, and the Ministry of Social Affairs. The state subsidy program gave the Ministry of Social Affairs and municipal poor relief authorities the possibility to use power over the widowed mother. By signing the contract, the mother lost some of her custody rights. There was a threat that if she did not follow the contract, her children could be taken away from her.<sup>23</sup>

The contract included several obligations for the mother. She had to keep her home and children clean, control the children's free time and education, and tend to the children's health. The morals of the widowed mother came under special surveillance. The children's upbringing was the most important task of the widowed mother. The authorities were suspicious whether the mothers would be able to teach a love of the fatherland to their children.<sup>24</sup> The sexual behavior of mothers was under special control. The Red widow's position as a woman without a husband in the household was seen as a potential threat to the moral stability of the nation. Angela Smith notes in her study on the widows of the First World War that women were subjected to a great deal of distrust regarding their morality. If a war widow did not behave in the expected way, her pension could be stopped. An illegitimate child could be another reason for suspending the pension. The war widow was seen as an unruly widow and an unfit mother.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Viljo Hytönen, Suomen sotaorpojen huolto: Selonteko viranomaisten toimenpiteistä. Assistance des orphelins de guerre en Finlande. *Revue sociale* 1920, 605–12; Viljo Hytönen, Suomen sotaorpojen huolto. La protection les orphelins de guerre en Finlande. *Revue sociale* 1923, 13–18.

<sup>24</sup> Viljo Hytönen, Suomen sotaorpojen huolto: Selonteko viranomaisten toimenpiteistä. Assistance des orphelins de guerre en Finlande. *Revue sociale* 1920, 605–12; Eemil Tolonen, Sotaorpothuolto meillä nykyään. *Huoltaja* 1923, 157–60, 165–8; Alpo Lumme, Sotaorpojen hoito Tampereella: Selostus sotaorpojen hoidon kunnallisesta järjestelystä. *Huoltaja* 1923, 101–2; Sotaorpokysymyksiä. *Huoltaja* 1920, 90–1.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, *Discourses Surrounding British Widows*, 2.

Inspectors from the Ministry of Social Affairs and the local poor relief board made home visits to control the Red widows' behavior. The Red widows were not expected to honor their husbands' memory, because it would have been an insult to the values of White Finland. Strict morality and restrained behavior in the relationships with men were expected of the Red widows. These visits revealed that widows had given birth to illegitimate children.<sup>26</sup> Among the Tampere-based Red widows, nine per cent (14 women) had become mothers during their widowhood. The Ministry of Social Affairs had made special instructions for inspectors on how to reprimand women who were suspected of immoral behavior:

According to reports received by the Ministry of Social Welfare, there are cases where the mother has given birth outside marriage. In due course, the mother must first be warned in private, and—if this does not help—through the local poor relief board. However, when a warning has to be invoked, it must be carefully assessed. It should not be made on the basis of rumors and complaints. It is also necessary to be able to distinguish an immoral life from a rather permissible relationship leading to a new marriage.<sup>27</sup>

The instruction was practical. For the poor relief, it was a great benefit if the poor relief costs of the Red families would decrease due to a new breadwinner in the household.

### RESISTANCE AND THE OPPORTUNITY FOR INTERACTION

In October 1924, 15 Red widows from a small mill community near Tampere sent a joint letter to the Chief Inspector of the Ministry of Social Affairs. This letter proved how the widows understood themselves as an emotional community and how they shared their collective experience of humiliation. With this letter, the widows made an appeal against the local poor relief board and complained of the inappropriate treatment they had received. The newspapers had reported that Parliament would give the

<sup>26</sup> Viljo Hytönen, Suomen sotaorpojen huolto: Selonteko viranomaisten toimenpiteistä. Assistance des orphelins de guerre en Finlande. *Revue sociale* 1920, 605–12; Eemil Tolonen, Sotaorpothuolto meillä nykyään. *Huoltaja* 1923, 157–60, 165–8; Alpo Lumme, Sotaorpojen hoito Tampereella: Selostus sotaorpojen hoidon kunnallisesta järjestelystä. *Huoltaja* 1923, 101–2.

<sup>27</sup> Eemil Tolonen, Piirteitä lastenhuollosta ja sotaorpojen huollosta meillä erikseen. *Huoltaja* 1922, 13–14.

state subsidies to the local poor relief boards for grants to Red families, but the widows were disappointed that the local poor relief authorities had not tried to apply for the state subsidy. Through the joint letter, these women tried to get support from the state authorities.<sup>28</sup> They wrote:

We are completely unaware if we are getting state aid for our orphans [...] We would urge the ministry [Ministry of Social Affairs] to take care of this matter and organize it so that the mothers will get a maintenance contract [...] All of our matters are such that for a quick improvement we kindly ask that our matter be taken account of and the Inspection Department will improve our situation. As we think we have been oppressed several years. In this time, several mothers have broken and lost their health, many mothers fight with lung and heart diseases or are else weak because of insufficient subsistence.<sup>29</sup>

Phil Leask has asked whether humiliation can be refused or rejected by the intended victim, but he found this unlikely because of power relations.<sup>30</sup> However, there was resistance among the Red widows, and a few of them began to enforce their rights and to question the principles of the poor relief practices in their domicile.

The mothers had compiled a statistical summary of the support they had received and provided clear justifications for their claims, describing the abusive treatment they had experienced. The detailed report provided information on the children's circumstances, the poor relief they received, and their rental costs and fixed expenses. The letter was formally polite, detailed, and outlined demands that the widows considered reasonable. They demanded, among other things, that the poor relief board should enter into a contract with them in which the obligations of the parties would be stated. The widows understood that the contract between the local poor relief board, Ministry of Social Affairs, and widowed mother would safeguard their rights as recipients of the benefit to which they were

<sup>28</sup> NAF, MSA, DP. Private enquiries. Chief Inspector Viljo Hytönen's correspondence with Hämeenkyrö Red widows, 1924–1925.

<sup>29</sup> NAF, MSA, DP. Private enquiries. Fanny Kallio's letter on the behalf of the 15 widows to the Ministry of Social Affairs, 15 October 1924.

<sup>30</sup> Leask, *Losing Trust in the World*, 129–42.

entitled.<sup>31</sup> They did not understand the maintenance contract as humiliating; instead, they believed that it would be easier to live under the contract.

The loss of the right to vote as a result of receiving poor relief was very humiliating for the Red widows. In the joint letter, the widows wrote that the local government had stolen their right to vote, and they thought that it was against the law. Actually, they had lost the rights of citizenship by losing the right to vote. Both Finnish men and women were granted the right to vote and the right to stand as candidates for the new unicameral parliament in 1906. However, the most democratic representative system in Europe still excluded a number of citizens from suffrage. The exclusion concerned people who had not paid their taxes during the previous two years and people who received regular help from the poor relief. These people had not fulfilled the requirements of economic independence.<sup>32</sup> The electoral law gave the local election committees leeway in interpreting who had the right to vote, for example, by how regular or temporary support was defined.<sup>33</sup>

This joint letter proves that communication with the authorities in high places was not easy for the women with little formal education. The writer of this letter had basic literacy skills, but the style proves that writing was difficult. The letter included the conventions of the spoken dialect. Even though the writer did not know grammar or how to formulate the official complaint, she was strict and determined in her argumentation. The letter resulted in an inspection from the Ministry of Social Affairs and the inspector's negotiations with the local poor relief board. The widows were given promises of better support.<sup>34</sup>

However, as the correspondence continued, the local poor relief board did not keep its promises and it had a contradictory interpretation of the Ministry's instructions. In the next letter, the widows wrote a more detailed description about several grievances and the exceptionally difficult conditions of some mothers and children, poverty, diseases such as lung disease, and unhealthy living conditions:

<sup>31</sup> NAF, MSA, DP. Private enquiries. Viljo Hytönen's correspondence with Hämeenkyrö Red widows.

<sup>32</sup> Harjula, *Excluded from Universal Suffrage*, 101–119.

<sup>33</sup> Harjula, *Köyhä, kelvoton, kansalainen?*, 4–19.

<sup>34</sup> NAF, MSA, DP. Private enquiries. Emil Tolonen's letter to widow Fanni Kallio, 8 November 1924.

Hilda Virtanen's family is homeless [mother and children living with grandparents] all in the one room and the eldest son suffers from tuberculosis, he has now tried to be at school and then has four more children and a father in prison. The family received a grant of FIM 100 a month if the old mother did not take care of the children, it would have been dead and bad with such a grant and miserable it is when the mother try to earn from the world for to stay alive and that children will survive and always wait for her husband to get out of jail, how the miserable society bullies the father as well as mother and innocent children get to suffer. Mothers will break down, those grant amounts must be maximized, mothers will not be able to work hard anymore, age will be for many and enough.<sup>35</sup>

This episode describes the possibility of interaction with the authorities and trust in the Ministry, even though the Red widows criticized the way society had treated them.<sup>36</sup> Widow Beda Suojanen continued the correspondence with the Ministry the following year. She wrote that she was a seamstress but unable to work regularly on a daily basis because of illnesses. Additionally, there were no working opportunities during winter. She again requested maintenance contracts for the orphans, writing:

Because of the circumstances, I must turn to You and ask for Your favored contribution, help, and advice. As the Mr. Inspector saw and heard, we mothers and orphans are not here in Kyröskoski of Hämeenkyrö in an enviable position. In spite of the past years, the authorities of the municipality did not ask for the state grant under the law to our children and now that we were forced to ask for it again and again, when we had exhausted our strength and sickness and lack did not leave our homes for a moment. [...] We have asked the chairman of the Poor Relief Board for maintenance contracts for our orphans, but he has replied that the municipality has not used them. We would ask the Lord Inspector to send them here to the foolish people, too, and let us know, because when they arrive, we can go and get them.<sup>37</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Finnish Parliament discussed every year the amount of the state subsidy given to the municipalities for the

<sup>35</sup>NAF, MSA, DP. Private enquiries. Fanny Kallio's joint letter, 17 November 1924.

<sup>36</sup>NAF, MSA, DP. Private enquiries. Inspector Emil Tolonen's letter to widow Fanni Kallio, 8 November 1924.

<sup>37</sup>NAF, MSA, DP. Private enquiries. Beda Suojanen's letter to the Inspector Emil Tolonen.

subsistence of the Red families. Especially the left-wing MPs made initiatives for the pensions of the Red widows and children. However, these propositions did not yield results.<sup>38</sup>

### COMPENSATION: THE RIGHT TO A PENSION

We widows of the Reds have otherwise suffered all kinds of ridicule, in addition to our other sufferings. The chance of living is so hard.<sup>39</sup>

During the Second World War, the attitudes towards Red veterans and Red widows changed. In the middle of the crisis, it was important to seek national unity and to bind the defeated side to the fatherland. White widows, orphans, and injured war veterans had already received pensions in 1918. In 1941, disabled Red war veterans began to get payments. The Finnish Parliament appointed a committee to investigate the possibility of beginning to pay pensions to Red widows as well. It was the last chance for the Finnish state to offer formal compensation to these women when they were of retirement age or approaching it. In 1943, the average age of these women was slightly over sixty. Among Tampere widows, 58 per cent had reached the age of sixty (Table 7.1).

The Finnish Cabinet made the final decision on pensions for Red widows on 28 January 1943.<sup>40</sup> The widows received the information about the pensions from the newspapers, radio, and public announcements.<sup>41</sup>

**Table 7.1** The age of Tampere red widows in 1943

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
40–49	2
50–54	9
55–59	31
60–64	21
65–69	20
Over 70	17

<sup>38</sup> Documents of the Finnish Parliament, 1918–1930.

<sup>39</sup> National Archives of Finland (NAF), The Archive of the Assistance committee of the widows of the war in 1918 (Ass. Comm. 1918), Ea: Letters 1942–1945 (EA), Eufrosyne Nieminen's application.

<sup>40</sup> Committee report 1942:8; Partanen, Punaleskien eläkkeet 1943.

<sup>41</sup> *Kansan Lehti*, 12 March 1942.

More than 6000 pension applicants were registered in 1942 and 1943. The application process was complicated for people who were unaccustomed to completing a form including 32 questions. The widows had difficulties dealing with so many officials, and they did not understand the role of all these questions in the application process. For many older widows, writing was difficult. They were asked to fill in the form conscientiously and clearly, and they were advised to ask for help from another person if their ability to write was poor.

The application required several certifications, like a certificate of good conduct (meaning that the applicant had not lost her civil rights), a doctor's certificate, and a pay statement. Additionally, local poor relief authorities made an estimation of the widow's financial status. A certificate informing of the dead husband's duties in the Red Guard during the war had to be included. The pension was not universal, and many rejections were made, especially in 1942 during the committee work and in 1943.<sup>42</sup> If the husband had participated in murders and killings, the widow did not have the right to the pension.<sup>43</sup> The pension was not granted if the widow had remarried. In the first stage, only the poorest widows received the pension, not those with satisfactory living conditions. In addition, if they had sons fighting in the war, the wartime allowances influenced the widowed mother's pension decisions.

The Red widows' pension was a first remarkable gesture of goodwill from the Finnish state to women who had lived in poverty, worked hard, and brought up their children.<sup>44</sup> The common experience of the Red widows in 1943 and 1944 was that they had not received any assistance from society after the Civil War and during the 1920s and the 1930s, as Hilda Mänty wrote:

In my conscience, I have made the most of my talents as any other Finnish woman. After my husband was killed, I was left with a 12-day-old boy and only 60 marks of money and no other property, our home was only at the beginning of establishment. There was no shelter from poor relatives or society, only later did I get FIM 50 a month from child protection. I received no security from society, but society takes a lot from me.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Partanen, *Punaleskien eläkkeet* 1943.

<sup>43</sup> This restriction was removed in 1945.

<sup>44</sup> Partanen, *Punaleskien eläkkeet* 1943.

<sup>45</sup> NAF, EA, Ass. Comm. 1918. Hilda Mänty's application.

After more than 20 years, it was difficult to get information about the husband's duties during the Civil War. For the widows, it might have been difficult to return in their minds to the tragic circumstances of 1918. Fanny Kivistö tried in her letter to the Social Minister to report her husband's fate:

I am 54 years old and I would hope that I would not be ousted any more. I have honorably raised four children alone and I have not received any support and it feels bitter to so late apply for this kind of allowance when the war widows now can receive their pensions without question, and the Rebels had some part to our great independence and my husband Heikki Kivistö was a very respectable working man in the company of all his friends and however he was shot when he was keeping guard over civilians, and it feels very sad to think that my son is at war and is devoted to guard our borders there far away. I can't write more but I hope that you will not forget me anymore.<sup>46</sup>

Vilhelmiina Kauppinen wrote herself on the pension form about her husband's fate and the problems she had with the certificate: "In 1918 2 April 20.30 my husband was picked up from home and I haven't seen him since. The men who have seen him fallen are dead, so I have not been able to claim [he is] verifiably dead."<sup>47</sup>

The widows did not understand or did not remember the state's role and state grants organized by the Ministry of Social Affairs after the Civil War and during the 1920s and 1930s. The common experience was that they had lived alone without any societal aid. Now they had to prove that they needed the pension, and they wanted to highlight their struggles after the Civil War. Even those women who had written on the pension form that they had received support from the local poor relief board or child welfare board had the experience that they had not received any assistance from society. The poor relief they had received had left them with the experience of humiliation and ostracism.

<sup>46</sup>NAF, EA, Ass. Comm. 1918. Fanny Kivistö's application, 22 January 1943.

<sup>47</sup>NAF, EA, Ass. Comm.1918. Vilhelmiina Kauppinen's application, 26 May 1942.



## WOUNDED CONFIDENCE

There were 102 Red widows in Tampere who had the opportunity to send in a pension application. In all, one third of these women made an application and received the pension. Weakened health, reduced working capacity, and poverty were common for all those widows to whom the pension was granted. Despite their health problems, they were still trying to work or at least take care of their children's household. Many statements written by the Tampere poor relief board included comments on the destitute conditions. The property of the Red widows consisted of nothing more than clothes and modest home furnishings. However, some of them had to submit the application twice. These women understood the pension as compensation, but their trust in the institution decreased because of the very complicated application process and the rejected applications. Additionally, the Ministry of Social Affairs changed the rules several times, and this caused embarrassment among the applicants.<sup>48</sup>

Maria Matilda Vilander's letter is a typical description of the widow's circumstances. It proves how, for an elderly person, it was difficult to understand the bureaucracy between authorities like the Ministry and the municipal poor relief board and to know who was deciding on her pension.

Thus, I humbly ask whether I will receive that 1918 Rebel Widow's Pension. I sent those papers back in the day there and I have waited very long. I went some time ago to the municipal poor relief board, asking about it, but they answered that they don't know anything about it. They encouraged me to approach the honored ministry. Since I lost my husband I have lived in poverty and in need. Three children, one girl and two boys left young, and for them I have worked night and day until they reached the age to go to earn. Then I lost my health and cancer came and I have had five operations and after that I have not been healthy anymore. My other diseases include heart disease and gallstones. Since 1939, I have been incapable of work [...] I have not been able to pay my rent for four months. And I don't know how

<sup>48</sup> NAF, EA, Ass. Comm. 1918. See also Partanen, Punaleskien eläkkeit. When the Civil War of 1918 Widows Relief Commission began its work, it enrolled 5500 widows as grant applicants, and the Relief Committee's archive contains over 6000 received applications in total. Tampere Red widows have been retrieved from the material because their names were known. Of the 162 widows in Tampere, 24 had died between 1919 and 1941 before it was possible to claim a pension and 30 entered a new marriage, which excluded them from the pension.

to get by this winter. So I humbly ask you to lend your helping hand by granting me a small pension.<sup>49</sup>

The decision of the Ministry of Social Affairs was in many cases inconsistent with the widows' own sense of justice. These women wrote themselves to the Ministry complaining about the decision that they thought of as unfair. The rejection of an application was a severe disappointment because they had understood that the time for compensation had come. Obviously, one of the reasons for the activation of the Red widows' pension was the ongoing war. Not only that, at a time when unanimity was required of the nation, it was appropriate to include the part that had lost in the 1918 Civil War. In addition, municipal welfare and social assistance authorities understood that wartime meant low incomes for elderly widows. In many cases, their children had helped them with living costs, and now the young men were undertaking military service.

In the application form, the widow had to declare, in addition to her own income, all the assistance she received from her children. According to the Poor Law (1922), adult children had a conditional maintenance obligation to their parents. This meant that an adult child had to give financial support to parents in need if the child had the means to do so.

The local poor relief board held the view that children had a duty to support parents, and they estimated the income level of daughters and sons. It was self-evident that the children living in the same household with their mother shared the living costs. In many cases, the Tampere poor relief authorities wrote on the widow's pension form that widow's livelihood was entirely dependent on her son's income and "the standard of living is very modest although not deficient."<sup>50</sup> The situation was more complicated when the children had their own families, however; the social authorities estimated the incomes of married children as well as their spouses' income and then drew a conclusion regarding the widowed mother's economic status.

In March 1943, the newspaper *Kansan Lehti* wrote that all applicants could not get the allowance that year because the grant for the pensions was not sufficient.<sup>51</sup> The Red widows had seen themselves as a uniform group who had gone through the same trials and had suffered humiliation

<sup>49</sup> NAF, EA, Ass. Comm. 1918. Maria Matilda Vilander's application, 20 October 1943.

<sup>50</sup> NAF, EA, Ass. Comm. 1918. Ida Maria Lundan's application.

<sup>51</sup> *Kansan Lehti*, 2 March 1943. See also *Kansan Lehti* 12 March 1942 and 29 January 1943.

and ridicule. As an emotional community, they worked in the same factories, and they knew each other's circumstances. There was a great confusion among the widows when some received a higher pension than others, and a great anger arose if no pension had been granted at all. This caused distrust toward society and doubts and envy among the widows. The pension scheme was breaking the collective experience and the widows' sense of solidarity with each other. The letters of complaint addressed to the Ministry tell of the wounded trust towards society.<sup>52</sup>

Widow Vilhelmiina Mänty wrote:

I hope that my application will not be rejected because of what I now earn, because my age-weakened eyes I don't see to do my work and when as an old person you must change line of work it is difficult and without society's aid I became a burden for my son if he comes back healthy from the war for he is much more conscientious soldier than many of those fallen soldiers on the White side 1918 and whose mothers society has all the time cared for.<sup>53</sup>

The war time caused many problems for these women. Many mothers lost sons who had been their only support and had brought security to their lives. Anna Lydia Malm wrote how she was a mother who had undergone several trials. Her son had died in the Winter War and her other son was away at war, as were her daughters' husbands. As her children had their own families, they could not support their mother. Another widow had lost the income she received because her son was away at war, but as the son had married, the conscript's allowance instead went to his young wife.<sup>54</sup>

Ilmi Vesanen wrote that "should I be as entitled to get from that desk (public funds) as those others, who had better livings. I should not ask if I were healthy. I must always get debt and pay it back when I am able to work, it is impossible to get further."<sup>55</sup> Vilhelmiina Mänty could not understand why all the other Red widows working in the same company

<sup>52</sup>NAF, EA, Ass. Comm. 1918. Applications of Ilmi A. Vesanen, Vilhelmiina Mänty, Anna Saarela.

<sup>53</sup>NAF, EA, Ass. Comm. 1918. Vilhelmiina Mänty's application. Letters to the Ministry of Social Affairs, 18 August 1943. See also 10 January 1944, 24 July 1944.

<sup>54</sup>NAF, EA, Ass. Comm. 1918. Anna Lydia Malm's application: letter to the Ministry of Social Affairs; NAF, EA, Ass. Comm. 1918. Anna Salmela's letter to the Ministry of Social Affairs.

<sup>55</sup>NAF, EA, Ass. Comm. 1918. Ilmi Vesanen's application.

as her got the pension and only she was left without it. She wrote that those in power should understand that citizens of the republic should not leave others in the shadows, and she called for equality because she understood that all widows at the factory lived in similar circumstances.

Tuulikki Henriksson was disappointed and wrote two letters of complaint about her mother's rejected pension applications. The first letter was addressed to the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the second to Minister Eino Kilpi. She wondered why her mother's application was rejected. Hilma Henriksson was a 60-year-old factory worker and had raised her two children alone without any aid from society. Tuulikki lived with her mother. She argued that many of the Red widows working in the same factory and living in better circumstances had been granted a pension. She even mentioned the names of these women. Tuulikki and her mother did not trust the inspector of Tampere poor relief board who had written the statement on Hilma Henriksson's pension application. The daughter suspected that the inspector was incompetent because the statement mentioned the pension Hilma would get from the Finlayson company. The inspector had taken into account Hilma's future pension. Hilma was still working for the Finlayson company, and the inspector was informed of the situation of Hilma and her children. In 1945, a pension was granted to Hilma Henriksson.<sup>56</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Civil War of 1918 had defined the lives of the Red widows and their children for the years to come. The atmosphere in Finnish society changed during the Second World War: First, the Red veterans received state subsidies, and in 1943, state pensions for widows were introduced. The pension process involving the Ministry of Social Affairs reflects the collective experience of the widows. By filling in the application form, the widows got the opportunity to write and give an interpretation in their own words of their experiences over the last 25 years, and these writings—with their unclear and poor handwriting—shed light on the widows' experience of society.

<sup>56</sup> NAF, EA, Ass. Comm 1918. Hilma Henriksson's application: The statement of Tampere poor relief board on Hilma Henriksson's application, 29 January 1944; Tuulikki Henriksson's letter to the Ministry of Social Affairs, 28 August 1944; Tuulikki Henriksson's letter to Eino Kilpi, 26 July 1945.

The common experience of the Red widows was based on the shared status in society and the shared living conditions. The way they systematically called themselves Red widows or Rebel widows in their applications tells of a strong common experience and sense of community. They wanted to bring this out clearly and, at the same time, remember their fallen spouses.

The everyday life of the Red families in the post-Civil War years was a struggle to make ends meet. They lived in the same areas in the same blocks, and they shared similar domestic conditions and similar work in the same factory halls, and this had strengthened their feeling of solidarity and strengthened the community. A joint letter of 15 widows in 1924 manifested their agency and effort to try to fight against the experienced injustice. Via these processes, an emotional community had formed.

The widows were active to report their fight against poverty and how in the 1940s—during the war—they were old, sick women losing their ability to work. They had in common the encounters with the local poor welfare authorities and the experience of humiliation. This position shaped the Red widows' everyday lives and their experience of society, especially because they also lost civil rights and the right to vote as poor relief recipients. These processes formed the widows' collective experience of society.

The common perception was that society had taken much from them but given very little. Now their sons were at war defending the shared fatherland, and the mothers worried whether their boys would return alive from the war. The mothers thought that it was unfair that their sons should be forced after the war to maintain their old mothers. The municipal poor relief boards had not gained their trust, which also reflected their experience that they had never received any help and had, in 1918, been left totally alone.

The promises on pensions in 1942 and 1943 had given the Red widows the feeling that they would receive compensation for the suffering of a quarter-century. The great disappointment came when they noticed that not all applicants could get the pensions at once—they had to wait. Additionally, the varying amount of the pension was considered confusing, as their circumstances, incomes, and salaries from the factory work were similar. This caused envy and suspicion among women who had known each other for decades and shared a collective experience. However, they believed and relied on the state, people in the high places, and the Ministry of Social Affairs. The widows began to write letters of complaint where they tried to complete their application and to explain their situation to the recipient at the Ministry. They held a different position when writing to the Ministry of Social Affairs, as the addressee was not someone they knew or had encountered personally. The letters of complaint to the

Ministry of Social Affairs spelled out the widows' view of the Civil War and even gave them the opportunity to express criticism.

However, a pension intended as a major reform broke up the emotional community of the Red widows and gave rise to suspicion and envy. During the application process and wait for the decisions, the widows felt that they had been betrayed and overlooked again. Questions such as why some had missed out completely and why some got more than others arose. Pensions of different sizes and negative decisions hurt trust in the state and society, as the widows had had great confidence in the Ministry and the state. Now this confidence was wounded, and the emotional community was broken by the pension process.

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PART III

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## Experiencing Institutional Spaces



## CHAPTER 8

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# Managing Disability and Constructing the Nation in Interwar Poland: The Lviv Disabled Veterans' Home

*Oksana Vynnyk*

### INTRODUCTION

Their home stands lonely on the hill among the wreaths  
Made from the black lace of spruces and the white lace of snow,  
Strange people lie inside it, far from the shore of an incomprehensible  
country,  
The country of people alive and insane  
Marja Kazecka “Disabled Veterans’ Home”<sup>1</sup>

Marja Kazecka’s verse suggests that residents of the Lviv Disabled Veterans’ Home were separated from the rest of society. They were far from “the country of people alive and insane.” According to the poet, this

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<sup>1</sup> *Biały Orzeł*, 1 January 1930, 7; my translation.

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separation was visible in urban space, as the institution was located on a hill. Scholars have indeed argued that such institutions excluded disabled persons from everyday life.<sup>2</sup> More inclusive projects based on the concept of the Garden City aimed to prevent the segregation of disabled veterans in Poland. The Lviv architect Roman Feliński believed that unbearable social conditions in modern cities caused physical and cultural degeneration, and he suggested establishing special garden urban settlements or agricultural colonies where disabled veterans would live close to healthy neighbors and be an integral part of society. Despite this new vision, the state initially chose traditional forms of institutionalization over the implementation of such new models for veterans who needed special care.<sup>3</sup> The sociocultural environment, and arrangements—including the “architecture of injury” that often separate disabled persons from the rest of society—are crucial in the construction of disability as a community bound together by discrimination and exclusion.<sup>4</sup>

Disability historians have acknowledged that “disability” itself is a socially constructed notion, and that an individual’s particular impairments “have no meanings in and of themselves.”<sup>5</sup> Rather, the experience of bodily or psychological difference is mediated by a complex set of social and cultural beliefs and conditions.<sup>6</sup> Experience as an analytical category studies both social reality and the cultural process that interprets social reality.<sup>7</sup> Although the understanding of disability changed over time, the experience of war disability has its distinctive features. War disability typically affected adults, who generally did not want to challenge social norms; rather, they preferred to return to conventional, masculine roles and a “normalized existence with ordinary street invisibility.”<sup>8</sup> Through studying documents, the disabled veterans’ press, and local Lviv newspapers, the chapter explores how the state facility and its location influenced the

<sup>2</sup> Kinder, *Architecture of Injury*, 66.

<sup>3</sup> Feliński, *Kwestia mieszkaniowa*; Roman Feliński, Project założenia kolonji inwalidów na obszarze 200 morgowym Fundacji St. Badeniego w gminie Radziechów, w Galicji. *Inwalida Polski* 3/1919, 1–4. In his model, Polish disabled soldiers had to become useful, loyal citizens who would live full lives; moreover, this new “architecture of injury” would become the first step in a full-scale transformation of society.

<sup>4</sup> Kinder, *Architecture of Injury*, 65–7.

<sup>5</sup> Gerber, Introduction, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Parr and Butler, *New Geographies of Illness*, 20.

<sup>7</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 11–14.

<sup>8</sup> Gerber, Preface to the Enlarged and Revised Edition, xiii.

veterans' experience of disability and how the institution shaped the community and its self-representation. It examines the interplay between various discourses constructed by the disabled veterans and the military and civilian authorities, which together formed the Lviv institution and shaped the injured soldiers' experiences of disability—or, to put it differently, how their wartime wounds translated into lives of disablement. However, the soldiers were hardly passive, and I will argue that activism and resistance to disciplinary regulations were crucial factors that shaped this state facility and the daily experience of its residents.

Due to the unstable political situation in the eastern borderland and Lviv, the largest city in the region, the social policy of the Polish state was especially important in these territories. Before 1918, the Polish lands were divided between the Russian, German, and Austrian empires, and as a result, sometimes Poles fought on opposing sides in the various imperial armies. The dissolution of the Austrian Empire led to the Ukrainian–Polish war of 1918–19 for the eastern part of the former province of the “Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria,” as two contesting national projects proclaimed their rights to this land. Lviv, a former provincial capital, had an ethnically and religiously heterogeneous population. According to the official census of 1931, 50.4 per cent of city dwellers were Roman Catholics, 15.9 per cent were Greek Catholics, 31.9 per cent were Jewish, and 1.7 per cent were of another faith, but 63.5 per cent spoke Polish as their mother tongue, 24.1 per cent Yiddish or Hebrew, 7.8 per cent Ukrainian, and 3.5 per cent Ruthenian.<sup>9</sup> The city attained a central symbolic meaning for both national projects and became an epicenter of street fights in November 1918.

The Polish army won the war, but the Ukrainians did not accept the defeat, and the Ukrainian–Polish conflict became one of the important features of political life in interwar Poland. Because of the Ukrainian–Polish dispute, the ethnically and religiously mixed lands of former Eastern Galicia were officially incorporated into the Second Polish Republic only in March 1923 (although de-facto they had been part of Poland since July 1919).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the Lviv pogrom in November 1918 and increasing political anti-Semitism caused a tense relationship with the Jewish

<sup>9</sup> Mick, *Lemberg, Lwów, L'viv*, 211; Bonusiak, *Lwów w latach*, 191–5.

<sup>10</sup> Kuchabsky, *Western Ukraine*, 320–7.

community throughout the interwar era.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the border with the enemy state, the Soviet Union, added to the complexity of the political situation in the region.

The imperial past and the Ukrainian–Polish war of 1918–19 and the subsequent Soviet–Polish war of 1920–21 resulted in various groups of veterans cohabitating in the same territory. The largest organization of disabled servicemen, the Polish Union of Disabled Veterans, was founded in April 1919 in Warsaw. The main purpose of this organization was to represent disabled veterans and defend their rights. Among its main principles were ethnic, religious, and political neutrality, as well as the inclusion of every demobilized disabled soldier regardless of the army with which he had been affiliated. Legislation that would provide state benefits was the main focus of the Union’s activism in the early 1920s.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, parliamentarians considered the social program for disabled veterans as a means to strengthen the Polish influence and loyalty to the state in the eastern and western borderlands. After long debates over whether disabled soldiers who belonged to the national minority groups and imperial armies could be considered “Polish” disabled veterans, the parliament passed the inclusive legislation in March 1921. Disabled activists won the battle for benefits, and the Polish government provided assistance to all disabled servicemen regardless of their ethnic origin, religious beliefs, or army affiliation. The only exceptions were disabled soldiers of the Ukrainian Galician army who had fought against the Polish army during the Ukrainian–Polish war. Among the benefits provided by the Polish state was the right to institutional care in the Disabled Veterans’ Homes for severely disabled combatants. Only those whose bodies were considered damaged beyond repair and who could not become productive members of society were eligible to live in these institutions.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup>The Lviv pogrom took place after the Ukrainian army had left the city at the end of November 1918, and it was a punishment for the neutrality of the Jewish community during the Ukrainian–Polish conflict. Poles perceived the neutrality of the Lviv Jews as treason. Gauden, *Lwów—kres iluzji*.

<sup>12</sup>Związek Inwalidów Wojennych Rzeczypospolitej Polski. *Inwalida*, November 1928, 33–7. Despite its founding principles, in 1924 Jewish disabled soldiers created the Union of Organizations of Jewish Disabled Veterans, Widows, and Orphans due to the anti-Semitism of the Polish Union of Disabled Veterans. L. S., Jedmością silni. *Inwalida Żydowski*, 1 December 1926; J. B., Sprawiedliwości. *Inwalida Żydowski*, 1 February 1927, 1–2.

<sup>13</sup>Sejm Ustawodawczy, 54–63; Ustawa z dnia 18 marca 1921 roku poz. 195. *Dziennik Ustaw* 32/1921, 414–22; 1923. Rozporządzenie Ministra pracy i opieki społecznej poz. 659. *Dziennik Ustaw* 84/1923, 969–70.

Like any special architectural arrangements, “the architecture of injury” was a part of urban social space in Lviv and it shaped the urban experience of disability.<sup>14</sup> The Lviv Disabled Veterans’ Home was built in the neo-Romanesque style by Viennese architect Theophil Hansen in 1855–63.<sup>15</sup> It was located in the Żółkiewskie district, an area described in the *Illustrated Lviv Guidebook* (1925) as a “dirty and shabby northern part of the city populated by Jews.”<sup>16</sup> Despite its location, the Disabled Veterans’ Home was impressive. It consisted of three wings and had about 225 rooms. It was a modern facility with running water, gas, and electricity, surrounded by a park, in which a small chapel was built. The 1933 edition of the *Illustrated Lviv Guidebook* listed “the Disabled Veterans’ Home” among major public buildings and praised it for its well-planned space.<sup>17</sup>

The magnificent building also housed a complex history of social and political relations. By the 1920s, it was a special state facility that was part of the welfare system and embodied the social policy of the Polish government, but at the same time, it was an institution inherited from the imperial era. Not only did the Polish authorities use the Austrian building of the “Home,” but prewar Austrian disabled veterans continued to reside there, emphasizing the continuity of the Disabled Veterans’ Home. To complicate matters, the building also accommodated various military offices, a prosthesis factory, a school for disabled soldiers, a residence for veterans who were studying, a temporary hostel for disabled servicemen, and an orthopedic surgery and military hospital. However, as victims of the economic crisis, many of these institutions established for disabled veterans would be closed by the mid-1920s (Fig. 8.1).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Kinder, *Architecture of Injury*, 66.

<sup>15</sup> Orłowicz, *Ilustrowany przewodnik*, 168–9; DALO, f. 1, op. 33, spr. 831, ark. 39; Hansen was one of the architects who replanned Ringstrasse; he was the architect of the Austrian parliament, among other buildings. The fortress-like Lviv Disabled Veterans’ Home resembled another of his works, the Vienna Arsenal, and the Home manifested the influence of Viennese architectural trends on the provincial capital. Zhuk, *The Architecture*, 113; Purchla, *Patterns of Influence*, 134–5.

<sup>16</sup> Orłowicz, *Ilustrowany przewodnik*, 164.

<sup>17</sup> *Ilustrowany Przewodnik*, 10; DALO, f. 1, op. 33, spr. 831, ark. 39.

<sup>18</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 831, 39–9 *zv.*; DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 3689; CAW, I 300.62.65.

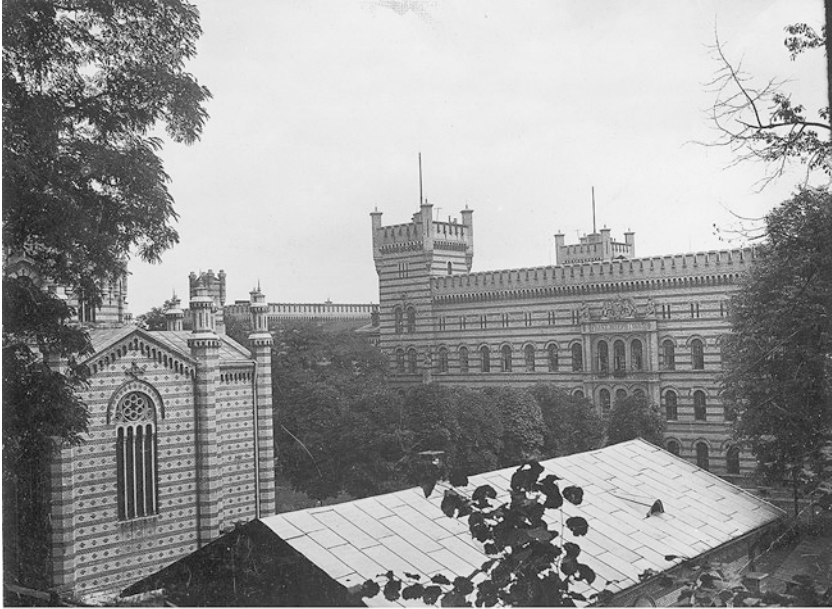


Fig. 8.1 The Lviv Disabled Veterans' Home (The National Library of Poland)

### THE STATE DISABLED VETERANS' HOME

**Admission Policies.** The right to reside in the state Disabled Veterans' Home was conditional: demobilized male soldiers were allowed to stay at the Home only if they were either 75–100 per cent disabled or were veterans with 47–75 per cent disability but could not perform paid labor because of mental disorders and could not receive adequate assistance at home.<sup>19</sup> In summer 1924, 194 disabled veterans resided at the Lviv Disabled Veterans' Home. The number of institutionalized servicemen decreased over the years; only 86 veterans resided at the institution in 1931. Among them were 61 disabled veterans who had served in 1914–21,

<sup>19</sup> Rozporządzenie Ministra pracy i opieki społecznej poz. 659. *Dziennik Ustaw* 84/1923, 969–70. Working under direct orders and guidelines from the state, special medical military commissions were responsible for determining the relationship between veterans' current health and their military service. Commissions calculated the percentage of the reduction of a veteran's ability to work and the degree to which they would need ongoing care. Zarządzenie Ministra Spraw, 122–8; Instrukcja ministra Spraw, 152–160.



15 prewar veterans, one participant in the January uprising of 1863–64, and nine people who did not enjoy the status of disabled veterans. The majority of the residents of the Lviv Disabled Veterans' Home were 100 per cent disabled.<sup>20</sup>

Institutionalization in the Disabled Veterans' Home meant the loss of personal freedoms, such as freedom of movement. Moreover, disabled veterans could be institutionalized against their will. They could not leave the Home without the permission of its administration. Residents could be granted "vacations," but they had to return to the institution or else the authorities would start an investigation. According to instructions issued in 1929, the Lviv province administration made decisions about the admissibility of disabled soldiers to the Disabled Veterans' Home. The Department of Assistance to Disabled Veterans conducted its own investigations into the applicants' families, and bureaucrats often delved into a family's most private and intimate details. Local authorities also refused to admit disabled veterans to the Disabled Veterans' Home when their health conditions were potentially dangerous to other residents of the institution.<sup>21</sup>

Before disabled veterans were placed in the Home, they had often spent years in military hospitals, victims of the convoluted procedures and policies involved in patient transfer, which delayed the process of moving to the Home.<sup>22</sup> For example, in spring 1927, the Lviv military hospital informed the Lviv Province administration that one of its patients, Michał Woźniak, did not need further medical treatment and had to leave the hospital. At the same time, the veteran applied for permission to reside in the Lviv Disabled Veterans' Home because his family could not care for him. The investigation of the family's finances and communication between the various levels of the local administration took more than two years. Woźniak was granted permission to move to the Disabled Veterans' Home only at the end of 1929.<sup>23</sup>

Veterans could also be removed from the Disabled Veterans' Home in the early 1920s if the medical commissions determined that there was an insufficient connection between military service and the individual's disability. However, in some cases, the administration actually suggested

<sup>20</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 1544, ark. 12; DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 3477, ark. 3–5 zv.

<sup>21</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 826, ark. 14, 73–81; DALO, f. 1, op. 33, spr. 1553, ark. 98–101 zv.; DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 826, ark. 13–13 zv., 38–9, 44, 124, 134–6; DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 504, ark. 33.

<sup>22</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 2535.

<sup>23</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 2906.

prolonging the veteran's stay so that another institution or job might be found for him, since he would otherwise be left homeless and without income. For instance, a soldier of the Polish army, Teodor Kubejko, continued to live in the Disabled Veterans' Home for years, despite the fact that he was injured not on the battlefield but in a railway accident.<sup>24</sup>

**Defending the "Right to the City."** The various branches of military and civilian administration had different visions of what constituted both institutional care and war-related disability, and in the early 1920s, bureaucrats often discussed different institutional models for caring for disabled servicemen. In 1923, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Labor requested that the Disabled Veterans' Home be transferred to its control.<sup>25</sup> Military and civilian medical professionals represented the Ministry of Military Affairs and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Labor during the negotiations. The representatives of both ministries shared the same opinion about disabled veterans and the institution. The officials agreed that veterans with a high level of disability had to be transferred from Lviv to the countryside, and they believed that these new circumstances would force the majority of disabled veterans to find work. In other words, Lviv military and civil bureaucrats considered residents of the Home to be loafers who used and abused state benefits.<sup>26</sup>

At the same time, other reports written by civilian authorities indicated that they opposed the effort by the Ministry of Military Affairs to transfer disabled soldiers from the Disabled Veterans' Home. The increasing tension between military and civilian bureaucrats led to years of struggle over the institutions for disabled veterans and highlight their varying bureaucratic approaches to this issue. The representatives of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Labor underlined that the transfer of disabled veterans to the countryside would have negative consequences for the Polish government. The eastern borderlands and Lviv constituted a special region where the various branches of the government had to cooperate to organize the welfare system for disabled veterans, and any failure of the authorities to support disabled soldiers could be used as anti-Polish propaganda by state enemies.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 495, ark. 76–122.

<sup>25</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 831, ark. 40–3 zv.

<sup>26</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 831, ark. 40–3 zv, 46.

<sup>27</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 831, ark. 65 zv–6.

Local officials also tried to use the “continuity” argument to keep the Disabled Veterans’ Home open. The province administration uncovered from the Viennese archive the founding documents that confirmed the establishment of the Home by Emperor Franz-Joseph as an institution for disabled veterans.<sup>28</sup> After negotiations in March 1924, civilian and military authorities ultimately divided the responsibilities for the institutions located in the building. The hospital of orthopedic surgery and the prosthesis factory were transferred to the Ministry of Social Welfare and Labor, while the Ministry of Military Affairs kept control over the care of veterans with a high percentage of disability.<sup>29</sup>

As the Ministry of Military Affairs maintained control over the management of severely disabled veterans, it continued to work on a plan to transfer these residents out of Lviv to the countryside. Among the many factors that influenced the Ministry’s plan was the resistance of local disabled veterans’ organizations as well as public opinion. The Lviv Organization for the Assistance to Blind Soldiers (“*Latarnia*”), the Little Poland Organization of Blind Soldiers (“*Spójnia*”), and the Union of Disabled Veterans of the Polish Republic protested to the local authorities in May 1924, and the Union even published a special booklet.<sup>30</sup>

Interestingly, the organizations mobilized many of the same arguments that the various authorities had used. The organizations emphasized that the Home had been founded as a residence for disabled veterans and had served as such for more than fifty years; they also contended that military authorities did not have the right to evict them. The Disabled Veterans’ Home, moreover, was situated in the region’s “metropolis” and could thus offer its residents the conveniences of modern urban life. It would be impossible to provide the same quality of life in any provincial town, and veterans would lack access to adequate medical and cultural services. Disabled veterans would also lose the employment opportunities that came with being in Lviv. The activists of “*Latarnia*” stressed the accessibility of the Disabled Veterans’ Home, and they underlined that blind soldiers had already learned the Home’s physical layout. Activists suspected that the authorities were trying to “hide” them from urban spaces and make them an invisible part of society. They explained that the governments of Western European countries had established special

<sup>28</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 831, ark. 112, 187–9.

<sup>29</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 831, ark. 118–18 zv.

<sup>30</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 831, ark. 134–5 zv.

institutions for disabled veterans in large cities and capitals, and so too should Poland.<sup>31</sup> Veterans were not passive victims in the experience of disability; rather, they defended what Henri Lefebvre called their “right to the city.”<sup>32</sup> Disabled soldiers effectively appealed to many of the same social and political priorities that had shaped their lives and service in the first place.

Among the defenders of the disabled veterans was Captain Dr. Józef Aleksiewicz, the founder and former head of the Lviv hospital of orthopedic surgery. Much like the disabled activists, he believed that servicemen were entitled to assistance and should continue to lobby for their interests. For Aleksiewicz, the Lviv Disabled Veterans’ Home was not only a veterans’ residence; it was also an educational and cultural institution that could strengthen the Polishness of the eastern borderlands.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the Disabled Veterans’ Home also acquired an additional symbolic meaning. It was a space that represented the Polish state project in Lviv.

Such opposition from disabled veteran organizations and some local bureaucrats was effective, and the Home was not closed down. In 1929, the military finally relinquished control and civilian authorities took over management of the Home. But the transfer was not seamless, and a dispute between the administrators of the Home and the military hospital over the attached park lasted about a year. In the summer of 1938, the military authorities again tried to regain control over part of the building. Although the local military officials requested the documents that confirmed the transfer of the building to the civilian authorities in 1929, employees from the Lviv province administration claimed that they were unable to find them.<sup>34</sup> However, it seems that the officials resisted the military authorities. In fact, the transfer of the institution to the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare in November 1929 was well-documented and these papers are publicly available today.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 831, ark. 134–5 zv.

<sup>32</sup> See Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 147–59. See also Harvey, *The Right to the City*, 23–40.

<sup>33</sup> Józef Aleksiewicz. W kwestji inwalidzkiej. *Inwalida*, 20 April 1924, 6–10.

<sup>34</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 831, ark. 159; DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 3689; DALO, f.1, op. 34, spr. 3729, ark. 3–8

<sup>35</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 3689.

## EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE DISABLED VETERANS' HOME

The Ministry of Military Affairs documents addressing the state's attempt to regulate daily life in the Home before 1929 are not well preserved. However, several newspaper articles paint a rather gloomy picture, including one published in *Inwalida* by a disabled veteran who visited his blind friends at the institution in 1925. He claimed that the residents of the Home did not have enough food and that their threadbare clothes confined them to the institution and its grounds. Veterans who spoke out, he reported, were expelled from the institution or punished.<sup>36</sup> The official document on food consumption at the Home differed from the newspaper articles. In 1925, for example, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare issued nutritional guidelines for Home residents. The officials underlined that the menu had to consist of a variety of dishes rich in proteins, fats, carbohydrates, and vitamins. The daily norm for veterans was 3643.9 calories, and they received, among other products, 800 g of bread, 250 g of meat, and 18 g of coffee. The Ministry also developed guidelines for nutritional substitutions depending upon availability and the season. In addition to food, residents of the Disabled Veterans' Home also received three cigarettes per day. These norms were not necessarily shared outside the administration, but the nutritional guidelines did have to be displayed.<sup>37</sup>

However, the press continued to publish the articles about the Home's shocking hygienic conditions, its lack of professional care, and the poor quality of its food. In 1929, the anonymous authors of *Biały Orzeł*, the Lviv newspaper for disabled veterans, demanded that authorities intervene and provide decent conditions for veterans.<sup>38</sup> Allegedly, the sorry state of affairs in the Home had serious consequences. In August 1928, *Inwalida* reported two suicides at the Lviv institution.<sup>39</sup> The same incident was reported in the Ukrainian newspaper *Novyi Chas*, which argued that the suicides were caused by the material hardship endured by the Home's disabled veteran residents. The journalist also mentioned that local Polish newspapers had ignored this case.<sup>40</sup> At that time, the Lviv institution for veterans was still under the control of military bureaucrats, and it was possible that the authorities had tried to prevent a public discussion.

<sup>36</sup> Guzik. List do Redakcji. *Inwalida*, 25 October 1925, 14.

<sup>37</sup> DALO, f. 1, op. 33, spr. 1544, ark. 22–6.

<sup>38</sup> TA. W sprawie pezpprawnej rumacji inwalidów z inwalidowni we Lwowie. *Biały Orzeł*, 15 August 1929, 2–3.

<sup>39</sup> Wcale nie janie... *Inwalida*, 12 August 1928, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Samovybystva v domi derzhavnykh invalidiv u Lvovi. *Novyi chas*, 20 August 1928.

Disabled activist and journalist Mironowicz published a rare outsider's account of his visit to the Lviv Disabled Veterans' Home in 1939. According to his article, disabled veterans were well taken care of, and food prepared at the Home could be served at the best restaurants. Although he was a disabled veteran himself, the visit was a very challenging experience for Mironowicz. He described the "macabre figures" in the park, but the worst place in the Home, in his view, was the room for servicemen with severe disabilities. Mironowicz was shocked by faces that looked like "death masks": "I do not know what to do with myself? Should I ask them something? Or should I leave ashamed?"<sup>41</sup> It is interesting that the journalist shared his shocking experience of exposure to disabled bodies, which were usually hidden from others, not with the general public but with veteran-readers of the journal for disabled servicemen (Figs. 8.2 and 8.3).



Fig. 8.2 The Disabled Veterans' Home, 1926–39 (The National Digital Archive)

<sup>41</sup> Mikołaj Mironowicz, *Blaski i cienie Legii Lwowskiej*. *Front Inwalidzki* 3–4/1939, 12.

**Fig. 8.3** Park near the Disabled Veterans' Home, 1926–39 (The National Digital Archive)



Nowadays, scholars challenge the idea that institutionalized disabled soldiers were “passive or voiceless” and could not influence their experience of institutionalization.<sup>42</sup> Conflicts between residents, with the administration, and with the rules were common at the Lviv Disabled Veterans’ Home after 1929, and their documentation has been well preserved. In general, the numerous clashes and disciplinary violations indicate the failure of the traditional model of institutionalization. Residents of the institution had different backgrounds and ethnicities, and they came from different Polish regions. Some veterans had mental conditions or suffered from alcoholism, both of which often exacerbated conflict with other residents.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Brumby, *A Painful and Disagreeable Position*, 48–9.

<sup>43</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 4126, ark. 2–9.

In August 1930, the Disabled Veterans' Home in Płock was closed, and 27 disabled veterans were transferred to the Lviv Home.<sup>44</sup> This resettlement of disabled veterans from other regions resulted in an even more heterogeneous environment. Nevertheless, the number of veterans residing at the institution also gradually decreased in the 1930s. In the summer of 1933, the commission that examined the work of the Home administration even recommended a reduction in the number of staff. In the end, in order not to increase the unemployment rate or to dismiss staff during the Great Depression, it was decided to reduce the employees' salaries.<sup>45</sup> By the 1930s, the Lviv Home became the only facility for institutionalized disabled soldiers in Poland, and its work showed the tension between the Polish government's managerial strategies and disabled residents' daily resistance to the disciplinary power of this institution.

**Forced Institutionalization.** Although many residents voluntarily chose to live in the Lviv Home, some were admitted against their will. State officials, guided by regulations and expert advice, could decide disabled soldiers' futures for them. For instance, in August 1930, Włodzimierz Skwirski was admitted to the Lviv Disabled Veterans' Home despite his wish to live with his fiancée. After treatment in a psychiatric hospital, local bureaucrats had decided to transfer Skwirski to the Home. They investigated the veteran's fiancée's background and concluded that she was not reliable enough to care for her disabled partner, who was addicted to morphine. However, in April 1931, Lviv province authorities sent a request to transfer Skwirski to another institution: his addiction to morphine rendered him ineligible for residence at the Home. The veteran, however, wished to stay in the institution, and he even demanded a separate room for himself and his wife. The local authorities refused to approve his request.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Skwirski violated the Disabled Veterans' Home's rules when his wife and dog moved in with him, and other disabled veterans, who lived in the same room, opposed this violation of their personal space.<sup>47</sup>

The relationship between Skwirski and the Home administrators deteriorated further after he accused them of financial fraud. Skwirski was

<sup>44</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 817, ark. 77.

<sup>45</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 3689, ark. 118–18 zv., 133.

<sup>46</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 826, ark. 73–81, 88, 100.

<sup>47</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 826, ark. 106–6 zv.



finally expelled from the institution in August 1931.<sup>48</sup> His story illustrates how some disabled veterans tried to lead a “normal” life and ignored the institution’s rules. They demanded accommodations that the institution simply could not provide. At the same time, while the administration had the power to admit or expel people from the Disabled Veterans’ Home, it took several months to evict Skwirski.

Disabled residents of the Lviv Home often suffered from various mental disorders. In August 1923, 74 disabled soldiers resided at the Kulparkiw Psychiatric Hospital in Lviv, and they constituted only about one quarter of institutionalized disabled veterans.<sup>49</sup> According to a report from 1931, among 61 disabled residents of the Lviv Disabled Veterans’ Home who had served in the military between 1914 and 1921, ten had various mental disorders.<sup>50</sup> Sometimes their conditions worsened, and their behaviors became dangerous to other veterans and the employees of the institution. In April 1931, the administration of the Home requested that Marjan Fischbach be transferred to the psychiatric hospital. According to their report, Fischbach had a “demoralizing” influence on other disabled residents and even threatened to shoot the director of the institution and his family.<sup>51</sup>

Two months later, in June 1931, Adolf Twardowski, the new director of the Disabled Veterans’ Home, wrote to the Lviv province administration about the veteran Kazimierz Klimczak, who had previously resided at the Home but whose behavior had resulted in him being transferred to the Kulparkiw Psychiatric Hospital. The administration of the Home refused to admit Klimczak to their institution again because of his dangerous history. Before institutionalization in the Kulparkiw hospital, the disabled veteran had threatened fellow veterans and nurses with a knife and a hammer. Considering that a dozen disabled soldiers might reside in one room, such behavior caused serious concerns for the administration.<sup>52</sup>

**The Role of the Family.** Institutionalized disabled veterans usually lacked close relatives or family members able to care for them. A few, however, were married but simply could not stay in their homes. In the early 1920s, several married disabled soldiers even tried to support their

<sup>48</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 826, ark. 73–81, 88, 100.

<sup>49</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 1553, ark. 79; Mironowicz, *Blaski i cienie Legii Lwowskiej. Front Inwalidzki 3–4/1939*, 11–12; DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 1544, ark. 12.

<sup>50</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 3477, ark. 3–5 zv.

<sup>51</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 4131, ark. 23–3 zv.

<sup>52</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 1553, ark. 79–88 zv.

children and spouse. They applied for a one-time payment in order to help their families cope with financial problems.<sup>53</sup> A payment of this kind was granted to veteran Piotr Flügel in May 1923. In his letter to the Lviv province administration, the disabled resident of the Home mentioned that he needed money to open a cigarette kiosk that would allow his wife to have a source of income.<sup>54</sup> As the traditional division of the gender roles assigned husbands to the role of breadwinner, disabled veterans tried to find ways to live up to this responsibility.

In many cases, veterans themselves—and occasionally their relatives—applied for residence at the Home.<sup>55</sup> Some disabled veterans could be readmitted to the Lviv Disabled Veterans' Home several times. Family members could also request that veterans be released from the Home. In cases where local authorities recognized relatives as suitable caretakers, they allowed veterans to leave the institution. Some disabled veterans, however, preferred to stay at the Lviv Disabled Veterans' Home.<sup>56</sup> For instance, Piotr Pycek, a former soldier of the Polish Legion, moved to the Home in 1935, complaining that his wife was starving him. Although he left the Disabled Veterans' Home in 1936 and moved back with his wife, he again applied for permission to return at the beginning of 1938. Pycek informed the authorities that his wife, Albina, had taken his allowance but had not taken care of him. In other cases, the wife not only took the veteran's money but also had other lovers and pursued an "immoral lifestyle."<sup>57</sup> In times of economic crisis and unemployment, disabled veterans' allowances became a very important source of income for some families. Relatives sometimes took advantage of disabled soldiers, and institutionalization was a way for these men to defend themselves.

Like other aspects of everyday life in the Disabled Veterans' Home, visits from relatives and friends were regulated. When five disabled veterans asked for permission to have visitors in their rooms twice per week, the province authorities refused. These residents reported that they were unable to move without wheelchairs, and it was inconvenient for them to

<sup>53</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 1179, ark. 25–45.

<sup>54</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 1179, ark. 44–5.

<sup>55</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 34, spr. 568, ark. 130; DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 1553; DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 1557; DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 3302; DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 4131, ark. 1.

<sup>56</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 34, spr. 565, ark. 89–104 zv.; DALO, f.1, op. 34, spr. 3092, ark. 46–9; DALO, f.1, op. 34, spr. 565, ark. 31–46; DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 1553, ark. 140; DALO, f.1, op. 34, spr. 1074, ark. 19.

<sup>57</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 34, spr. 565, ark. 31–46; DALO, f.1, op. 34, spr. 1074, ark. 19, 21.

meet visitors in the special room downstairs. However, a doctor testified that the disabled veterans in fact did have wheelchairs and could move downstairs using the electric elevator without harm to their health. Moreover, some of them went to cinemas, theatres, or the park near the Home, so they should certainly be able to meet their visitors in the special room.<sup>58</sup> These strict regulations divided the space of the institution into “private” and “public” parts. Families and friends could not see the private part, which was open only to residents and employees of the Home. This denied the veterans the privacy to meet with friends and relatives outside the designated public meeting space.

**Ethnic Conflict.** Tensions continued in the form of ethnic conflict. Technically, the administration of the Lviv Home did not classify servicemen according to their nationality or army affiliation. Rather, residents’ lists indicated only the percentage of disability and the diagnosis of Home residents.<sup>59</sup> However, while the administration showed little concern about the backgrounds of disabled servicemen, national and regional divisions caused many conflicts. For instance, although veterans of the Ukrainian People’s Republic (UNR) army<sup>60</sup> were allowed to reside at the Lviv Disabled Veterans’ Home, they did not always have a pleasant stay. In September 1931, the Central Ukrainian Committee in Warsaw requested that two Ukrainian veterans, who were about to be expelled, be allowed to remain temporarily at the Home. The members of the committee needed time to find them another residence.<sup>61</sup>

Antoni Slusarczyk, a veteran of the UNR army and Szymon Atrachowicz, an 85-year-old veteran of Denikin’s and the UNR armies, were not typical residents of the Lviv institution (and veterans in general). They had been transferred from the Płock Home to the Lviv Disabled Veterans’ Home in 1930. After this transfer, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare decided that the former soldiers did not have the right to reside at the Lviv

<sup>58</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 34, spr. 3729, ark. 18–20.

<sup>59</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 3477, ark. 3–5 zv.

<sup>60</sup> Disabled soldiers (Polish citizens) of the Ukrainian People’s Republic were recognized as “disabled veterans” in June 1927. President Ignaci Mościcki issued an order stating that soldiers who had served in allied armies that struggled for Polish independence and who were citizens or permanent residents should receive the same assistance as other categories of disabled soldiers. Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej poz. 475. *Dziennik Ustaw* 54/1927, 745–6; Rozporządzenie Ministrów poz. 898. *Dziennik Ustaw* 103/1927, 1413–14.

<sup>61</sup> DALO, f. 1, op. 33, spr. 3477, ark. 6.

institution. The Ministry reasoned that the veterans had served in the UNR army before it became an ally of Poland and that legally they were not entitled to the status of disabled veteran.<sup>62</sup>

In addition, the residents of the Home and the other local disabled activists were dissatisfied that disabled servicemen who did not have the official status of “Polish disabled veterans” were allowed to stay there.<sup>63</sup> Legal regulations had likely governed the course of events, however; perhaps the reason for their expulsion was more prosaic. Indeed, it seems that the key reason for the departure of these two Ukrainian veterans stemmed from a nationalist-based personal conflict between Slusarczyk and a soldier of the Polish army, Adam Gryglewski. Slusarczyk was a Ukrainian patriot and openly expressed his political views. He publicly declared his desire for Lviv to become a Ukrainian city. Such statements irritated Gryglewski and resulted in a serious conflict between the two residents. On 20 February 1931, Slusarczyk was listening to a Ukrainian record when the furious Polish veteran smashed the recording and beat him. Eight months later, Slusarczyk left the Lviv Disabled Veterans’ Home and was directed to the Central Ukrainian Committee in Warsaw. The other disabled Ukrainian veteran, Atrachowicz, was forced to move from Lviv to Kalisz at the end of May 1932.<sup>64</sup>

Although disabled veterans of various ethnic origins were accepted in the Disabled Veterans’ Home, Jewish veterans rarely resided at this institution. In May 1936, Leopold Steier wrote to the Lviv Province administration that he was the only Jewish veteran among the 57 residents at the Home. Steier complained that he did not feel welcome in this environment and asked for a transfer to a Jewish facility with kosher food and co-religionists. The Jewish disabled veteran was transferred first to the Jewish institution for elderly people in Przemyśl; after his second transfer request, Steier was moved to a similar institution near Poznań.<sup>65</sup>

The political climate outside the institution also influenced the inter-ethnic relations inside it. In the late 1930s, some disabled residents denounced their fellow veterans as German, Ukrainian, or Soviet sympathizers. In July 1939, for example, the Pole Franciszek Nowak and the Ukrainian Cyryl Kowalczyk accused each other of anti-Polish views, as

<sup>62</sup> DALO, f. 1, op. 33, spr. 3477, ark. 21, 33

<sup>63</sup> DALO, f. 1, op. 33, spr. 3477, ark. 21–41.

<sup>64</sup> DALO, f. 1, op. 33, spr. 3477, ark. 21–41.

<sup>65</sup> DALO, f. 1, op. 33, spr. 4126, ark. 21–95.

well as German and Ukrainian sympathies.<sup>66</sup> Veterans' reports, moreover, described not only national but also regional differences between disabled servicemen at the Lviv Home. In September 1938, Józef Irla, a former soldier of the Polish army, informed the province administration that the so-called "Warsaw group" of disabled veterans was linked to Lviv criminal circles and that it terrorized the other residents of the institution. Many veterans also believed that one's region of origin determined one's political orientation. For instance, a person from Poznań would be labelled a German sympathizer because this city had previously belonged to the Second Reich.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, these reports show that, despite institutionalization, disabled veterans were not isolated from society and were well aware of political developments outside the Home.

**Resistance to Disciplinary Regulations.** Disabled servicemen often resisted the disciplinary regime of the Lviv Disabled Veterans' Home. Alcohol consumption and prostitution were the main reasons for the intervention of the local authorities.<sup>68</sup> Scholars have emphasized that alcoholism was a common problem for institutionalized veterans. Alcohol became an escape from a depressing reality.<sup>69</sup> Some residents acknowledged their alcohol addiction and asked for treatment in special institutions.<sup>70</sup> Both the administration of the Lviv Home and disabled residents themselves also reported numerous cases of intoxication that resulted in conflicts with other residents and employees of the institution.<sup>71</sup> For instance, in January 1931, veteran Piotr Hołuj was supposed to spend a vacation with his family in Cracow; instead, he stayed outside the Disabled Veterans' Home in Lviv and pursued an "immoral lifestyle."<sup>72</sup> Moreover, during his vacation, a drunken Hołuj would occasionally visit the Home and terrorize other disabled servicemen and Home employees. As a result, the director of the Home asked him to leave the institution. He was finally

<sup>66</sup> DALO, f. 1, op. 34, spr. 3728; DALO, f. 1, op. 34, spr. 3092, ark. 99–9 zv.

<sup>67</sup> DALO, f. 1, op. 34, spr. 3728.

<sup>68</sup> DALO, f. 1, op. 34, spr. 3092, ark. 50, 59–9 zv., 62–5; 105; DALO, f. 1, op. 34, spr. 3728, ark. 3–7.

<sup>69</sup> Marten, *Nomads in Blue*, 279–87.

<sup>70</sup> DALO, f. 1, op. 34, spr. 3092, ark. 59–9 zv.

<sup>71</sup> DALO, f. 1, op. 33, spr. 1563, ark. 12–2 zv.; DALO, f. 1, op. 34, spr. 3728; DALO, f. 1, op. 34, spr. 3092, ark. 2–3, 23 zv.—4, 50–1, 59, 105.

<sup>72</sup> DALO, f. 1, op. 33, spr. 1563, ark. 12–2 zv.

expelled from the Home in March 1931 after he stole money from the director's private apartment and robbed several people in the city.<sup>73</sup>

A special committee that examined the work of the Lviv Disabled Veterans' Home in December 1938 informed the province administration that reports of rampant alcohol abuse and fornication in the Home were unfounded. However, in June 1939, Home administrators requested permission to hire an additional watchman. On the evening of 16 June, two unknown women fought inside the institution. One of them had been invited by a resident, so the administration suggested tighter rules on visitors.<sup>74</sup>

While they asserted their independence, residents of the institution could technically participate in the "outside world" only with the permission of the administration. The urban space stood in contrast to the regulated world of the closed institution, and the city was often a space of "sin, immorality, and pleasures," where disabled veterans consumed alcohol and spent time with prostitutes. At the same time, the boundaries between behavior outside and consequences inside were permeable, as the Home would alert local police and authorities about its residents' misbehaviors, and the Home's administrators were also alerted to the improper behavior of disabled veterans outside the institution. By the end of 1938, the Lviv province authorities questioned the administration of the Lviv Disabled Veterans' Home about disabled beggars; in response, the administration denied that residents of the institution begged on the city streets.<sup>75</sup> Lew Kaltenbergh, a future Polish writer, lived near the Disabled Veterans' Home as a teenager and used to spend time in the park near the institution. In his memoirs, Kaltenbergh emphasized that despite the fact that the Home was fenced in by barbed wire, the shabby fencing had never been an obstacle for those who wanted to leave or enter the grounds of the institution. Moreover, an illegal "club" where semi-criminals gathered was located close to the facility, and one of the Home residents, Miron Łegkij, was its "majordomo." Amputee Łegkij, "a gadabout and cynic," was bored by life in "the nursing home" and was sneaking out in order to join a more entertaining group of companions in the "club."<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup> DALO, f. 1, op. 33, spr. 1563, ark. 12–2 zv., 15.

<sup>74</sup> DALO, f. 1, op. 33, spr. 1544, ark. 67–8 zv.; DALO, f. 1, op. 34, spr. 3729, ark. 121.

<sup>75</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 1563, ark. 12–12 zv.; DALO, f.1, op. 33, spr. 1544, ark. 68.

<sup>76</sup> Kaltenbergh, *Ułamki stłuczonego lustra*, 71–2.

As institutionalization still limited mobility, servicemen frequently opposed the Home's tight regulations. Bolesław Nosarzewsky often stayed overnight outside the institution. In March 1939, Adolf Twardowski, the director of the Disabled Veterans' Home, stated that he would inform the Lviv Province administration about Nosarzewsky's behavior. The director mentioned that he could no longer turn a blind eye because a disabled resident had reported to local authorities that he had been too lax and unable to maintain discipline in the Home.<sup>77</sup> In other words, Twardowski openly admitted that he had ignored rule violators and permitted residents more freedom than what was allowed by regulations, but bureaucratic pressure might soon change that. Moreover, several months later, another resident of the Home requested permission to spend three nights per week with his female friend. He argued that he was a young man and that life in the institution was too monotonous.<sup>78</sup> In other words, veterans aimed to receive some of the benefits provided by the Home while also having some semblance of an ordinary life beyond the institution.

**Conflicts Between Residents and Staff.** Although the Home's administration was not always responsible for the shortcomings of the welfare system, disabled soldiers were prone to blame it for them.<sup>79</sup> Conflicts between administrators and residents could have serious consequences. For example, in June 1931, the employees of the Home suspected that some disabled veterans had obtained weapons. As a result, Lviv police searched the disabled resident, Fischbach, but they did not find any. In fact, not only the veteran who had been searched but also some other residents were shocked by the actions of the Home administration and police. Fischbach threatened to appeal to Józef Piłsudski's wife, while a disabled soldier named Jan Piekieski intended to report these events to one of the Lviv newspapers.<sup>80</sup> In the spring of 1939, Twardowski informed the province administration that some disabled veterans were threatening him. The authorities had not granted a one-time payment to disabled soldier Franciszek Struś at the end of March 1939, and according to the director, the disappointed resident came to his office and criticized the

<sup>77</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 34, spr. 3092, ark. 32.

<sup>78</sup> DALO, f.1, op. 34, spr. 3092, ark. 102.

<sup>79</sup> DALO, f. 1, op. 33, spr. 1225, ark. 88 zv.

<sup>80</sup> DALO, f. 1, op. 33, spr. 4131, ark. 23–3 zv. Józef Piłsudski was the de facto head of the Polish state, although officially, he served as a Minister of Military Affairs at the time.

government.<sup>81</sup> As Twardowski tried to placate him, Struś threatened that the director would soon be unable to work at the institution.<sup>82</sup>

In June 1939, the Ministry of Social Welfare warned the administration that an inspection of the Home was imminent. Warsaw bureaucrats were aware of the conflicts in the Lviv Home and insisted that residents of the institution had to behave in accordance with the regulations and that all troublemakers had to be expelled.<sup>83</sup> However, a strict administrative policy could cause dissatisfaction and a desire for revenge among veterans. For example, disabled residents could accuse the administration of various crimes. Veteran Józef Irla had been one of the major troublemakers at the Home, and he was expelled from the institution in July 1939. In his letter to the prime minister, he accused the director of embezzlement, leading Warsaw officials to conduct an investigation into the Lviv Disabled Veterans' Home one week before the start of the Second World War. Although central authorities took this accusation seriously and requested the necessary information, the Lviv Province administration confidently concluded that Adolf Twardowski had not committed a crime.<sup>84</sup>

Still, the administration of the Lviv Disabled Veterans' Home continued to fail in its efforts to maintain discipline, and it even tolerated some bending of the rules during the years before the Second World War. The Home's model of institutional care needed serious revision. At the same time, periodicals described life in the Disabled Veterans' Home differently. Mironowicz, who wrote about the Home for an article in *Front Inwalidzki* at the beginning of 1939, was well aware of the institution's challenges.

<sup>81</sup>When Struś was accepted to the Disabled Veterans' Home in November 1937, the administration worried about his mental health, drug use, and alcohol abuse. His difficulties with anger control were a result of his mental condition, and Struś was honest about his health issue. DALO, f.1, op. 34, spr. 3404.

<sup>82</sup>DALO, f.1, op. 34, spr. 3092, ark. 6–6 zv.

<sup>83</sup>DALO, f.1, op. 34, spr. 3822, ark. 47.

<sup>84</sup>DALO, f. 1, op. 34, spr. 3728, ark. 3–7; DALO, f. 1, op. 34, spr. 3729, ark. 124–6; DALO, f.1, op. 34, spr. 3092, ark. 21–32, 43, 104. Irla presented disabled veterans as war victims justly entitled to proper state assistance. “However, because of war all those scandalous disabled veterans are ill. They are anxious because of war. War! War is the reason, and this is the consequence of it. The Disabled Veterans' Home is not for the director Adolf Tarnawsky but for disabled veterans. Instead of eliminating the reasons for the problem, they expel disabled veterans.” DALO, f. 1, op. 34, spr. 3728, ark.7. Although Tarnawsky himself was a disabled soldier, he was perceived as the “other” by the residents of the institution because of his administrative position. As a bureaucrat, he represented the state that tried to limit the rights of war victims.



He stressed that even though Twardowski was a disabled veteran himself, he was a very capable director. Mironowicz acknowledged that it was hard to work with various groups of disabled veterans of the imperial and the Polish armies who often had mental disorders, but stressed that Twardowski had been able to establish “exemplary discipline and order” at the Home.<sup>85</sup> The director described his job to Mironowicz: “It is hard and exhausting work. A person often faces various nuisances and unfounded criticism, remarks, or accusations, but there are also bright minutes.”<sup>86</sup> Although Twardowski and Mironowicz revealed that the administration faced some problems, they tried to present the Lviv Disabled Veterans’ Home as a well-managed institution and a successful state project.

### CONCLUSION

The fortress-like Disabled Veterans’ Home emerged as a visible urban landmark in a poor suburb of Lviv in the middle of the nineteenth century. It was a present from the emperor to injured men who had sacrificed their health for the Habsburg monarchy. At the same time, even the location of the Home—built on a hill and surrounded by a park—emphasized the separation of disabled veterans from the rest of the city’s inhabitants. After the proclamation of an independent Polish state, the government organized a welfare system for disabled servicemen of the imperial and the Polish armies, and the institutions located in the former Austrian “Disabled Veterans’ Home” in Lviv became a part of this project.

Activism was one of the important factors influencing the institution during the first decade after the wars. Disabled servicemen were not passive beneficiaries; rather, they struggled for their rights, and as a result, they participated in the formation of the public sphere. When in the early 1920s, the military and civilian authorities debated different approaches to the institutionalization of veterans, both disabled veterans’ organizations and some civilian officials opposed their isolation in the countryside, and they struggled to find alternative spaces for disabled veterans in the metropolis. These groups used the argument of the continuity of rights. As the Austrian emperor had first established the institution for disabled veterans, these men still had the right to live there; despite the dissolution of the empire, the new Polish state had to absorb the imperial tradition.

<sup>85</sup> Mironowicz, *Blaski i cienie Legii Lwowskiej*. *Front Inwalidzki* 3–4/1939, 11.

<sup>86</sup> Mironowicz, *Blaski i cienie Legii Lwowskiej*. *Front Inwalidzki* 3–4/1939, 12.

They actually presented institutionalized life in the urban center as the life of a person incorporated into society, rather than as an exile in a remote rural area. Indeed, although everyday life in the state Disabled Veterans' Home was supposed to be regulated and rule-bound, the reality was quite different. Many residents were not completely isolated from everyday urban practices; their behaviors were rather shaped by both life inside and outside the Home.

In their efforts to shape the experience of institutionalization, disabled veterans resisted the disciplinary regime of the institution, and the state Disabled Veterans' Home became a site of various conflicts. As the only Disabled Veterans' Home in Poland in the late 1930s, it provided institutional care to veterans from the different regions and mirrored the political and ethnic tension outside its walls. At the end of the 1930s, the administration could not maintain discipline consistently, and the Lviv Disabled Veterans' Home became an example of the failure of the state-promoted institutionalization model. Disabled veterans' experiences had been shaped by a complex combination of individual agency, group activism, ethnic tension, and political, fiscal, and military priorities, a combination that the vision of institutionalization had proved too simplistic to manage.

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## CHAPTER 9

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# The Walled-in Illness: The Twentieth-Century Finnish Tuberculosis Sanatorium as Lived Space

*Heini Hakosalo*

### INTRODUCTION

Before the introduction of effective anti-tuberculosis medication in the 1950s, the treatment and prevention of tuberculosis relied heavily on spatial solutions, on moving people from unhealthy or risky places to healthier and less risky locations. At-risk children were relocated to healthy families or placed in preventoria, open-air schools, or summer colonies. For those already ill but deemed treatable, a sanatorium stay was indicated. Hopeless cases withered away at home, in hospitals, or in work-house infirmaries. The traditional hygienic-dietetic sanatorium regimen was compatible with the dominant medical conception of the complex causation of tuberculosis, but it also reflected age-old ideas about the special healing qualities of certain natural and human-made environments. In the case of the tuberculosis sanatorium, the environment was regarded as

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therapeutically impactful from the outset, even more so than in the case of other institutions of care.

Medical historians have investigated the tuberculosis sanatorium as an idiosyncratic therapeutic tool and environment, while architectural historians have been interested in the evolution and prominent representatives of the building type.<sup>1</sup> This chapter focuses on the relationship between patients and the building. The primary bulk of source material is constituted by autobiographical narratives written by former sanatorium patients. These narratives were collected by means of a thematic writing competition organized by the Lung Patients' Union and the Finnish Literature Society in 1971. The resulting contributions—over nine thousand typed and handwritten pages of retrospective narratives—were deposited in the archives of the Finnish Literature Society under the name Collection Competition for Sanatorium Tradition (henceforth *ST*). In addition to systematically analyzing the *ST* material, I have made selective use of letters and diaries from other collections, as well as photographs and patient magazines.<sup>2</sup>

In analyzing the material, I have focused on passages where patients *interacted* with the sanatorium building—that is, assigned meanings to it, associated emotions with it, misused or modified it, or reflected upon its influence on their social relationships, health, and well-being. “Lived” or “experienced” space is perceived in this chapter as something that is constantly being made and remade in and by such interaction. As Thomas Gieryn and others have noted, buildings are both shaped by and capable of shaping their occupants' behaviors, social relationships, beliefs, and feelings.<sup>3</sup> The chapter argues that the experience of the institutional space formed a key part of the overall sanatorium experience and demonstrates

<sup>1</sup>The medical point of view on sanatoria dominates in, for example, Worboys, *The Sanatorium Treatment*; Condrau, *Beyond the Total Institution*; Schürer, *Der Traum von Heilung*; Burke, *Building Resistance*. Architecture occupies the centre stage in, for example, Châtelet, *Early Days of the Sanatorium*; Cremnitzer, *Architecture et santé*; Miller, *Le sanatorium*; Grandvoinet, *Architecture thérapeutique*; Heikinheimo, *Architecture and Technology*; Campbell, *What Tuberculosis Did for Modernism*. More general histories of institutions of care that are also relevant for sanatorium history include Adams, *Medicine by Design*; Willis, Goad, and Logan, *Architecture and the Modern Hospital*; Kisacky, *Rise of the Modern Hospital*.

<sup>2</sup>All major sanatoria had their in-house magazines, written and illustrated by patients, initially by hand. Here, I will make use of the Paimio Sanatorium magazine, first called *Pasuna*, then *Sputum*, and then *Pasuna-Sputum*. It is held by the Hospital Museum, Turku.

<sup>3</sup>Gieryn, *What Buildings Do*, 35.



that the interaction between patients and the building was less one-directional and more multiform than commonly assumed.

### SANATORIA AND SANATORIUM HISTORIOGRAPHY

The tuberculosis sanatorium was a late nineteenth-century innovation designed to treat, isolate, and re-educate people with tuberculosis. In Finland, where tuberculosis mortality rates were among the highest in Europe, a vigorous anti-tuberculosis campaign was launched at the beginning of the twentieth century, and comprehensive public tuberculosis services were put in place in 1948–52. The first specialized tuberculosis sanatoria came into being at the very beginning of the century. During their heyday, between the mid-1920s and the end of the 1950s, sanatoria were a highly visible (and costly) part of the Finnish health care system and a prominent example of state-of-the-art welfare architecture. Specialized tuberculosis sanatoria disappeared by the early 1970s, and tuberculosis services, as a distinct part of the health-care system, were finally dismantled in 1986.

Circa 80 institutions specializing in the treatment of tuberculosis functioned in Finland between 1900 and 1970. They were a mixed bag, consisting of two large private sanatoria, opened in 1903, many small private nursing homes, two state sanatoria, a handful of urban municipal sanatoria/hospitals, some pediatric sanatoria, and 14–16 large “folk sanatoria” owned by municipalities that were collaborating for the purpose.<sup>4</sup> The variation was also great in terms of architecture. Small sanatoria and nursing homes were usually housed in repurposed wooden buildings, for instance, in old army barracks, farmhouses, and villas. In contrast, major sanatoria were purpose-built establishments designed by leading architects. The bulk of beds were in folk sanatoria, and most *ST* reminiscences also relate to them. One distinctive feature of Finnish tuberculosis sanatoria was their relatively low level of social segregation. There were no truly exclusive private sanatoria, and class segregation within the institutions was also quite weak. Private sanatoria were struggling charitable institutions rather than thriving business enterprises. Subsidized by the state, they provided a fixed number of free beds to patients with no or little means.

<sup>4</sup> *Tuberculosis Sanatoria.*

Some studies have focused on the relationship between the sanatorium building and patients. They can be divided into two main classes based on their approach. The first sees the sanatorium primarily as a “salutogenic,” or health-generating, institution. This approach chimes with the original medical rationale of the sanatorium treatment, which relied on the health-promoting qualities of a particular kind of built and natural environment. The environmental rationale waned with the introduction of specific therapies and was largely abandoned by the end of the 1950s. During the past few decades, the notion has re-emerged in architectural discourse, where sanatoria are evoked as historical exemplars of salutogenic architecture.<sup>5</sup> If the key notion of the first approach is health, the second approach revolves around the concept of power. Inspired by Erving Goffman’s analysis of “total institutions” and Michel Foucault’s notion of “disciplinary institutions,” it sees the sanatorium above all as a strictly controlled environment productive of knowledge and subjectivity.<sup>6</sup>

What the two seemingly different approaches have in common is their tendency to assume the one-way influence—whether beneficent or pernicious—of a stable architectural environment on a passive patient. In an attempt to reinsert patient experience and agency, this chapter relies on Michel de Certeau’s distinction between space (*espace*) and place (*lieu*).<sup>7</sup> As defined by de Certeau, place is static and can be observed as a whole, from above as it were, whereas space is the realm of piecemeal appropriation,

<sup>5</sup> Anderson, *Humanizing the Hospital*; Campbell, *What Tuberculosis Did for Modernism*.

<sup>6</sup> Goffman, *Asylums*. Foucault’s most pertinent writings from the point of view of buildings and power are *Surveiller et punir*, *Machines à guérir*, an edited and extensively commented compilation of original documents, and the paper translated as *Of Other Spaces*. For Foucault-inspired analyses of the built sanatorium environment, see, for example, Prior, *The Architecture of the Hospital*; Järvelä, *A Genealogy of the Tuberculosis Sanitarium*; Järvelä, *Suomalainen keuhkotuberkuloosiparantola*. Sheila Rothman *Living in the Shadow of Death*, 226–7 and Linda Bryder *Below the Magic Mountain* also refer to sanatoria as “total institutions,” but, like Goffman himself, they are more interested in the intra-institutional social and medical order than in the influence of the built environment. The same goes for Bengtsson and Bülow, *The Myth of the Total Institution*, which is based on 72 patient narratives and focuses on social relationships, stressing the agency of the patient. Condrau, *Beyond the Total Institution* offers a somewhat similar classification, but without the specific emphasis on the relationship between the building and the patient.

<sup>7</sup> Saarikangas, *Merkityksellinen tila*, 64, 69–70. In geographical discourses on space, the two terms are used in a very different, almost opposing sense: space is “empty” and free of meaning, whereas place is a space that has been experienced and assigned meaning. See, for example, Creswell, *Place*, 16–17. This chapter uses the two terms à la Certeau rather than in the way that they are typically used in geographical discourses.

multiple meanings, and contingency. De Certeau also characterizes the difference between the two by saying that space is to place as an itinerary is to a map. While place is perceived essentially visually, often from a single vantage point, space is appropriated in action and by all the senses.<sup>8</sup> In de Certeau's words, "space is a practiced place," "composed of intersections of mobile elements."<sup>9</sup> It can be claimed that the notion of experience is embedded in de Certeau's notion of space, which is by definition lived and used.

The term *experience* has many meanings, ranging from casual everyday meanings ("something that happened to me") to highly technical psychological and philosophical definitions. I have elsewhere defined experience as "thought emotions" and the historical study of experience as the study of the ways that "people have made sense of their emotions by means of culturally available conceptual tools."<sup>10</sup> Because experiencing entails meaning-making and because meaning-making is predicated upon former personal and collective experiences and knowledge, there can be no strict distinction between the emotional and the knowledge-based, and experience thus defined is intrinsically historical.

Statements about experiences can concern either speakers' inner states of mind or outer states of affairs, or both. Either way, they usually entail a claim to veracity and thus a testimonial component: "This is how it was, and I want you to know it." What they seldom claim is universality, recognizing the perspectival nature of experience: "This is how *I* experienced it." *ST* authors, too, often stressed the veracity of their statements, concerning both inner states and outer affairs, while acknowledging that what they were talking about was their personal take on reality, recollected and recorded to the best of their ability but subject to partiality and error. With material like this, it would be difficult—futile even—to try to arrive at universal conclusions. What we have is an aggregate of voices talking about the spatial parameters of a particular past institution.

<sup>8</sup> De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117–19.

<sup>9</sup> De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117. See also Saarikangas, Merkityksellinen tila, 64, 69–70, and Tunturi and Syrjämaa, Johdanto.

<sup>10</sup> Hakosalo, *The Ill(s) of the Nation*, 244.

## RECALLING SPACE

Former patients described the institutional space frequently, often at great length and sometimes in fine detail. This alone seems to point towards the importance of space to their overall sanatorium experience, especially as the list of suggested themes that *ST* participants were provided with did little to steer their attention in this direction.<sup>11</sup> References to space serve multiple functions, both narrative and psychological. Spatial framing is a standard narrative device and a much-used memory aid. To quote the art historian Kirsi Saarikangas, “Space has the power to keep alive, produce and call up memories. There is a strong connection between space and memory, and this connection was central to classical rhetoric and mnemonic techniques.”<sup>12</sup> It has also been noted that people going through personal crises and “biographical disruptions” have a heightened need to anchor their memories to the material world. As the medical anthropologists Kaisa Ketokivi and Mianna Meskus observe, “In the presence of an emotional fear of dispersing into nothingness, the concreteness of material settings emerges as significant.”<sup>13</sup>

The patients’ ways of (re)experiencing and describing the sanatorium space varied widely. This is reflected in the broad range of metaphors they applied when talking about it. They compared the sanatorium to a prison, barracks, and concentration camp, and medical operations and invasive examinations to torture and the Inquisition.<sup>14</sup> The metaphor of a caged bird, longing for freedom, was a much-used rhetorical figure in the poems submitted to the patient magazine.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the narrators also

<sup>11</sup> Large, thematic writing “competitions” organized by leading memory organizations are something of a Finnish specialty. The participants are usually provided with an open-ended list of guiding questions or themes, and this is true for *ST* as well. The organizers stressed that the list of 22 questions was intended to aid memory work, not to restrict it. The background materials related to the collection, including the instructions and the list of guiding questions, are stored in a separate case (no signum) at the Collection Competition for Sanatorium Tradition, Archives of the Finnish Literature Society, Helsinki.

<sup>12</sup> Saarikangas, *Merkityksellinen tila*, 63. See also Kuusisto-Arponen and Savolainen, *The Interplay of Memory and Matter*, on the role of material things in narrativization.

<sup>13</sup> Ketokivi and Meskus, *The Dilemma of the Capable Actor*, 45.

<sup>14</sup> Aartolahti 14, Aitamäki 72, 162, 166, 169, 940, Finnilä 62–3, Heino 20, Tuomaila 7, Viiliäinen 3, Puttonen 9 in *ST*. Prison comparisons can also be found in fiction. See, for example, Stolpe, *Kuoleman odotusbuoneessa*, 31.

<sup>15</sup> Aitamäki 162, 166, 169, 940, 950, Aartolahti 14, Finnilä 62–3 in *ST*. *Sputum* First of May issue 1958, 2. Hospital Museum, Turku.

referred to the sanatorium as a paradise, palace, grand hotel, rest home, all-inclusive boarding house, and holiday resort.<sup>16</sup> One narrator likened the Halila Sanatorium to a university.<sup>17</sup> An autobiographical sanatorium novel characterized the house as a luxury cruiser, but this was an isolated reference probably influenced by literary models.<sup>18</sup>

The medical historian Flurin Condrau has remarked that twentieth-century sanatoria “were no concentration camps; equally they were no cosy Magic Mountains either.”<sup>19</sup> He is no doubt right, as far as external circumstances go, but when we focus on patients’ *experiences*, the sanatorium was in fact both. What was a magic mountain to one patient was a concentration camp to another, and sometimes to one and the same individual at different stages of their treatment. As many students of space have emphasized, lived space is not singular.<sup>20</sup>

Judging by the *ST* narratives, the patients’ first encounter with “the house” left particularly strong memory traces. Addressing this memory-generating quality, a woman wrote about her entry to the sanatorium thirty years earlier: “One surely remembers such days forever. They are, somehow, recorded in the conscious stream of memory, lucid to the last detail.”<sup>21</sup> Arrival scenes are clustered with negative, emotional adjectives such as “gloomy,” “grim,” “anxiety-provoking,” and “bleak.”<sup>22</sup> A woman wrote that she entered the Tampere City Sanatorium believing she would never leave: “I went there climbing the endless stairs leaning on my mother, like a person being accompanied to her grave.” To another *ST* participant, the sanatorium door seemed like the entrance to a tomb.

<sup>16</sup> Aitamäki 102, 436, 433 (quotes the inhouse magazine), Korhonen-Jolma 1–3, Korja 4, Karke 1, Korja 4, Meilo 5, Lindqvist 13, Ylösmäki 3, Arvola 44, Kleemola 6, Nikkilä 43, Remes 5, Arola 5–6, Wessman 9, Heino 20, Kallio-Könnö 1, Soini 23, Lung Patient’s Union material 193, Ylösmäki 3 in *ST*. Tomppo in Hoffren, *Elämäni Tarinamäellä*, 146. “Lung Patients’ Union material” is a nested collection of interviews and reminiscences compiled by Union activists and incorporated into *ST* under the name of the Union.

<sup>17</sup> Remes 5 in *ST*.

<sup>18</sup> Elgert, *Skratta för livet*, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Condrau, *Beyond the Total Institution*, 91.

<sup>20</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty has emphasized this plurality of space, and so has, from a different point of view, Henri Lefebvre. See also Saarikangas, *Merkityksellinen tila*, 58; Saarikangas, *Asumnon muodonmuutoksia*, 56.

<sup>21</sup> Pöijärvi 1–2 in *ST*.

<sup>22</sup> Lindqvist 4, “Markku Einonen” 10, Siikala 3–4 in *ST*. Three out of the ca. 350 *ST* participants wished to remain anonymous. I will refer to them with a pseudonym, indicated by inverted commas.

Some gave the house anthropomorphic features: “The great white house appeared in front of me without warning. It looked hostile, but, at that moment, the feeling was mutual.” Another patient found the sanatorium building, more reassuringly, “calm, perhaps even a little mysterious.”<sup>23</sup>

Some entrance scenes convey a sense of intense emotions without using any ostensibly emotional words. Instead, they describe the physical environment in a particularly sharp and distinct way, with the intensity of “flashbulb memories.”<sup>24</sup> It seems as if the heightened sensory impressions had taken the place of emotions in these descriptions. Arrival scenes are dominated by visual impressions, but they also evoke other senses, referring, for instance, to the “hospital-like” smell that greeted patients at the front door and that some writers associated with the much-used disinfectant Lysol, others with floor wax or medicines. The strange smell was yet another disheartening reminder that they had entered an alien world.<sup>25</sup> The soundscape, too, was occasionally discussed. For instance, people who first entered the sanatorium around noon, when most patients were out on the communal balconies or in bed, might record the eerie silence and emptiness that met them upon arrival.<sup>26</sup>

Narrators treated in folk sanatoria often commented on the scale of the building, contrasting it with their own modest domestic conditions. They characterized the building as large, huge, grand, and castle-like.<sup>27</sup> The stairs seemed “frightfully endless,” the corridor as “long as a city street.”<sup>28</sup> A woman admitted to the newly opened Paimio Sanatorium in 1934 wrote: “For a country girl like me, it was a huge experience to come there. The house was big and grand.”<sup>29</sup> Some newcomers’ sense of having been thrown into a foreign world was accentuated by their unfamiliarity with modernist architecture and modern conveniences like elevators,

<sup>23</sup> Viiliäinen 3, Tuomenoja 8, Heiskanen 2, Haapoja 1 in *ST*.

<sup>24</sup> The oral historian Lynn Abrams encountered several such memories when she interviewed people who had spent their childhood in a children’s homes or with foster parents. “Flashbulb memories” were most commonly related to the moments when the children had been removed from their homes. Abrams, *Memory as Both Source and Subject of Study*, 92–3.

<sup>25</sup> Aitamäki 950, Harju 8, Huvinen 2, Karke 2, Kumpulainen 1, Nurminen 7, Yli-Jyrä 19–20 in *ST*.

<sup>26</sup> Ranki 2, Siermala 13 in *ST*.

<sup>27</sup> Aitamäki 72, Arola 16, Heino 20, Huvinen 11, Jääskeläinen 3, 22, Karke 2, Korja 3, Korkeakoski 2, Meilo 5, Mikkonen 1, Palin 7, Rontu 14–15, Soini 23, Viiliäinen 3 in *ST*.

<sup>28</sup> Poijärvi 2, Siermala 13–14 in *ST*.

<sup>29</sup> Tuominen 1 in *ST*.

telephones, signaling systems, and indoor toilets.<sup>30</sup> Many were struck by the excessive cleanliness.<sup>31</sup> The dissonance between the domestic and the institutional surroundings was relived, in reverse, when the patient returned home: “[At home] Everything seemed so small after the big house.”<sup>32</sup>

The contrast between the domestic and the institutional, called forth in many *ST* narratives, is a reminder of the layered nature of experience and the relationality of lived space. Patients’ recorded experiences upon entering the sanatorium were influenced by the stockpot of their experiences and memories of other spaces, above all their homes, but also for instance schools, barracks, or hospitals. Many patients had also been treated at other sanatoria and would implicitly or explicitly compare one with the other(s).

### SPATIAL REGULATIONS AND TRANSGRESSIONS

Goffman and the Foucauldians were not wrong in regarding the sanatorium as a controlled and regulated space. The patients’ use of time and space was indeed strictly controlled, especially during the period ranging from the mid-1920s to the mid-1950s. However, they also found multiple ways of bending the rules and escaping the control.

Entering the sanatorium, patients were met with a confusing array of rules and regulations. Kaarlo Aitamäki, who was treated in Paimio in the 1950s and again in the 1960s, calculated that the rulebook he had been handed when he was first admitted contained over 200 dos and don’ts, mostly the latter. He described his frustration in a letter to a friend:

In this house, patients are barred from many places. In general, you can only move in your own ward and its corridor at certain hours—unless you are a bed patient—and likewise in the day room and games room and dining room and in the communal balcony [*halli*] during the open-air rest hours. Patients who are well enough can take walks outside at fixed times. [...] Anyone who has been here a few months [...] will start to feel anxious and start thinking it is a prison, although of course it isn’t.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Aitamäki 495, Lung Patients’ Union material 30–31 in *ST*.

<sup>31</sup> Aitamäki 950, Holopainen 2, Heino 10, Karke 2, Tuovinen 6 in *ST*.

<sup>32</sup> Pehkonen 13, Tiainen 2 in *ST*.

<sup>33</sup> Aitamäki 169 in *ST*.

The rules, which could be complex and reach down to the minute details of everyday life, mainly pertained to the use of the sanatorium space. For instance, rules regulating the use of the elevators were intricate: how many floors patients were allowed to travel by an elevator depended not only on their physical state but also on whether they were going up or down. (In practice, it might also depend on the social status of the patient, and their relationship with the staff.)<sup>34</sup> In addition to the written rules, there was a multitude of unwritten ones. Successful institutional acculturation required that the patient learned to “see” the intramural divisions and boundaries and to respect them.

House rules and the architecture conspired to stabilize social relationships and hierarchies and regulate the distance between different classes of people inhabiting the sanatorium—staff and patients, adults and children, and, above all, men and women. Sanatorium architecture, too, reflected the importance assigned to gender segregation: in large traditional sanatoria, male and female wards and communal balconies were distinct structures, placed on the opposite sides of the building (Fig. 9.1). In 1913, a physician was planning to open a private sanatorium and sent the floor plan for review to the deaconess she wanted to recruit as matron. One detail drew sharply critical comments from the latter: the mixed communal balcony. Such a structure was asking for trouble, she argued, for patients would seek sexual gratification by any means, and design solutions must make this as hard as possible. “You cannot even fathom what our common people are like,” exclaimed the deaconess.<sup>35</sup>

As the wording of the matron-to-be indicates, gender segregation intersected with class considerations, particularly during the first part of the century. Middle-class medical directors and matrons self-evidently assumed that working-class people lacked self-restraint in sexual matters. Therefore, the greater the number of public patients in an institution, the stricter was the gender segregation. The few larger sanatoria that had mixed-sex communal balconies or wards were comparatively genteel. The Nummela Sanatorium, the closest thing to an elite sanatorium in Finland, had some mixed wards, and the male and female sections of the communal balcony were separated by a light partition only. The Halila Sanatorium

<sup>34</sup> Aitamäki 73, 81, Finniliä 60, Kauppinen 1–2 in *ST*. Former patients wrote a lot about the rules and sometimes copied parts of the rulebook verbatim in their narrative.

<sup>35</sup> Åbo Akademi Library Manuscript Collections. Rolf Lagerborg’s Collection (Case B88), letter from Elli Sidensnöre to Viva Lagerborg 16 March 1913.





Fig. 9.1 Satalinna Sanatorium in Harjavalta. (Photographer unknown, the archive of the Finnish Lung Health Association, Helsinki)

had two separate buildings for adult patients; the building reserved for private patients had mixed wards, while the building housing both public and private patients did not.<sup>36</sup>

Just like the rules mainly concerned the proper use of the institutional space, rule-breaking often took the form of spatial transgressions. Patients found multiple ways to trespass on the visible and invisible borders separating different groups, especially those between men and women. “String elevators” (*naruhissi*) were used to deliver messages and gifts between male and female rooms, wards, and balconies. Men visited women in their rooms and balconies during restricted hours, and male patients were reported having sneaked into nurses’ quarters.<sup>37</sup> While men and women

<sup>36</sup>Stadius 1, Piikämäki 10–11, Lung Patients’ Union material 146 in *ST*. Finnish National Archive (Helsinki), the Archive of the 1st Office of the National Medical Board, the annual reports of Halila Sanatorium, 1920–29.

<sup>37</sup>Aitamäki 86–7, Hautamäki 8, “Inkeri Mattinen” 106, Jääskeläinen 26, Kaario 20, 38, Kanervisto 9, 18, Keränen 4, Kivilahti 5–6, Nikkilä 53, Ranki 4–5, Walta 6, 7–8, Lung

were allowed, even encouraged, to associate with each other under certain forms (called “lumpustaminen” in Finnish and “cousining” in American sanatorium slang), sexual relationships were proscribed by the rules and discouraged by the staff. Patients, however, were proficient in making use of the sanatorium space for intimate encounters. Judging by the *ST* narratives, patients engaged in sexual acts in closets, stairways, storerooms, wardrobes, elevators, behind curtains, or basically any little used and ill-lit corner of the institutional space, as well as on the sanatorium grounds.<sup>38</sup> It might be difficult to associate such feverish exertions with people institutionalized because of a serious chronic disease. However, it should be remembered that the largest age group in traditional sanatoria consisted of 15–25-year-olds, and the majority of patients were mobile rather than bed-ridden.

The term “sexual acts” should be understood in its broadest and vaguest meaning here. There is really no way of knowing how common such encounters were or what they entailed. What is clear is that the sanatorium emerges as a much more promiscuous place in the men’s than in the women’s narratives. Obviously, gendered cultural norms and expectations are at play here. It was socially more acceptable for men to actively defy house rules and transgress spatial and social boundaries in search of sexual pleasure. As Condrau has noted in discussing German sanatorium patient subculture, male patients were under considerable peer pressure to show an interest in women despite their illness.<sup>39</sup> This is clearly true for Finland as well. It is fully possible that some men still felt the weight of cultural expectations and peer pressure when they penned their sanatorium experiences, which made them accentuate (or make up) sexual reminiscences. For women, the social pressure and expectations went the opposite way, making them more likely to downplay or omit sexual acts and thoughts when recounting their sanatorium memories.

Not all spatial transgressions had to do with sex. Patients violated spatial boundaries for other reasons as well, for instance, to alleviate boredom or for material gain. An athletic male patient would use the fire ladder to leave the sanatorium to buy alcohol, which he then sold to fellow patients. A woman treated at the Muurola Sanatorium as a teenager made use of the

Patients’ Union’s material 100, 179 in *ST*.

<sup>38</sup>Heino 25, Kautto 62–8, Kivelä 4, Koskell 12, Liukko 4, “Markku Einonen” 35–6, Nikkilä 31, 52, Rautavala 41–2, Salmu 22, Vesterinen 6, Walta 6, 7–8 in *ST*.

<sup>39</sup>Condrau, *Who is the Captain*, 255, 262.

scaffolding—the sanatorium was being enlarged at the time—to climb to the roof “to see the world.” Another teenage girl escaped the sanatorium routine by exploring out-of-bounds zones until she accidentally ended up in the morgue, almost getting stuck there with a fresh corpse. A twelve-year-old girl, treated at Takaharju Sanatorium at the beginning of the century, sneaked out at nights just to walk and run on the forested ridges surrounding the secluded sanatorium.<sup>40</sup>

Adult patients caught in the wrong place at the wrong time could be reprimanded or discharged. In *ST* narratives, by far the most common reason for a disciplinary discharge was drinking. Drinking often took place in the woods surrounding the sanatorium and thus involved spatial transgressions. The decision to discharge a patient was made by the chief physician, and there was no court of appeal. To other patients, these decisions could seem arbitrary and cruel, especially when the patient ousted from the sanatorium was very sick or homeless.<sup>41</sup> The Second World War brought many young servicemen, and with them new disciplinary problems, to sanatoria. However rowdy, a sick serviceman could not be sent home. At least one chief physician solved the problem by having a lockup installed on the premises.<sup>42</sup>

On special days and occasions, spatial rules were temporarily relaxed. Patients could roam freely from ward to ward after the normal curfew on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and New Year’s Eve.<sup>43</sup> First of May celebrations included carnivalesque elements and forms of ritualized opposition. Patients wore fancy dress and organized a mock demonstration that involved marching, chanting, and signs with assorted demands.<sup>44</sup> In Meltola Sanatorium, this ritual exceptionally took place on the chief physician’s name day rather than on the First of May, but was otherwise true to form:

<sup>40</sup> Aitamäki 90, Heino 19, Poijärvi 8–9, Huhtanen 5, 7 in *ST*.

<sup>41</sup> Aarnio 16, Aitamäki 95, 950, 954–5, Finnilä 38, 57, Hirvilampi 2, Kairisvuo 4, Karke 22, Kauppinen 6, Kleemola 6, Siermala 19, Styrman 14–15, Wessman 7–8, Tuominen 119 in *ST*; *Pasuna* First of May issue 1966, 53; Åbo Akademi Library Manuscript Collections, Hagar Olsson’s Collection (case 49), diaries of Toya Dahlgren IV, 3 and 28 November 1928.

<sup>42</sup> Hakala in Lung Patients’ Union material 186 in *ST*.

<sup>43</sup> Aartolahti 2–3, Pehkonen 8, Lung Patients’ Union material 179, 223–4 in *ST*. One narrator implied that a prostitute offered her services in one of the patient rooms of a male ward on New Year’s Eve.

<sup>44</sup> Jääskeläinen 7–8, Pentikäinen 6 in *ST*.

With noise and clatter the long procession of patients curled down to the physician's house early in the morning. With soot and paint on their faces, all dressed up and masqueraded, carrying protest signs. On the signs one could read: "Down with medical power," "Put milk in our jugs," "Freedom from work," "Freedom from the halls," "Long live card games," "We demand" and many other things. [...] He came to the balcony and observed the spectacle and received our congratulations. It was play, but maybe with a bit of oppositional attitude mixed in. He would point at the people with the protest signs and state: "She will be exempted from the hall today," "He won't have to work," and "she shall have milk in her jug," etc. The funny thing was that none but the one who carried the sign was given the privilege. And for that day only.<sup>45</sup>

De Certeau's term "oppositional practices" captures the nature of patients' transgressions better than Foucault's rather demanding "resistance" or Goffman's functionalist "secondary adaptation."<sup>46</sup> Patients did not participate in organized efforts to overturn or undermine the established order. Rather, they engaged in small, mundane acts that went against the intentions of doctors, administrators, and architects, introducing a degree of instability and unpredictability to the regime. Their motives varied a great deal. Especially with younger patients, such practices approximated (team) sports, a cat-and-mouse game that offered more excitement and distraction than organized pastimes. Oppositional practices alleviated the tedium and the feelings of fear, powerlessness, impotence, and alienation that accompanied prolonged sanatorium treatment.<sup>47</sup> A war-time patient summed it up as follows:

Generally speaking, it was like a party, the comradeship and the mood were usually high and good. (It should be remembered that I was there as a bachelor and as a young person.), for example, all sorts of little mischief, the kind that young people get into, like going to the village and the like, having girlfriends (cousins), etc. and everything that differed from normal life, was interesting. I don't really [want to] recall the medical side of it.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Johansson 2–3 in *ST*.

<sup>46</sup> Goffman, *Asylums*, 54–8.

<sup>47</sup> See also Rothman, *Living in the Shadow of Death*, 236–7; Burke, *Building Resistance*, 369.

<sup>48</sup> Lung Patients' Union material 186 in *ST*.

## PATIENTS MOLDING THE SANATORIUM SPACE

The built environment was not stable, and the interaction between the building and the patient was not unidirectional. Patients acted on the sanatorium space by domesticating and individualizing it, for instance by creating small domestic islets. These were often centered around a substance, and they tended to be homosocial.

Coffee was clearly a substance capable of bringing people together and answering not only physiological but also psychological and social needs. Patients placed cooking plates and electric pots in their rooms and other corners of the wards. Both men and women brewed and drank coffee, but coffee has been a particularly central part of female sociability in Finnish culture, and it was so in the sanatorium as well. Female patients communicated many fond memories of making and drinking coffee, while men referred to these activities only in passing.<sup>49</sup> For women, coffee-drinking was an occasion for social bonding and a respite from the rigid sanatorium regime. A woman who had been treated in one of the smaller sanatoria as a girl wrote:

Then I remember a man called Aabraham Kalliokoski he might have been around 40 or little older, I thought it was exciting to sneak to visit Aabraham he namely boiled coffee in the oven of a room [that was seldom used], and I also got a cup if I did not tell anyone, it was probably not quite allowed by the sanatorium rules at the time, the coffee, it weakened your appetite. That man Aabraham was a sort of a father figure for me which is probably why I liked him so much, fatherless as I was.<sup>50</sup>

More commonly, women brewed and enjoyed coffee among themselves. A woman recaptured the pleasure of drinking coffee together with fellow patients in the evenings when the lights had been turned off in the room and the only light came from the lamppost outside. She grew so used to this comforting ritual that she found it difficult to go to sleep without it.<sup>51</sup> Emotions associated with coffee in *ST* narratives are almost exclusively positive. The only exception I have come across is a piece in a

<sup>49</sup> Viljanen 11–12, Koskelin 1–2, Saarinen 11–12, Vänälä 3–4, Arola 9, Pentikäinen 5–6, Saarinen 9, Tuomaila 4, Aitamäki 120, 265, Aarnio 12, Hannula 28, Huvinen 28, Karke 2, Ovaskainen 11, Kapiainen 8, Hiiri 20, Lung Patients' Union material, 209, Vänälä 3–4 in *ST*.

<sup>50</sup> Ovaskainen 11 in *ST*.

<sup>51</sup> Finnilä 33 in *ST*. See also Haapalainen 6 and Keskinen 8 in *ST*.

patient magazine where a man suspected that women gossiped about men over their coffee.<sup>52</sup> This piece of writing, too, indicates that collective coffee-making and drinking was regarded as a gendered preoccupation.

Men, in turn, created partly clandestine, homosocial spaces around smoking and drinking. When smoking was still formally prohibited in sanatoria, men would sneak into a toilet at night to smoke and talk. A male narrator described the smoking room as a place where you learnt to know men from other wards and could talk about anything, including politics and religion, topics otherwise proscribed by sanatorium rules. Another noted that lewd talk was even more common in the smoking room than elsewhere in the sanatorium.<sup>53</sup> The issue of smoking also allowed men to “stand up to the big man.”<sup>54</sup> In the 1950s, patients and patient associations campaigned against the smoking prohibition, and smoking rooms were indeed installed in central sanatoria.<sup>55</sup> These rooms remained characteristically male spaces even after that. There must have been women who smoked, but women produced no first-hand reminiscences about smoking or smoking rooms.

There were also other ways in which patients could individualize and “domesticate” the institutional space, for instance, by means of their personal belongings and images. Written narratives seldom refer to personal items, perhaps because the authors did not think that these counted as “tradition”—that is, they had no ethnographic or historical information value—and they are also absent from photographs taken for promotional purposes. In contrast, snapshots taken by patients and staff do include personal items and *ad hoc* decorations.<sup>56</sup> Snapshots show how patients could mark a little zone as their own by means of personal items (Fig. 9.2). In a snapshot taken in the male section of the communal balcony of the Nummela Sanatorium, the wall was decorated with cut-outs of pin-up girls. Such embellishments individualized the space, marked it out as homosocial, and, to the extent that the images annoyed the nursing staff, provided a way to engage in minute oppositional practices (Fig. 9.3).

<sup>52</sup> *Pasuna*, Christmas Issue 1954, 31. Hospital Museum, Turku.

<sup>53</sup> Walta 4, Pönkkö 17, Kurkinen 2, Aitamäki 109 in *ST*.

<sup>54</sup> The oral historian Alessandro Portelli has identified the trope of “standing up to the big man” as a standard feature of hospital narratives. Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Aarnio 13, Aitamäki 109, 851, Bogdanoff 33, Pönkkö 15, Saarinen 11–12, Tuomaila 4, Viljanen 11–12, Walta 4 in *ST*; Nenola, *Parantolaelämä*, 38.

<sup>56</sup> On making use of the inadvertent elements in snapshot photographs for purposes of historical study, see, for example, Autti, Valokuvat mikrohistoriallisen tutkimuksen lähteinä.



**Fig. 9.2** Patients of the Satakunta Sanatorium by their nightstands. (Photographer unknown, the image archives of the Finnish Literature Society, SKS 8508:004.)

Naming practices can be regarded as another way of individualizing and de-institutionalizing the sanatorium space. Patients habitually gave nicknames to the sanatorium and its parts. These could be private, as for instance when a young woman called the loathed Nummela Sanatorium “satanorium” in her letters.<sup>57</sup> More commonly, however, nicknames were part of the shared patient subculture. To give but a few examples, the smoking room was known as “the gas chamber,” the corridor leading to the operation room as “the alley of suffering,” and the waiting room for the doctor’s office as “the fish trap.” The room to which the bodies of freshly deceased patients were taken was called “the three-mark bedsit,” apparently because it cost the relatives three marks to reclaim the body. The outdoor privy located in the far corner of the grounds of the Oulainen

<sup>57</sup> Åbo Akademi University Library Manuscript Collections, Hagar Olsson’s Collection (case 23), a letter from Toya Dahlgren to Hagar Olsson, 19 April 1931.



**Fig. 9.3** Patients in the male part of the communal balcony of the Nummela Sanatorium, Nurmijärvi. (Photographer unknown, the image archives of the Finnish Literature Society, SKS 8014:3.)

Sanatorium was known as Helsinki, in “honor” of the faraway southern capital.<sup>58</sup>

Nicknames, like the sanatorium subculture in general, were saturated with black humor. Humor was a way to address and share emotions, perhaps above all fear, without having to name them directly. This is obvious when space-related names were used metonymically in talking about death: in the Muurola Sanatorium, “moving to the cellar” meant dying from the disease, and, in Paimio, references to the “Rose Cellar,” the sanatorium morgue, served a similar function.<sup>59</sup>

### ISOLATION AND COMMUNALITY

Space organizes social relationships, and social relationships shape experiences. To illustrate this, I will next discuss two parts of the sanatorium space with special medical and social functions and meanings: the isolation

<sup>58</sup> Aitamäki 942, 227, 229, 281, Jaskari 5–6, Kanervisto 19, Setälä 11, Tikkanen 11–12 in *ST*.

<sup>59</sup> Aitamäki 104–5, 961 (Aitamäki quotes *Pasuna* here), 1021, Heino 11 in *ST*.



room and the communal balcony. They epitomize the combination of enforced isolation (from the outside world) and intense communality (within the institution) that was so characteristic of the traditional sanatorium.

The value attributed to privacy varies over time, from culture to culture, and from one person to another. Sanatorium patients were hardly ever alone. They shared a patient room, ate together by long tables in a communal dining room, and took their open-air treatment side by side on a communal balcony. No room used by the patients, not even the toilets, could be locked from inside.<sup>60</sup> Self-isolation was both difficult in practice and poorly tolerated socially. An effort to self-isolate was likely to be interpreted as a sign of incipient depression and countered by a collective effort to cheer the person up.<sup>61</sup> While patients may have disliked this lack of privacy, they mainly accepted it as an inescapable fact of sanatorium life. Coming predominantly from small farmhouses and working-class homes, they did not expect life indoors to be anything but communal and—by present-day middle-class standards—cramped. Sleeping several to a room, or even to a bed, was a rule rather than an exception in mid-century Finland.<sup>62</sup> Single people seldom lived alone either.

In folk sanatoria, not even money could buy you privacy. Patient rooms usually slept two to four. (Large communal wards were only found in pediatric sanatoria.) Space was economically employed, with smallish rooms and little space between the beds. The sanatorium diary of a woman treated at the Paimio Sanatorium during the Second World War conveys the stress that this enforced proximity could engender. The diarist was a Finnish-speaking, middle-aged, working-class mother of two. She shared a small twin room with a Swedish-speaking seventeen-year-old girl with advanced tuberculosis. They lay on their beds, close enough to touch, without a common language, day in and night out. At night, the diarist was kept awake—in a growing state of anxiety—by the incessant coughing, labored breathing, and feverish moans of her roommate. Both patients improved when the girl was finally moved to another room and got a roommate she could talk to.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Aitamäki 141 in *ST*.

<sup>61</sup> Haapalainen 6, Reittonen 2 in *ST*.

<sup>62</sup> Saarikangas, *Asunnon muodonmuutoksia*, 82–3.

<sup>63</sup> Karke 5–6, 9, 10–12, 17, 19, 21, 23, 27 in *ST*.

By and large, *ST* narrators did not associate single rooms with privacy or luxury but with loneliness, deterioration, and approaching death. Some shuddered at the recollection of the time they had been temporarily left without a roommate, because it had allowed them to surrender to their anguish.<sup>64</sup> In folk sanatoria, private rooms were reserved for critical and terminal patients, and the expression “room of one’s own” was used as a shorthand for death or the terminal phase of disease.<sup>65</sup> In the Satalinna Sanatorium, the single room reserved for terminal patients was known as “the death cell.” Rooms for terminal patients were also called “glass closets” or “glass cells,” because their inner doors had a window through which the patient could be observed.<sup>66</sup> A young woman who had seen her boyfriend taken to the “glass closet,” never to return, had no illusions when she was placed there herself a few years later. She recorded in her diary that she was reconciled with the idea of imminent death but was nevertheless vexed when fellow patients, including people who had never paid her any attention at the regular ward, visited the glass closet to solemnly bid her farewell. She relished their amazed expressions when she was able to leave the “glass cabin” for a short walk in the corridor.<sup>67</sup> One was not expected to leave the room, not even temporarily.

In pediatric sanatoria for extrapulmonary tuberculosis, isolation rooms had somewhat different functions. They were occasionally used to house terminal patients, but more commonly to quarantine newcomers, to isolate children with acute infectious diseases, and to mete out punishments. A man admitted to a children’s sanatorium in Sweden at the age of four had positive memories of the “iso”: isolated there due to mumps, he welcomed the change and especially the special attraction of the room, a private radio with headphones.<sup>68</sup> More commonly, memories relating to isolation rooms are negative. A woman still vividly recalled her dread when she had first been admitted to the Salpausselkä Pediatric Sanatorium at seven, strapped to an isolation room bed, and left there for two weeks.<sup>69</sup> Another narrator had been taken in his bed to the isolation room as punishment and left there alone without light, food, drink, or any idea about

<sup>64</sup> Kotilainen 6, Luhtala 2 in *ST*.

<sup>65</sup> Heino 6, 22, 36, Mäki-Petäjä 36, Leskinen 35 in *ST*.

<sup>66</sup> Aitamäki 992, Hannula 28–9, Hautamäki 2, Ijäs 10, “Inkeri Mattinen” 334–7, Kautto 30, Kotilainen 6, Luhtala 2, Mäki-Petäjä 26, Piikamäki 27, Siermala 23 in *ST*.

<sup>67</sup> The diary of “Inkeri Mattinen” 112–20, 142, 336–7, 373 in *ST*.

<sup>68</sup> Axenström and Steen (eds.), *Livet gick vidare*, 69–72.

<sup>69</sup> Peltoniemi 6, Tahvanainen 6–7 in *ST*.

how long he would have to stay.<sup>70</sup> Isolation was also a common punishment for not eating everything on one's plate (feeding was a high priority in pediatric sanatoria).<sup>71</sup> Reading these narratives, the limits between punishment, treatment, and prevention seem blurred to the present-day observer, as they did to the erstwhile child patients.

The communality of sanatorium life is epitomized by communal balconies, the architecturally most characteristic feature of the traditional sanatorium building. In English literature, these structures are discussed under many names, including sun-terrace, external dormitory, sunning deck, cure gallery, cure balcony, loggia, treatment balcony, and *Liegehalle*.<sup>72</sup> In Finnish sanatorium language, one and the same word, *halli* (from the German *Liegehalle*) referred to three things: an architectural structure, a social unit, and a period of open-air treatment. Architecturally, the typical *halli* was a long, narrow, roofed structure facing south. It was located on the opposite side of the building from the entrance to keep visitors from disturbing the patients resting there. In purpose-built sanatoria, the communal open-air rest halls (i.e. *halli*) were an integral part of the building and accessible from inside, while buildings repurposed as sanatoria might have separate, self-standing halls. Socially, it was the hall rather than the ward that was the main arena of patient subculture.<sup>73</sup>

The communal balcony was also a therapeutic space, where fresh air was dispensed like a medicament to the patient, supposedly at rest. As soon as patients were fever-free, they were "given the halls"—that is, prescribed one to three daily outdoor rest periods. In traditional sanatoria, patients might spend up to five hours a day on the balcony. Patient experiences relating to the hall hours were, again, varied. The so-called silent hour, the rest period during which patients were not supposed to move or talk, especially divided opinions. Some appreciated being left alone with their own thoughts or getting away from their roommates for a while. Some recalled beautiful sights or pleasant sounds associated with the surrounding woodland. Others remembered being cold, disturbed by unpleasant noises or smells, or bored to the extreme.<sup>74</sup> A woman who had

<sup>70</sup> Kivimäki 7–8 in *ST*.

<sup>71</sup> Sivula 30, Tahvanainen 22, Peltoniemi 10, 22 in *ST*.

<sup>72</sup> Condrau notes that while the communal balconies were a staple feature of German sanatoria, they were uncommon in Britain. Condrau, *Beyond the Total Institution*, 81.

<sup>73</sup> On patient subculture in Finland, see Hakosalo, *The Ill(s) of the Nation*, 10–11, and Nenola, *Parantolaelämä*.

<sup>74</sup> Aitamäki 933, Kaario 21, Koskelin 5, Ranki 3, Tomppo 9 in *ST*.

been treated at the Tampere Sanatorium in her early twenties recalled the rest hours, when patients were lying “side by side silent like mummies,” as the most oppressive part of her generally stunted and “completely institutionalized existence.”<sup>75</sup> In the 1960s, many central sanatoria demolished their communal balconies or converted them into indoor spaces. In what now seems like a symbolically loaded act, the sanatorium building closed upon itself, renounced its “porous” structure together with its characteristic forms of treatment and communality, and became indistinguishable from other institutions of care.

### CONCLUSIONS

It is fully possible and legitimate to study the sanatorium as a meticulously designed, completed, static *place* (in de Certeau’s sense), and this perspective has indeed dominated sanatorium historiography. The sanatorium as a place can be reconstructed based on plans, drawings, project descriptions, rulebooks, and administrative documents. What emerges from such studies is a functionally differentiated and strictly rule-bound institution whose outer and inner boundaries are sharp both spatially and socially.<sup>76</sup> The sanatorium rules, overseen by the medical and nursing staff, pulled in the same direction. They segregated women from men, children from adults, patients with different forms of tuberculosis from each other, and the staff from the patients.

Looked upon as *a space*, as I have done here, the sanatorium emerges as a more muddled, ambiguous, and mutable institution. Patients were not just guided, constricted, and molded by the built environment; they also interacted with it, thereby influencing their own sanatorium experience. They invested the sanatorium space with divergent and sometimes surprising values, meanings, and emotions. They found ways to bend the rules and to use and modify the institutional space in ways unrelated to and unforeseen by architectural and medical experts, to better meet their emotional and other needs. Men and women met in places they were not supposed to meet, children were treated among adult patients, (middle-class) patients socialized with doctors and nurses, nurses became

<sup>75</sup> Viiliäinen 3 in *ST*.

<sup>76</sup> Hospital architects saw functional differentiation as an important planning principle already prior to the breakthrough of modernist architecture, known in Finland as “functionalism.” Kisacky, *Rise of the Modern Hospital*, 105–6, 109.

romantically involved with patients, and, not infrequently, members of the staff turned into patients and vice versa. Patients' "oppositional practices" destabilized the sanatorium rule without a coordinated attempt to reverse it. The textual and visual documents produced by patients allow us to study the sanatorium as a space in a way that plans, blueprints, and administrative documents alone do not.

Methodologically, these observations cast some doubt on the idea that "the construction of the patient" could be exhaustively studied by analyzing medical or architectural intentions as expressed in architectural drawings, project plans, or in-house regulations. Experiencing the site first-hand today is no royal road to capturing the historical experience of the same space either. A well-preserved building may be the same *place*, but it is not the same *space* to, say, a seriously ill patient who was admitted to the sanatorium in the 1920s with a potentially fatal disease and stayed there for years, to an urban explorer seeking thrills in a derelict former sanatorium, to an enthusiastic architectural tourist visiting a cultural heritage site, or, for that matter, to a historian chasing past patient experiences.

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“It Went All the Way Down to the Shoes”:  
Experiences of Institutionalization  
in the Danish Special Care System  
for the Intellectually Disabled, 1933–1980

*Klaus Petersen and Sarah Smed*

INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to imagine being institutionalized in a mental hospital or asylum without having experienced it yourself. Does institutionalization resemble depictions in popular culture, such as in the film *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1974)? Or should we allow ourselves to be seduced by the institutional buildings that stand as beautiful monuments in the Danish landscape? The largest Danish institution for the intellectually disabled,

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the Kellerske Anstalt in Brejning, now operates as a modern conference center and spa resort.

In this chapter, we try to get a deeper view of the experiences of institutional placement of persons with intellectual disabilities during the so-called golden age of the Danish welfare state—from the 1930s to the 1980s. We focus on a specific spatial setting: institutions established to care for persons with intellectual disabilities. Often, these institutions were located in remote areas and took the form of small self-sufficient units of living. From the 1930s, triggered by eugenics, these institutions developed into a combination of Erving Goffman’s “total institutions” and Michel Foucault’s “disciplinary institutions”.<sup>1</sup> The spatial setting regulated almost all aspects of the residents’ lives, including a knowledge-based regime combining medical knowledge, bodily practices, discipline, and care. We are interested in how this specific institutional context marked and formed the experiences of its inmates.

The chapter is based on an investigation carried out at the behest of the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs during the period of January 2019 to March 2022.<sup>2</sup> In the wake of accounts of abuse and protests over treatment within the Danish child institutional placement system, the government requested a study of placements within the so-called special care area covering the period from 1933 to 1980. The institutional placements covered individuals who, in the parlance of the time, were classified as “mentally deficient” (*åndssvage*), deaf, blind, epileptics, disabled (*vanføre*), and speech-impaired.<sup>3</sup> Not everyone in these categories was institutionalized, but many—especially within the “mentally retarded” group—were institutionalized for large parts of their lives. This historical study, which was published in March 2022, was based on extensive archival materials and interviews with former inmates and staff of the special care facilities.

In recent decades, there has been a growing research interest in the institutionalization and treatment of disability groups in Denmark,

<sup>1</sup> Goffman, *Asylums*; Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

<sup>2</sup> Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning* (especially Chapter 18). See also Kragh, Jensen, and Rasmussen, *På kanten af velfærdsstaten*.

<sup>3</sup> The Danish word *åndssvage* was originally used to label people as “feeble-minded,” “imbecilic,” “mentally defective,” or “idiotic” in an intellectual sense. Today, the word is used only to describe actions that are considered irrational or stupid, such as a new parking regulation, a bureaucratic barrier, or a person who misbehaved at a party. In the world of mental health, the term was replaced in the 1970s by *mentalt retardede* while the current term is developmentally impaired.

including in the history of mental health care. Often, this has been based on the critical—Goffman and Foucault-inspired—analytical framework developed by a pioneering scholar in Danish disability research, Birgit Kirkebæk.<sup>4</sup> Her work, emphasizing aspects such as categorization, social control, and the abuse of power within the institutions, have influenced several studies analyzing the historical development of specific institutions or persons.<sup>5</sup> As we have the most historical records related to the large so-called total institutions,<sup>6</sup> the images of these institutions have dominated the narratives about institutionalization in mental health care, even though a very large proportion (40–60 per cent) were placed in smaller (often private) institutions or in family care.<sup>7</sup> Systematic studies of the sector as such are scarce and often focus on negative aspects of institutionalization, such as violence and abuse, the widespread use of restraints, and the use of eugenically inspired “bio-power” through forced sterilization and other population policy instruments.<sup>8</sup>

In the empirical sections below, we discuss the themes that have emerged in our study of how inmates experienced their placement in Danish institutions of mental health care. Overall, our findings seem to confirm the influence of structural features of the “total” and “disciplinary” institutions as impersonal and alienating, as stigmatizing, interventionist, regulatory, and controlling, etc. The experiences, we find, include institutionalization as a way of life, broken family ties and lack of social relationships, loss of autonomy, and experiences of injustice and abuse. We do not claim that these are the only relevant themes in the experience of placement. However, these themes recur in the interviews and in the written material. In dividing the experienced placement thematically, we risk overlooking how the themes mutually reinforce or balance each other, and we might potentially overlook the overall individual experience. On the

<sup>4</sup> Kirkebæk, *Defekt og deporteret*; Kirkebæk, *Normaliseringens Periode*; Kirkebæk, *Letferdig og løsgtig*; Kirkebæk, *Uduelig og ubrugelig*.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Jensen, Rasmussen, and Kragh, *Anbragt i historien*; Kragh, *IQ75*; Rønn, *De fattige i ånden*; Wingender, *Drivhuset for den sygnende plante*; Duedahl, *Billeder fra en anden verden*.

<sup>6</sup> See also Goffman, *Asylums*, and the introductory chapter to this volume. Several of the larger institutions have their history written, see, for example, Kristensen, *100 år i Hammer Bæk*; Hvam, *Ebberødgårds historie*.

<sup>7</sup> Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 80.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Koch, *Tvangsterilisering i Danmark* as well as most recent comprehensive investigations, such as Kragh, Jensen, and Rasmussen, *På kanten af velferdsstaten*, and Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*.

other hand, a thematic division allows for a degree of generalization that would be difficult to achieve were we to restrict ourselves to descriptive individual narratives.<sup>9</sup>

In what follows, we will first set the scene and describe the Danish special care system as a placement system. We then discuss the analytical challenges of describing the experienced history of a strongly marginalized group, which is articulated to only a limited extent in the historical source material. Finally, we present the main themes of those inmates who were placed in institutions as they emerged in our studies: experiences of institutionalization, lack of autonomy, abuse, and stigmatization.

### TRACING EXPERIENCES OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION

In this chapter, we see the study of experiences as “a study of a blurred mediating category, where cultural meanings, subjective identities, social relations, and societal structures shape individual perceptions into experiences proper.”<sup>10</sup> Hence, describing people’s experiences in institutional placement is a far from easy task. The experiences are individual and subjective, and there are major challenges in terms of sources. The extensive written sources about the placement system and the individual inmates (such as personal records) are produced by the system itself (officials and employees at the institutions) with an administrative or legitimate scope, thus allowing little insight into how the individual inmates experienced their placement.

In this chapter, we have used three main types of source material. First, we have used interviews<sup>11</sup> with former inmates and employees. These interviews provide access to the individual’s experienced placement from a life-historical perspective. Naturally, this also entails the risk of forgetting and post hoc rationalization, although research indicates that the more traumatizing aspects of placements follow individuals throughout their lives.<sup>12</sup> The most significant challenge, however, is the limited scope and bias of the material. It is resource-intensive to collect these types of life

<sup>9</sup> See, however, Kragh, *IQ 75*, who writes a history of institutionalization based on a single individual, one Erling Jensen.

<sup>10</sup> Kivimäki, Suodenjoki, and Vahtikari, *Lived Nation*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> The interviews are supplemented with published memories, such as Jensen, *Min opvækst*; Herlev, *Brejningerødder*.

<sup>12</sup> Jensen, *Livtag med fortiden*.

histories, and we therefore have only a few of them.<sup>13</sup> Those we have originate predominantly from the more resilient and articulate among those placed. The care system for the intellectually disabled contained groups without the ability to speak or with very limited cognitive resources, and we know very little about the experiences of these people. For ethical reasons, all interviews used in the following are anonymized.<sup>14</sup>

Second, individual inmates also appear in the system's written source material. This is most directly in the form of letters or complaints addressed to the special care system's central management organs or to authority figures outside the system. In 1942, for example, an inmate placed at Ebberødgård requested the intervention of the Danish King so that he could be discharged.<sup>15</sup> In most cases, however, the voices of those placed in institutions appear only second-hand, when, for example, they were questioned in relation to a formal investigation into complaints of abuse after the family had complained on behalf of the inmate or when a doctor documented the need for a placement or recommended that a patient be discharged. Throughout the period examined here, parents' associations became increasingly vocal, advocating for the more vulnerable groups of inmates and putting more focus on their needs. These sources provide some insight into the hopes and dreams of the inmates, especially their reactions to perceived abuses or injustices. For this source group, however, it is especially the most robust and articulate inmates who appear in the source material.

Third, insight into the treatment and attitudes of the inmates can be partly deduced from the system's source material regarding the physical setting. It is possible to describe the everyday setting and to some extent also to document the occurrence of abuse and dissatisfaction among the inmates. However, not all violations are documented; many violations of prohibitions against physical punishment go undocumented in the material. It is also difficult to extrapolate from individual cases of physical violence or the extent to which inmates had a fear of physical violence from staff or other inmates as part of their experience of placement.

<sup>13</sup> See Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 29–32.

<sup>14</sup> Interviewees are in the footnotes referred to with an IP (Interview Person) no., which refers to the interview collection at the Danish Welfare Museum in Svendborg. All interviewees have signed a declaration allowing the interviews to be archived and used for research purposes. See also Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 29–32, 418–34.

<sup>15</sup> Rigsarkivet (National Archives Denmark), Sårforsoegskontoret, Journalsager 1921–1949, box 517, file: 43/13.

To summarize: the sources of how inmates experienced their placement are analytically challenging. We have a few scattered pieces of a complicated puzzle. There are repressed memories, silent groups, fears, taboos, etc.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the material has a built-in bias, where especially the weakest (and silent) groups of inmates rarely come forward, and we have no material that might allow for a systematic generalization of individual experiences. What at first hand appears to be a “community of experiences” might only be representative for the most vocal or resourceful of the institutionalized persons in question.<sup>17</sup>

### THE DANISH CARE SYSTEM FOR THE INTELLECTUALLY DISABLED, 1933–1980

This chapter focuses on the experience of placement in the Danish care system for the “mentally retarded” (*åndssvageforsorg*), as it was then termed, from the period of 1933 to 1980. The Danish placement system was established in 1933 as part of a comprehensive social reform. Under the reform, specific client categories, including the intellectually disabled, were separated from the “normal” social welfare system and brought under state care, in what was termed “special care” (*særforsorg*).<sup>18</sup> The special care system was based on already existing institutions, set up in the 1800s with partial state support. From 1933 onwards, the state took over most of the responsibility and funding; a central government coordination system was established, the National Care System for the Mentally Retarded (*Statens Andssvageforsorg*). During these early decades, the management organs of the local institution had a high degree of autonomy. This was reflected in the local forms of placement, which exhibited wide variation, such as the large total institutions Den Kellerske Anstalt in Bregning or Ebberødgård, north of Copenhagen, to very small institutions and care in private families. Throughout the period, central national leadership was gradually strengthened. The comprehensive administrative reform in 1959 divided the Danish care for the intellectually disabled into

<sup>16</sup> See also Kragh, Jensen, and Rasmussen, *På kanten af velferdsstaten*.

<sup>17</sup> Kivimäki, Suodenjoki, and Vahtikari, *Lived Nation*, 13.

<sup>18</sup> See Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 43–82. For the Social Reform Act of 1933, see Petersen, Petersen, and Christiansen, *Det socialpolitiske idélandskab*, 140–7. The other groups, who are not discussed in this article, were the deaf, blind, epileptics, those with speech defects, and the physically disabled.

11 care centers, and the power of doctors at the individual institutions was reduced.<sup>19</sup>

The institutions and placement policy were aimed primarily at solving societal problems. They were characterized by the general social policy development of the time, where the more philanthropic activities of the nineteenth century were taken over by the state and where the agendas were increasingly influenced by science and experts. Seen from today's vantage point, the institutions of the time were paternalistic, for better or for worse. Care and social control went hand in hand. This paternalism can also be seen in those institutions charged with caring for the intellectually disabled. However, in the period examined, there were two ideas which particularly came to affect care for the mentally retarded: the eugenics<sup>20</sup> movement in the early phase and the so-called “normalization policy” in the later phase.<sup>21</sup>

In connection with the 1933 social reform, the social legislation differentiated “socially dangerous” groups—such as the intellectually disabled, as mentioned—from the “normal” population, who were covered by the general social legislation. The idea was to give these people a dignified life while also subjecting them to restrictions in connection with key life decisions, such as pregnancy, marriage, and residence.<sup>22</sup> These restrictions—and the treatment of people categorized as intellectually disabled—were motivated largely by the eugenicist ideas of the time. The basic idea in the Danish eugenic policies was a concern that those who at the time were considered to belong to genetically and morally “defective” groups would negatively affect the “quality” of the population, and their reproduction would impose large welfare/care costs on the state. Therefore, society had to protect itself from this possibility by regulating the reproduction of these groups.<sup>23</sup> In the words of the Minister of Social Affairs K.K. Steincke, as an intellectual disability “from the very beginning and throughout life makes the person in question more or less unfit for work in society, and as a general rule quite unfit to fulfil household provider and childcare duties,”<sup>24</sup> it was precisely these intellectually disabled people who became the primary target of the eugenically motivated legislation.

<sup>19</sup> Kirkebæk, *Normaliseringens periode*; Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 54–8.

<sup>20</sup> Koch, *Racehygiejne i Danmark*.

<sup>21</sup> Kirkebæk, *Normaliseringens periode*.

<sup>22</sup> Lov om offentlig Forsorg. Lov. Nr. 181 af 20. maj 1933, § 66.

<sup>23</sup> The central work here is Koch, *Racehygiejne i Danmark*.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 48.

This eugenics-based complex of laws included the sterilization laws of 1929, 1934, and 1935, the abortion law of 1937, and the marriage law of 1938.<sup>25</sup> In connection to these laws, Steincke pointed out the obligation to report:

The main emphasis, of course, is on creating a better system in the entire abnormal care system, and alongside this, the various rules for reporting obligations, not least for the mentally retarded, where the current conditions—especially in certain places—cry out and show us a legislative power that funds one large institution after the other, but which seems otherwise rather indifferent to the tumult in the lives of the mentally retarded—with the associated breeding of new mentally retarded [children].<sup>26</sup>

If schools, doctors, or the local social committee suspected mental retardation in a child, the child would be examined, and if mental retardation was found, the child would be enrolled in special care. In 1934, this was followed up with the Act on Measures Concerning the Mentally Retarded (*Lov om foranstaltninger vedrørende åndssvage*), which established more comprehensive legislation for the intellectually disabled.<sup>27</sup>

In the decades after 1945, eugenics was downplayed in favor of general social policy considerations. In a parliamentary debate in 1947, it was stated that care for the intellectually disabled was aimed at “the unfortunate fellow creatures who are both spiritually and physically defective and can therefore be an unusually heavy burden for a home, especially for the small households where there is neither time, advice, or space to give them the necessary care.”<sup>28</sup> However, several studies of placement practice have shown that the specific situation changed only very slowly, and the sterilization policy continued through the 1960s.<sup>29</sup> The discrepancy between the general development of welfare and the conditions of care for the intellectually disabled led to new legislation in 1959, where the emphasis was now placed on a “normalization policy.” Those assigned to the care system for the intellectually disabled—according to the policy

<sup>25</sup> See the following legislation acts: Lov om adgang til sterilisation, lov nr. 130 af 1. juni 1929; Lov om ændringer i Lov nr. 276 af 30. juni 1922 om ægteskabs indgåelse og opløsning, lov nr. 141 af 1. juli 1938.

<sup>26</sup> *Socialreformen med noter*, 41.

<sup>27</sup> Lov om foranstaltninger vedrørende åndssvage, lov nr. 171 af 16. maj 1934.

<sup>28</sup> Lov om foranstaltninger vedrørende åndssvage, lov nr. 171 af 16. maj 1934.

<sup>29</sup> Koch, *Tvangsterilisering i Danmark*, 325; Kragh, *IQ75*, 66–8, 206–8.



motivations—should live a life closer to a normal life, with increased autonomy and freedom. Since life had to be lived within the same institutions as prior to the reform, the changes took place only slowly and gradually, especially for the most vulnerable of those placed. In 1980, the National Care for the Mentally Retarded (*Statens Åndssvageforsorg*) was eliminated, and responsibility for the institutions was transferred to the municipalities and counties.<sup>30</sup>

### INSTITUTIONALIZATION AS A WAY OF LIFE

As stated above, care placements for the intellectually disabled were implemented over a wide range of institutional types, from individual placements in family care to smaller private facilities to large total institutions. In the following, we focus on individuals who resided in these large institutions.<sup>31</sup> There exists extensive source material on the physical setting and formal operational framework of the large institutions. This material gives us pictures of a life without privacy, with large dormitories and shared toilet and bathing facilities. Quite soon after 1933, these institutions became overcrowded, and studies from the mid-1950s revealed significant space problems, with beds in the dormitories just 20 cm apart. Twenty years later, in the mid-1970s, the Parliamentary Ombudsman issued reports that continued to show horrendous conditions at the large and unmodernized institutions.<sup>32</sup> The impersonal dormitories, the toilet conditions, and the like were referred to by the Ombudsman as “extremely objectionable” with a “forced community” devoid of “any significant individual privacy.”

Institutionalization also had a strong impact on daily life. The mental care facilities were a kind of society within a society, with their own rules, practices, and social hierarchies. In the early decades, both inmates and staff wore uniforms, and the inmates were divided not only according to gender, age, and need but also according to their ability to work. There

<sup>30</sup> Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 57–8.

<sup>31</sup> For some inmates, residence in the large institutions was part of the total placement, and for the most vulnerable of these inmates, they were institutionalized for their entire lives. Between 5000 and 20,000 persons were in the institutions every year, but we do not know the exact number of persons institutionalized throughout the 1933–1980 period. See Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 79–80.

<sup>32</sup> *Folketingets ombudsmands beretning for året 1975*. See also Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 328–31.

were limited activities for those judged unable to work, and several employees told of groups who sat passively around the clock. It was not until the 1950s that general educational activities were introduced for some of the inmates. There were rules for proper conduct that could include more or less formal sanctions. The large institutions had their own “cell-like” units and closed sections that could be used as punishment, and there were also various forms of physical restraint that could be deployed as an informal sanction.<sup>33</sup>

The physical setting and the lack of personal freedom have undoubtedly shaped the experience of being institutionalized. An interviewee, placed as a young person under the intellectually disabled care system in Brejning from 1958 to 1975, described the staff: “They were strict sometimes. Other times they were a bit irritating. But they never ever said ‘No.’ Only once in a while did they say ‘Hello [name], how are you?’”<sup>34</sup> There was great variation in the institutional experience, and we know very little about the lives of those placed prior to being institutionalized. A consistent feature in the interviews is an experience of institutionalization as a negative event in their life. Complaints from inmates as well as in interviews show that the highly regulated life was experienced as restrictive. A person placed at Ebberødgård in the 1950s recounted: “We had to go to bed at seven, because we had to get up early. Some went to bed as early as four o’clock, but I went to bed at seven. There were also some who were in bed all day, so you just lay there talking and looking at each other, and then at 11 o’clock, the night watchman came in and checked if there was anything.”<sup>35</sup> Another person, employed at Ribelund from the end of the 1960s, explained: “Calm, cleanliness, and going by the rules prevailed.”<sup>36</sup>

In the complaints raised by the inmates, it was not only the bedtimes and the forced passivity that were criticized, but also the food, the pocket money, and the lack of opportunity to decide things for oneself (for further discussion on the lack of autonomy, see below).

<sup>33</sup> On the use of restraints, see Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 233–60. Restraints included a number of techniques such as isolation, straight jackets, restraints of hands or feet, and even the use of rope to tie up people to a chair or a bed. In the 1960s, there was also a discussion of so-called medical restraint using psychotropic drugs to pacify people in institutions.

<sup>34</sup> IP34, inmate, Brejning, 1958–1975.

<sup>35</sup> IP42, Ebberødgård, 1957–1967. See also IP16, employee in Løgumgårde in the 1970s.

<sup>36</sup> IP18, employee in Ribelund from the late 1960s.

## BROKEN FAMILY TIES AND A LACK OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

The relationship with the family is central to the narratives of the inmates, and the separation from and at times sparse contact with family members is highlighted as painful and incomprehensible.<sup>37</sup> This applies especially to the care for the intellectually disabled, where many individuals were institutionalized as children and for long periods of time. A former inmate, placed in the care of the system, said that being handed over by his parents at Brejning as a very young child had left its mark: "What I was exposed to that day was feeling like a discarded piece of rubbish that should just be thrown away. I was something that was wrong, so my parents handed me over to Asylgården."<sup>38</sup> A mother of an inmate described how, as an 18-year-old in the mid-1950s, on the advice of her physician, she went to the Ribelund mental institution with her husband, of the same age, and their six-month-old son for an examination:

We came down to a chief physician. When we finished with the examination, he took my husband out. When he [the doctor] came out to me, he said: "It's [the child] a losing ticket [*en nitte*]. Try again. And if it's the same, don't try."<sup>39</sup>

The son was placed in the institution.

Life in an institution also affected the inmates' family relationships for shorter or longer periods. Some informants talked about how they had regular contact with their family, who either visited them at the institution on pre-announced days, or the informants were permitted planned holidays at home.<sup>40</sup> However, many were placed far away from their homes, and the physical—and in time often also psychological—distance could become so challenging that family relationships came under pressure or disappeared altogether.

A relative of an inmate at Ribelund at the end of the 1950s recounted:

<sup>37</sup> Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 339–40. See also Kragh, Jensen, and Rasmussen, *På kanten af velferdsstaten*, 356–7.

<sup>38</sup> IP34, inmate, Brejning, 1958–1974.

<sup>39</sup> IP28, family member, Ribelund and Brejning.

<sup>40</sup> Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 339–41.

When my brother was a little younger, well, he may have been eight years old. I remember that I was there to visit him at the institution. But we were never able to get in. It was something like we sat in a waiting room and then he was washed and they put nice clothes on him, and then he came out, and then we had maybe two hours when we could be together with him and then we had to hand him back again. We never got around to seeing where he lived. They [the parents] did not question the fact that you were not allowed to enter. You were very respectful of authority.<sup>41</sup>

In the mid-1970s, this same informant ended up working at the institution Ribelund and in this connection, got the feeling that his brother was not being treated well. However, the informant never told his parents about it:

I kept it completely to myself. I would not have gotten anything out of telling my mother and father that he was washed with cold water, because they couldn't take him home, and they couldn't shout at [the staff] in [the institution].<sup>42</sup>

Communication between the person in custody and next of kin could be controlled<sup>43</sup>:

Each week, I received a package and a letter from home, but the package and letter were opened. There was censorship. When we children wrote a letter, we were told that it had to be read by the foster mother [...] I don't know whether my parents knew that the mail was being censored. There was no such thing as phone calls. I only remember talking on the phone once for my birthday, and that was even though my parents had a phone at their shop.<sup>44</sup>

For some inmates, being together with the other inmates could develop into friendships and social relations. Friendships could be formed through long stays within the large institutions for the intellectually disabled. "We supported each other. We didn't gossip about each other, you didn't do that," said an informant from within the care system about the community

<sup>41</sup> IP27, employee and family member, Ribelund, 1974–1977.

<sup>42</sup> IP27, employee and family member, Ribelund, 1974–1977.

<sup>43</sup> Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 149–50.

<sup>44</sup> IP67, inmate, Geelsgård, from 1956.

they experienced.<sup>45</sup> Another informant talked about moving from one ward to another:

You were also not allowed to show emotions, like the first night, when I [the informant was approximately four years old] was on the new ward. I was sad and cried myself to sleep. It was probably because I missed the ward I had lived on before. But I was told by the night watchman that I had to stop whining.<sup>46</sup>

In several of the testimonies of former inmates, they described their feelings of being of less value and excluded. These feelings of low self-esteem are recalled from the time during the placement itself, but also when describing the feelings they still have. A sense of objectification and stigmatization is expressed in several of the inmates' accounts. These emotions are often linked to experiences of not being part of normal society or being exhibited as different. Describing the people who lived in proximity to the institution, an informant concluded: "They obviously thought that we were someone who was contagious."<sup>47</sup>

Although the physical distance between the institution and the local community was small, the social distance could be great. A former inmate described:

It was only when we had to go to the priest, when we were to be confirmed, that we met them [other children and young people from the local area]. We met them down there in the confirmation hall with the priest. And I remember that it was a very strange experience. I had no idea how to behave with them. ... It was very strange. ... People from an alien planet ... that's about it.<sup>48</sup>

The experience of stigmatization also appears in the individual complaints, where discharged inmates wanted to waive the monitoring visits at home because they were experienced as stigmatizing.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> IP31, inmate, Vodskov, 1953–1965.

<sup>46</sup> IP34, inmate, Brejning, 1958–1974.

<sup>47</sup> IP52, inmate, Ribelund, 1964–1976. See also IP33, inmate, Ribelund, from 1960.

<sup>48</sup> IP76, inmate, Refsnæs, 1963–1971.

<sup>49</sup> Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 352–4.

## LACK OF AUTONOMY

The physical setting tended to impose strict limits on gaining privacy and individual freedom. The informants frequently emphasized a lack of privacy combined with the feeling of being constantly monitored. One inmate in the care system for the intellectually disabled placed in 1966 described the situation thus: “We didn’t really have a door. I’m glad it’s not the old days anymore [...] Thank God, I’m glad about that.”<sup>50</sup> Another inmate talked about life in the 1950s and 1960s at the institution in Brejning:

If you didn’t learn anything else out there, you at least learned to walk sideways because the beds were so close together. Later on, it became an eight-person room, then a six- and finally three-person room. It also ended up with us each getting our own bedside table—almost a chest of drawers with space for some private things—books, letters, and whatever else you had.<sup>51</sup>

The absence of privacy also included the conditions in the toilets and when bathing, and these most intimate bodily activities could be experienced as greatly frustrating under institutional conditions. A former employee at the institution for the intellectually disabled in Løgumgårde explained that “there was a fixed toilet time, it didn’t matter that you had to go to the toilet when you needed to.”<sup>52</sup> A former inmate from Andersvænge experienced the bathing situations as follows: “It was a cold bath that we had back then [...] a cold shower. They were really mean. We sat on a bench and they showered us with cold water.”<sup>53</sup> A former inmate from Vodskov emphasized that one of the worst things was when they all had to take a shower on Friday, and the staff lined up and got ready to perform their respective functions:

It was almost like being on an assembly line. One [staff member] washes your hair, then you were washed all over your body, and then you went under the shower, where you were allowed to stand for two or three minutes, then it was out again, you were dried off, and then you had your nails cut. I had a very hard time with that. And it was humiliating that right up to

<sup>50</sup> IP39, inmate, Andersvænge, from 1966.

<sup>51</sup> Herlev, *Brejningrødder*, 39.

<sup>52</sup> IP11, employed, Løgumgårde, from 1963.

<sup>53</sup> IP39, inmate, Andersvænge, from 1963. See also IP11, employed, Løgumgårde, from 1963, who compared bathing to the process in a slaughterhouse.

the age of 14, I had to stand and be naked in front of women who had to wash you in one place and then the other. You also have feelings, and you also have pride. For example, I think that I was washed too much in the crotch. I think so. Sorry to say this.<sup>54</sup>

Freedom also includes the right to shape one's own life. A pessimistic assessment from a former employee in the care system for the intellectually disabled was that "having influence over one's own life didn't exist back then."<sup>55</sup> In the inmates' accounts, the absence of autonomy often concerned very specific activities. Several inmates recounted how they were not allowed to wear the clothes that they had brought with them from home. An informant placed in the care system for the intellectually disabled talked about the patient gowns that all the women inmates wore during the day:

It went all the way down to the shoes. That's how it was. You could hardly walk [...] but when my mother came to visit me, I could have my own clothes on, on the other days you were not allowed to wear your own clothes.<sup>56</sup>

The same informant also explained that at night she slept naked, which she found humiliating, especially when she was menstruating. Another informant, an inmate at Brejning from 1956, described:

They were some horrible old, ragged clothes we wore back then [...] We wore canvas workpants [*drejsbukser*], and if you so much as walked, they squeaked, and long stockings with elastic in them, no they were austere times [...] and we had shoes from someplace called Koda Bicycle Factory, and you know, on the sides [of the shoes] there was fabric and the bottom was made of bicycle tires.<sup>57</sup>

The experience of a lack of personal freedom was also linked to dreams of a life outside the institution. This is evident in the many petitions for discharge, where the inmate motivated their request with the desire to

<sup>54</sup> IP31, inmate, Vodskov, 1953–1965.

<sup>55</sup> IP8, employee, Brejning, from 1963.

<sup>56</sup> IP42, inmate, Ebberødgård, 1949–1959.

<sup>57</sup> IP42, inmate, Ebberødgård, 1949–1959. See also IP34, inmate, Brejning, 1958–1974. See also Bertelsen, *Liv og arbejde*, 20.

have normal work and a family life. The requests also concerned education—at least for some of the inmates who had the opportunity to leave the institution as adults.<sup>58</sup> Until the 1950s, within the Danish system of care for the intellectually disabled, there was a limited focus on education and the development of skills, apart from when the inmates were included in the daily practical work of the institutions or when they worked on tasks on the outside while supervised by the institution. For some, this gave hope of a life outside the institution, but the hopes were not always fulfilled.<sup>59</sup>

Another important aspect of the inmates' perceived lack of freedom in institutional life concerned romantic partners, sexual relationships, and establishing one's own family. Institutional life was sharply divided by gender, and the eugenicist thinking of the time led the institutions to be acutely preoccupied with the inmates' sexual behavior in connection with enrolment and discharge and during their period of residence.<sup>60</sup> Especially for the younger inmates, until the 1960s, the restrictions on intimate relations were described as a strict set of rules prohibiting boyfriends/girlfriends and the girls and boys being separated unless supervised. However, several inmates also mention how they found ways to have relationships in secret. A former inmate within the intellectually disabled care system recounted how when the girls and boys reached the age of 15–16 at Vodskov, they had a system where they flashed a light from ward to ward after their 19:30 bedtime: "If we blinked once and they blinked three times, then we would meet down in the singing room. And here we had romance."<sup>61</sup>

Other former inmates within the care system for the intellectually disabled reported harsh sanctions and degrading treatment at the slightest suspicion of an interest in the opposite sex. A female informant talked about her time at a Pietist (*indremissionsk*) institution in the 1960s:

Me and a lady, we were sitting on a bench one day and we could look down the road. Then a truck came. He pulled into a parking lot not too far away. He waved to us and we waved back. Do you know what we got for that?

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Rigsarkivet, Statens Åndssvageforsorg, journalsager 1959–1975, box 280, file: FO119/1; See also Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 109–10.

<sup>59</sup> IP38, inmate, Østbo and other places, 1973–1979.

<sup>60</sup> Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 110–112, 133–7, 282–5.

<sup>61</sup> IP31, inmate, Vodskov, 1953–1965.



Eight days in bed! And you weren't even allowed to go to the toilet, no, they placed a toilet bucket in there.<sup>62</sup>

A former male employee from Brejning talked about the sharp division of the sexes: "If I was on my way home from a shift, for example, and I saw a female and male resident talking to each other, I was actually obliged to report it, and then the two could easily risk some form of punishment—a day in bed or solitary confinement."<sup>63</sup> However, sexual morality was changing throughout the period examined, and this liberalization could also be observed within the system for special care in the 1960s and 1970s. Relations between the sexes in the institutions became somewhat more relaxed.<sup>64</sup> However, sexuality was still subject to regulation; for example, masturbation was considered problematic, and former employees and inmates within the care system for the intellectually disabled reported sanctions against this practice right up to the end of this period. An informant who resided at Ribelund in the 1960s, for example, when questioned about the extent to which one had the right to privacy in relation to masturbating responded: "No, we weren't allowed to." The interviewer then asked what would happen if one was discovered masturbating. The informant replied: "Then we got scolded. Then we had to stay in our rooms for four or five days. Then we weren't allowed to come out."<sup>65</sup>

An employee at the same place between 1974 and 1977 described how she experienced the pressures of having a more modern view of the inmates' sexuality while the management had instructed all staff to take measures to prevent masturbation:

If we came in and we saw it, we would simply make sure they knew: "Now you have to get up and take a shower, and you have to do it now," and they shouldn't be allowed to do that, because it was something filthy. They [the management] will simply not have it. And then they came up, and if it was such that it was too much, we could just give them some cold water [...]. There was a shower, so you could just give them some cold water. Then I said that I simply didn't want to do that.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>62</sup> IP48, inmate, Sølund and other places, from 1963.

<sup>63</sup> Kragh, Jensen, and Rasmussen, *På kanten af velfærdsstaten*, 137.

<sup>64</sup> Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 134–5; See also Kulick and Rydström, *Loneliness and Its Opposite*.

<sup>65</sup> IP33, inmate, Ribelund, 1960 and later.

<sup>66</sup> IP27, employee, Ribelund, 1974–1977.

## EXPERIENCES OF INJUSTICE AND ABUSE

As mentioned in the section on sources of the inmates' experience, their experience becomes vivid in the letters of complaint. The topics of complaint could include very different aspects, from everyday matters, such as food and clothing, to more fundamental issues, such as having suffered abuse, disappointment, and a lack of rights. Those who complained rarely made explicit reference to standards and rules in "normal" society, but they are implicitly grounded in a subjective experience of injustice. A former inmate, placed in Brejning in the 1950s, remembered that "there was also a girl on my ward who complained about the food. She called it dog food. The chief medical officer, Wildenskov, acknowledged that she was correct, but she was nevertheless still punished and placed in the 'cell'."<sup>67</sup> Another inmate from the mental institution, also resident in the 1950s, described the food: "It was some kind of dog food. You could risk finding adhesive bandages in the goulash and beer bottle caps in the beer bread. We were forced to eat up." Meals also took place in complete silence.

It was a silent game. If it was not silence, or if someone was playing with the cutlery, there was a risk that the maids would come and collect the plates. When you got a plate again, it was random which plate you got. You could get some food that one of the others had been messing around with.<sup>68</sup>

Complaints were not limited to mundane matters of food and clothing. The complaint materials contain many requests to be discharged. The coercive element in connection with enrolment and especially discharge was the ultimate expression of a lack of autonomy. Several inmates expressed a general desire to leave the institution and live a more free and normal life on the outside. It was the local chief physician who decided whether the inmate could be discharged, and the actual exit process could be long and gradual, including demands made on the inmate in return for discharge.<sup>69</sup>

A number of applications for discharge (or complaints about not being discharged) were based on wishes to enter into marriage, but the eugenic thinking of the time pushed the system to ensure that a discharge did not

<sup>67</sup> Herlev, *Brejningrodder*, 47.

<sup>68</sup> Jensen, *Min opvækst*, 22, 29.

<sup>69</sup> Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 89–116.

lead to pregnancy.<sup>70</sup> For those inmates of fertile age, submitting to sterilization was often a condition for discharge.<sup>71</sup> Some of the inmates experienced this as an abuse or injustice. There were inmates who on several occasions refused to “voluntarily” accept sterilization, and there were inmates who accepted sterilization but were never discharged.<sup>72</sup> We can also observe that from the 1950s, there were more reactions to the sterilization policy. More complaints were submitted and lawsuits filed by those who had been sterilized.<sup>73</sup> Very few cases led to any form of compensation, but the cases show how sterilization was experienced as a form of abuse. In 1976, a man complained that he had been sterilized in the early 1950s at the asylum in Vodskov:

I was 19 years old when I finally got out of there. In order to get out, it was necessary for me to sign a form that they could sterilize me. I think that this was extortion, and I believe that it must be possible to give me compensation for that. ... Now I have been on the outside for approximately 24 years, and I am married, and I would have liked to have children, but as you already know, it has been made impossible for me.<sup>74</sup>

In both the interviews and in the archival materials, we have come across testimonies from women who were inmates within the intellectual disability care system and who were sterilized. Later on, they felt stigmatized by others because of the placement and the intervention.<sup>75</sup> For some women, the procedure also brought feelings of shame. A former inmate described in an interview her decision to tell her future husband about her past, which she had otherwise kept hidden:

My husband told me that it meant nothing to him. But on many occasions, his own family poked fun at him, saying, “Think, with her, you won’t have any children.” They said this all the time. But he just told them that I had told him all about it. And then he didn’t want to hear any more about it.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 285–9.

<sup>71</sup> This is well-documented by the existing research, see Koch, *Tvangsterilisering i Danmark*; Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 285–9.

<sup>72</sup> Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 285–9.

<sup>73</sup> Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 263–93.

<sup>74</sup> Rigsarkivet, Socialministeriet, journalsager 1976–1981, box 1178, file: 5114/6.

<sup>75</sup> Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 290–2.

<sup>76</sup> IP32, inmate, Brejning, 1944–1958.

A central theme that appears in accounts of institutionalization is violence and abuse. This is also documented in the care for the intellectually disabled in Denmark.<sup>77</sup> Despite the fact that sexual assault and physical violence throughout the entire period violated both criminal law and the care system's own rules, it is documented that it took place. There was abuse by the employees and among the inmates. The cases cover a wide spectrum, from sexual assault and serious violence (cases that ended up in the legal system) to examples of the use of physical punishment. However, we know only of those cases that were registered in the archival material or appeared in the media, so it is not possible to assess precisely how widespread violence and abuse were in the care system for the intellectually disabled.<sup>78</sup>

However, we can observe in the recollections and the complaint petitions that this is both emphasized and strongly articulated by the inmates. In addition to the traumatization of experiencing an assault, we can see that the testimony of the inmates has often not been judged as credible (for example, in connection with the investigation of cases). In other cases, it appears that in some institutions, the use of physical punishment was part of the institutional culture.<sup>79</sup> Overall, it may have created an atmosphere where inmates feared being subjected to violence and abuse. One informant from the care system recalled their fear of a certain staff member:

He would decide to hit you, and it wasn't just on one side of the head, no, it was on both sides of the head, and then with both hands and then ... he would lift you up and you were thrown down on the floor. He worked in the ward for many years, and I was uneasy around him. If the headmistress had seen it, it would have been "Goodbye and good luck" for him. But we didn't dare say it.<sup>80</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It is not easy to summarize how inmates experienced the Danish care system for the intellectually disabled in the decades from 1933 to 1980. While we have a wealth of source material on the system's development and practice, we have only a few scattered sources describing how the

<sup>77</sup>This is described in detail in Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 163–232.

<sup>78</sup>Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 164–6.

<sup>79</sup>Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 181–90.

<sup>80</sup>IP52, inmate, Ribelund, 1964–1976.

inmates themselves experienced being in the institutions. We have used interviews with former inmates (and staff) and the voices that emerge in the system's own archive materials (including letters of complaint) to draw an overall picture of the experience of placement.

The experiences, we find, were characterized by a lack of autonomy, institutionalization as a way of life, stigmatization, ruptured family relations, and a fear of violence. In many ways, experiences and feelings closely related to the specific institutional setting of "total" and "disciplinary" institutions in which they lived.<sup>81</sup> There were, of course, changes throughout the period investigated here. From the 1950s, there was a gradually increasing focus on granting the inmates more legal rights and personal autonomy, and 1959 saw the introduction of the so-called "normalization policy," which emphasized that the conditions of those in institutions should increasingly follow the general development of society. Nevertheless, the question remains: How quickly did things change? In a sense, experiences can be relative—a moving target—referring to the potential differences between ideals and reality, and as the living standards and individual empowerment improved in the "normal society," the experience found a new base line.<sup>82</sup>

Another question is worth asking: Did it change for everyone? The source material tends to reveal the voices of those inmates who were most resourceful or articulate. However, the Danish system of care for the intellectually disabled also included very vulnerable inmates with severely limited cognitive and communicative resources. We hear very little from them and know very little about them. They were largely left to themselves, and when in the late 1960s there was an increased focus on the use of physical restraints, it became clear that some of the inmates were physically restrained and understimulated for large parts of the day.<sup>83</sup> In 1978, in a critique of the conditions at Ebberødgård, the Ombudsman emphasized that the "the clients rocking back and forth should have the opportunity for human contact, among other things."<sup>84</sup> What at first hand might appear to be a "community of experiences" might only be representative for the most vocal or resourceful of the institutionalized persons in

<sup>81</sup> Goffman, *Asylums*; Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

<sup>82</sup> See also Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, Introduction, 12.

<sup>83</sup> Petersen et al., *Historisk udredning*, 233–58.

<sup>84</sup> Rigsarkivet, Socialstyrelsen, journalsager 1972–1982, box 834, file: 352/620101/9.

question.<sup>85</sup> Arguably, the structural selectivity of the so-called “normalization policies” from the late 1950s offered new life chances and de-institutionalization for the most resourceful in the institutions, but potentially further marginalized and stigmatized the least resourceful.

Another aspect of the experience of institutionalization is that the interviews in particular show that the feeling of being institutionalized does not stop at discharge, but most often lives on and shapes the individual’s life long after leaving the institutional setting. A striking example is a man who for five decades was interned in various institutions. After being discharged in 1956, he complained about his forced institutionalization for more than 20 years. In his final letter of complaint, dated 1979, the man was over 80 years old. He addressed the Ministry of Justice:

I am a man who has been forcibly placed in care for 50 years. Since I was discharged (about 20 years ago), I have tried in vain to have my case reviewed because I believe that I am entitled to compensation ... but without any result. ... I hope you can do something for me, so that I can still have time to enjoy life a little. Yours sincerely ....<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Kivimäki, Suodenjoki, and Vahtikari, *Lived Nation*, 13.

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PART IV

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Dealing with Institutional Experiences



## CHAPTER 11

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# Lived Residential Schools in Times of Crisis and Change: Debating the School for the Deaf in Borgå Through Experience in the 1930s and 1980s

*Hanna Lindberg*

### INTRODUCTION

On 5 June 1993, three teenagers graduated from the school for the deaf in the town of Borgå (Porvoo in Finnish) in southern Finland.<sup>1</sup> The day was highly emotional for the graduates as well as the families and teachers participating in the ceremony. The graduation was also of national interest, and it was reported in the media. At the center of attention were not only the two boys and one girl who now closed a chapter in their lives and would continue their high school education in Örebro, Sweden. What

<sup>1</sup>The chapter was written with the support from the postdoctoral project Minority Citizenship in the Finnish Welfare State. The Case of the Finland-Swedish Deaf, ca 1950–2000 funded by the Academy of Finland (grant number 326560).

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drew attention was the fact that the almost 150-year-old school would now close its doors permanently, and thereby deaf education for the Finland-Swedish minority in Finland would come to an end.<sup>2</sup>

The closing of the school had been predated by reoccurring discussions and conflicts about the need for and quality of education for Finland-Swedish deaf people.<sup>3</sup> The school was one of its kind in Finland. Borgå was the site of the birth of the deaf community in Finland, as it was here that the first school for the deaf was founded in 1846. The town and the school were therefore a part of the canon of Finnish deaf history, and particularly so for the Finland-Swedish deaf community, a double minority intersecting the deaf minority and the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. Between 1932 and 1993, the school in Borgå was the only Swedish school for deaf children in Finland, and it provided comprehensive education to deaf children from Swedish-speaking homes in Finland, who chiefly live along the southern and western coast as well as on the Åland Islands. Although the percentage of Swedish-speakers in Finland was in steady decline throughout the twentieth century, amounting to approximately 6 percent of the population by the end of the millennium, the constitution declared that Finland had two national languages, and therefore education on all levels should be provided in both languages.<sup>4</sup> The residential school in Borgå gave rise to a particular Finland-Swedish deaf community with

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Karin Kronlund-Saarikoski, *Sista skolavslutningen på dövskolan i Borgå, Dövas Tidskrift* 8/1993, 39; *Nya Åland* 22 June 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, deaf people were conceptualized in different ways. My sources from the 1930s use “deaf-mute” in reference to prelingually deaf people who communicated in sign language. The term would, however, soon thereafter become heavily criticized for, among other things, implying that deaf people lacked a language altogether, and the term was in the mid-twentieth century replaced by “deaf” in official settings. In the chapter, I use deaf-mute only when citing or translating official names. Furthermore, since the 1970s, there has been a division between writing “deaf” with a lowercase d in reference to the audiological condition of hearing loss, and “Deaf” in reference to a cultural and linguistic minority centered on sign language communication. Although I am studying a period in time when deaf people were asserting their position as a linguistic minority and their right to sign language, I choose to write deaf in the lowercase following the recommendation by Annelies Kusters and Michele Friedner, who view “deaf” as more inclusive. I am studying a historical period when deaf people seldom viewed themselves as purely “deaf” or “Deaf”, but the two understandings interlinked and affected each individual differently. Salmi and Laakso, *Maahan lämpimään*, 288–99; Kusters and Friedner, Introduction, ix.

<sup>4</sup> For the history of the Finland-Swedish population and the role of the Swedish language in Finland, see, for example, Engman, *Finns and Swedes in Finland*; Engman, *Språkfrågan*; Meinander, *Nationalstaten*.

specific sets of experiences attached to the school building and the teachers and personnel that worked at the school, as well as the rules and regulations set by them. Furthermore, Finland-Swedish Sign Language was developed throughout the twentieth century in connection to the school.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter, I will study how experiences of deaf education in Swedish and particularly of the school in Borgå were brought forth when claiming the right to deaf education for Finland-Swedes and fighting for the preservation and improvement of the residential school in Borgå. I will concentrate on two time periods when the school was under debate prior to its closure in 1993: the spring of 1936 when plans to enroll Finnish students in Borgå were refuted, and the late 1980s, when a public debate over the educational quality and disciplinary actions of the Borgå school arose in Finland-Swedish media. I argue that experience became a vital point of reference in the discussions and debates surrounding the Borgå school and was brought forth by all involved parties. Therefore, the two time periods can be studied as moments in time when experiences were crystallized. I ask the following questions: How were experiences of deaf education and the school for deaf people in Borgå used when arguing for the preservation of the Borgå school as a Finland-Swedish institution and for raising the quality of deaf education? How did the experiences put forward in the public debate in the 1930s and 1980s reflect changes in deaf education, the social position of deaf people and Finland-Swedes, and the ideologies surrounding sign language and deafness? A focus on experiences of the past simultaneously exposes expectations for the future, thus highlighting the dynamics of social change.

To answer my questions, I primarily utilize periodicals and newspapers where the issue of deaf education for Finland-Swedes was debated and where different stakeholders formulated their opinions and used experience as a tool when arguing for their point of view. I use both local and national newspapers as well as the periodical *Dövas Tidskrift* (previously *Tidskrift för Dövstumma*)<sup>6</sup> published by the Finnish Association of the Deaf. As secondary sources, I also use interviews and archival material.

<sup>5</sup>For the development of Finland-Swedish Sign Language, see Hoyer, *The Sociolinguistic Situation of Finland-Swedish Deaf People*.

<sup>6</sup>The periodical, founded in 1897, went through several name changes. Between 1897 and 1949, it was called *Tidskrift för Dövstumma* (spelled *Döfstumma* until 1908) and changed to *Tidskrift för Döva* in 1950, after which it merged with the Finnish periodical *Kuurojen Lehti*. In 1986, the name changed again to *Dövas Tidskrift*, thereby clearly signaling that it was not only a periodical *for* but also *by* deaf people.

In the chapter, I employ experience as an analytical tool, and I study mediation and the process of giving meaning to experiences. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Toivo understand *experience* on three interlinked levels: (1) the social reality of individuals and collectives, (2) the process of analyzing and making sense of everyday occurrences, and (3) an analytical tool to investigate everyday life and people's interpretation of it. As an analytical approach, experience provides the historian with the opportunity to study the past holistically and intersectionally and to combine top-down and bottom-up narratives, as the approach takes into account both physical realities and the discourses and ideals surrounding them.<sup>7</sup>

My focus on debates involving people representing different groups with different backgrounds and interests provides me with the opportunity to study how experiences were shared and appropriated from both the top-down and bottom-up. Furthermore, by studying two time periods, I can expose how a *scene of experience*, the Borgå school for the deaf in the late 1930s and 1980s, developed through changing *layers of experience*. Building on Berger and Luckmann's social constructionism as well as Koselleck's concepts of the space of experience and horizon of expectation, Heikki Kokko and Minna Harjula have developed these conceptual tools for analyzing experiences as socially shared phenomena. Kokko and Harjula define the scene of experience as a concrete situation where the space of experience and horizon of expectation interlink. The concept can be used to analyze a specific moment when social change takes place and how this moment is experienced from below. The layer of experience is a way to analyze institutionalized socially shared experiences and how different historical layers are built upon one another to form experiences in a specific historical time and place.<sup>8</sup>

The chapter proceeds as follows: I will first give an overview of the role of residential schools for minority cultures, especially the deaf community, and the ways in which experiences have been studied in connection to these types of institutions. The following two sections focus on the two times of crisis under study: the 1930s and 1980s. These crises are analyzed as scenes of experience that illuminate experiences and the expectations of residential schools for deaf children, and how these changed over time.

<sup>7</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 11–13; see also Kivimäki, Suodenjoki, and Vahtikari, *Lived Nation*, 10–17.

<sup>8</sup> Kokko and Harjula, *Social History of Experiences*, 31–8.

## LIVED RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS AS SITES OF COMMUNITY AND OPPRESSION

Experiences of residential schools have been documented and analyzed in several studies, state inquiries, and community history projects utilizing oral histories as the basis of knowledge.<sup>9</sup> In the history of welfare and educational institutions, residential schools have often been studied as sites of oppressive treatment and violent discipline. Especially previous researches into residential schools for Indigenous people have focused on the schools as a tool for ethnic cleansing, separating children from their birth communities in order to integrate them into majority cultures.<sup>10</sup>

Analyzing the history of deaf people and deaf communities, however, exposes the situationality and complexities of residential schools. Residential schools for deaf children were established in Europe in the latter part of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century and formed the basis for the development of sign languages and deaf communities. Before the advent of deaf education in the form of residential schools, geographically scattered deaf people had few opportunities to socialize with each other and form sustainable sign languages. After the foundation of the Borgå school, several other schools were established in Finnish cities during the second half of the nineteenth century, and the schools gave rise to deaf cultures and political activity channeled through local deaf clubs and a national association formed at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup>

For deaf people, schools would however become ambiguous institutions, symbolizing both the foundation of deaf communities and sign languages as well as the suppression of the same. In the early phases of deaf education in Finland, instruction had been given in sign language,<sup>12</sup> but

<sup>9</sup>For residential schools in Finland, see, for example, Hytönen et al., *Lastensuojelun sijaisshuollon epäkohdat*; Laitinen and Pietilä, *Vammaiset*, 173–87; Juuso, *Truth and Reconciliation Process Concerning Sámi Issues*, 32–5.

<sup>10</sup>Among the most notorious examples is the residential school system for Indigenous people in Canada, that was introduced in the nineteenth century and operated until the late twentieth century. See, for example, Fraser, *T'aih k'iighe' tth'aih zhit diidich'ub*; Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*; Olsen, *Children and Childhood*; Woolford, *This Benevolent Experiment*.

<sup>11</sup>Lindberg, *National Belonging through Signed and Spoken Languages*.

<sup>12</sup>For the ambiguous nature of residential schools among other minority groups, see also Bloch, *Red Ties and Residential Schools*; The founder of the Borgå school, Carl Oscar Malm, who was deaf, had received his education at the Manilla school in Stockholm and used the sign language he had learnt in Sweden in his instruction. For the early stages of deaf education in Finland, see Salmi, *Linguistic Turns in Teaching of the Deaf in Finland*, 17–22.

from the 1870s most educators favored oralism, that is, speech and lip-reading for deaf children.<sup>13</sup> According to the oralist ideology of deaf education, deaf people could be integrated into hearing society through speech, whereas sign language secluded them to a life of isolation. Furthermore, sign languages were not seen in the late nineteenth century as proper languages by linguists and educators but as a primitive form of communication. The oral method was introduced at different times in all European countries, and in Finland it was set in law in 1892 and abandoned only in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>14</sup>

The ambiguous nature of deaf schools and the role they have played in shaping deaf people's experiences has been analyzed in oral history projects as well as by the Finnish state inquiry into human rights violations against deaf people and the sign language community from the early 1900s until the present day, which was led by Hisayo Katsui and published in 2021. The different projects have emphasized specific experiential narratives in relation to deaf schools and the suppression of sign language, and these experiences are historically situated in relation to the developments of deaf education and attitudes toward sign language.<sup>15</sup> For the generation born at the beginning of the twentieth century, the experiences detailed include arriving at the school for the first time often without proper skills in any language, feelings of abandonment in a strange environment, learning sign language from other students, being taught how to speak and read lips by the teachers, and being physically punished for using sign language or transgressing the rules of the school. For the generation born in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, common experiences include teaching being hampered by hearing teachers' insufficient skills in sign language, as well as feelings of not being safe at the boarding house because of the staff's lack of knowledge of sign language.<sup>16</sup> These experiences can be

<sup>13</sup> Salmi, *Linguistic Turns in Teaching of the Deaf in Finland*, 16–36.

<sup>14</sup> Lindberg, Kohti sivistystä; Lindberg, Att värna om en minoritet inom en minoritet.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Katsui et al., *Viitotut muistot*; Homi, *Oralismen ubrit*; Hiljaisen kansan äänet, <https://www.hiljaisenkansan.com/>; for schools for the deaf in other countries, see, for example, Deaf New York City Spaces: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/72ffae8f36644ce7bf78d98a64bce1eb>.

<sup>16</sup> Katsui et al., *Viitotut muistot*, 74–6; Homi, *Oralismen ubrit*, 17, 39, 82; Salmi, *Linguistic Turns in Teaching of the Deaf in Finland*, 39; Wallvik, *Du måste vara döv*, 61, 64. Research focusing on the experience of oralist education in different European countries have exposed similar experiences of language and knowledge deprivation, as well as physical punishment for the use of sign languages. See, for example, Hesse and Lengwiler, *Aus erster Hand*; Van Herreweghe, De Meulder, and Vermeerbergen, From Erasure to Recognition, 47–8; Werner, Subverting Exclusion and Oppression.



understood as experiential layers that are constantly developing and changing but still building on previous experiences.

The experiences are common for both Finnish and Finland-Swedish deaf people, as shown, for example, by interviews collected within the project *Se vårt språk!* (See our language!) 1998–2002, where approximately 30 interviews with Finland-Swedish deaf people were conducted in order to research Finland-Swedish Sign Language.<sup>17</sup> However, as I will show in the following sections, some of the experiences mentioned above gave rise to public debate, which would have graver consequences for the Finland-Swedish deaf community, as the foundation for the community—the Borgå school for the deaf—was threatened.

### “A FINNISH INVASION”: THE THREAT OF FINNISH DEAF STUDENTS IN A SWEDISH ENVIRONMENT IN THE 1930S

By 1936, a school for deaf people had operated in the town of Borgå for almost a century. Deaf children from Swedish-speaking homes were usually sent to the school at the age of seven or eight, and as some travelled several hundred kilometers to get to the school; they lived in the boarding house and went home only during longer holidays. The school in the town had originally been multilingual, giving instruction in sign language and welcoming deaf students from both Swedish- and Finnish-speaking homes. The turn toward oral education in the last decades of the 1800s created the need to separate Finnish and Swedish students, and the decree of 1892 divided deaf schools into Finnish and Swedish schools, with the Borgå school designated to give oral instruction in Swedish. Furthermore, the division of the schools was also a part of a broader institutional separation of the Finnish and Swedish languages in areas of culture and education around the turn of the century.<sup>18</sup>

Approximately 40 years after the division of deaf education on linguistic grounds, the status of the Borgå school as an exclusively Finland-Swedish institution was questioned as the number of Finnish students steadily increased while the number of deaf children from Swedish-speaking families was expected to decline. Throughout the twentieth century, the percentage of Swedish-speakers in Finland decreased, but this was largely a consequence of the Finnish population’s higher natality, while the number

<sup>17</sup> *Se vårt språk*. The interviews are stored at the Finnish Association of the Deaf, Helsinki.

<sup>18</sup> *Hans Kejsersliga Majestäts nådiga kungörelse*; Engman, *Språkfrågan*, 176–235.

of Swedish-speaking citizens remained more or less the same.<sup>19</sup> For a minority within the minority, however, this meant that the number of deaf children born each year fluctuated, and the state estimated that fewer deaf children would be born into Swedish homes in the coming years. The Finnish schools, on the other hand, operated over their capacity, and as a response, the National Board of Education planned to enroll Finnish students in the Borgå school.<sup>20</sup> This gave rise to strong reactions both within the Finland-Swedish deaf community and in Finland-Swedish society at large.

The Borgå-based local newspaper *Borgåbladet* was the first outlet to report on the plans. With the title “A Finnish Attack under Plans on the Borgå School for the Deaf-Mute,” the newspaper reported on the plans that it had learnt from sources close to the National Board of Education. According to the reporter, the plans would be detrimental to Finland-Swedish deaf people for two reasons. Firstly, the enrollment of Finnish students meant that education for Finland-Swedish deaf children would suffer, as all students would be taught together.<sup>21</sup> All deaf schools at the time applied a system of segregation depending on the students’ proficiency in speech. Between 1895 and 1926, students who were deemed unfit for oral education were sent to Jakobstad (Pietarsaari in Finnish), approximately 500 kilometers to the north, to receive their education using writing and fingerspelling.<sup>22</sup> After the Jakobstad school was closed in 1932, all students attended the Borgå school, but a four-level classification of students was used.<sup>23</sup> The writer at *Borgåbladet* thus feared that the intellectual capacity of the A-students would be threatened.

Secondly, the reporter also feared that the mixing of Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking students would corrupt the social unity of the school.

The school for the deaf-mute applies a boarding house system, where students and teachers make up a family, so to speak, and its members are in

<sup>19</sup> Meinander, *Nationalstaten*, 60.

<sup>20</sup> *Borgåbladet* 3 March 1936.

<sup>21</sup> *Borgåbladet* 3 March 1936.

<sup>22</sup> Hans Kejslerliga Majestäts nådiga kungörelse. In reality, the ban on sign language was not always as harsh as the decree stated. The Jakobstad school also welcomed overaged students, who were excluded from the ban on sign language. Furthermore, sign language could be used at the Jakobstad school with all students when teaching Christianity, and when “otherwise seen fit.” Wallvik, *Från Dövstumsbacken till Solsand*, 21–2.

<sup>23</sup> Helling, *Dövstumskolan i Borgå*, 83.

constant contact with one another not only during lectures, but also in their spare time, where the common “home language” naturally must be one and the same. One is now prepared to light-heartedly abandon this principle with undoubtedly great harm for the relations between students, but also for the general comfort and well-being of the school, and its work to educate and discipline. This must undoubtedly suffer on account of the bilingualism within the school, and it is easy to imagine that the students, at least during the first years of school, will experience confusing and nerve-racking language difficulties.<sup>24</sup>

The reporter had presumably no first-hand experience of the deaf school environment but made presumptions about life at the school and how the students would experience the change. Therefore, the reporter’s viewpoint was based on imagined experience. Written and oral histories of former deaf students have, however, told of the continued use of sign language during the oralist period among the students in social settings, such as at recess and in the boarding house.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, before the 1890s, children from both language groups attended the same schools, and within the deaf clubs that were formed from the late nineteenth century onward, deaf adults from both linguistic groups socialized. Thus, a mutually intelligible sign language, with local variations, was used by deaf people from both Swedish and Finnish homes.

*Borgåbladet*’s report on the plans by the National Board of Education gave rise to further reactions. Other local newspapers quickly reported on the plans, and the strongest reactions came from the Åland Islands. The completely Swedish-speaking islands are a self-governing region in Finland, and there were strong anti-Finnish sentiments among the population.<sup>26</sup> As a part of Finland, however, deaf children born on the islands were sent to the mainland to receive their education. Under the title “It is going too far!” the signature “Spokesperson for the opinion of Åland” listed the current threats to the Swedish language, the Eastern Swedish

<sup>24</sup> *Borgåbladet* 3 March 1936.

<sup>25</sup> Salmi and Laakso, *Maahan lämpimään*, 180; Katsui et al., *Viitotut muistot*, 78. However, during the most severe oralist period, in the 1910s and 1920s, the school in Kuopio also forbade signing during recess and in the boarding house. Salmi, *Linguistic Turns*, 39.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Meinander, *Nationalstaten*, 14–18.

race,<sup>27</sup> and the island community from Finnish nationalism and was alarmed that these attacks now had also reached deaf education.<sup>28</sup> Using oralist argumentation, the writer saw it as the right of deaf people to learn their mother tongue—that is, Swedish—of which the Borgå school was a guarantor. The writer was highly critical of the closing of the Jakobstad school four years earlier, as it meant that deaf children who had the ability to learn spoken Swedish had to mix with those who did not, leading to confusion and a breakdown in communication between the children. A “Finnish invasion” of the Finland-Swedish deaf school would only further deepen this confusion.<sup>29</sup>

The plans also angered members of the Finland-Swedish deaf community. In *Tidskrift för Dövstumma*,<sup>30</sup> the periodical for Finland-Swedish deaf people, the Jakobstad-based deaf man Anton Hellöre wrote of his shock about the proposed plans. Hellöre also saw it as harmful to mix Swedish and Finnish students, but not on the account of communication problems between the two groups, but as a threat to Finland-Swedish culture. He described Borgå as a beloved home that fostered the Swedish culture and spirit. As a response, Hellöre wanted to organize a mass protest from local deaf clubs against the National Board of Education, and on behalf of the Jakobstad club, he had sent a letter to beg the board to revise its plans. Like the writers of the local newspapers, Hellöre also wrote of the difficulties of merging Finnish and Finland-Swedish deaf students, as it would weaken the opportunity to learn Swedish. Simultaneously, however, he emphasized the social cohesion between Finnish and Finland-Swedish deaf people and stressed that when Finnish and Finland-Swedish deaf

<sup>27</sup> According to some theories of race biology in the early twentieth century, the Finnish-speakers and Swedish-speakers of Finland represented different races, the East Baltic and the Nordic (which the Eastern-Swedish belonged to), and the Nordic race was considered to be most prevalent on the Åland Islands. These theories were quickly refuted and downplayed by the Finland-Swedish political elite, but they remained prevalent among a minority of Finland-Swedes. Hietala, *From Race Hygiene to Sterilization in Finland, 199–200*; Meinander, *Nationalstaten*, 28.

<sup>28</sup> It is interesting to note that deaf people were here used in an argument relying on racial rhetoric, that is, to secure “the Eastern Swedish Race.” Deafness was in other circumstances seen as a threat and included in discussions on race hygiene in Finland. The Finnish Marriage Act of 1929 prevented intermarriage between people who were born deaf. See, for example, Koivisto and Katsui, *Meitä on uhattu vainota*.

<sup>29</sup> *Åland* 14 March 1936.

<sup>30</sup> For more on *Tidskrift för Dövstumma*, see Lindberg, *National Belonging Through Signed and Spoken Languages*, 220, 226.

people met each other later in life, they were able to gather around common interests.<sup>31</sup>

A deaf woman called Irene Karlsson also wrote to *Tidskrift för Dövstumma* about the proposed plans. She claimed that although she hated language conflicts, she could not accept these plans. Karlsson referred to the debates over the position of the Finnish and Swedish languages that had characterized the Finnish national awakening in the nineteenth century and intensified in the 1920s and 1930s, leading in some cases to violence.<sup>32</sup> In her letter, Karlsson shared her experience of the school in Borgå.

I enrolled in the school for deaf-mutes in Borgå in 1892 and remember a couple of Finnish deaf-mutes there; they were in a separate room for two years. After that the school was completely Swedish. After attending school for seven years me and my friends moved to the new school for the deaf-mute, which was so fine, grand, and comfortable [...] May the Borgå school for the deaf-mute remain a Swedish school; it is the oldest in our country, and may its former students think highly of it and remember it lovingly and gratefully [...]<sup>33</sup>

She had enrolled in the school in 1892, the same year as the decree on education for people with sensory disabilities declared the supremacy of oral education and the division of deaf schools on linguistic grounds. As the students who were already enrolled in the schools were allowed to finish their education in the language and with the educational method they had begun it, Finnish students continued to attend the Borgå school for a couple more years.<sup>34</sup> Otherwise, Karlsson argued for the perseverance of Finland-Swedish deaf education through the mediation of warm and loving memories. She praised the warm guidance provided by teachers as well as the localities of the deaf school.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Anton H-e, Attack mot Borgå svenska dövstumskola. *Tidskrift för Dövstumma* 5/1936, 42–3.

<sup>32</sup> For language conflicts in the 1930s, see, for example, Lindqvist, *Minnesbilder från trettioalets språkstrid*, 161–84. For more on the effect of the language conflicts on the deaf communities in Finland, see Lindberg, *National Belonging through Signed and Spoken Languages*.

<sup>33</sup> I. K-n, Brev från dövstumma. *Tidskrift för Dövstumma* 6/1936, 50.

<sup>34</sup> Salmi and Laakso, *Maahan lämpimään*, 159.

<sup>35</sup> I. K-n, Brev från dövstumma *Tidskrift för Dövstumma* 6/1936, 50.

The crisis of 1936 lasted for only a couple of months, and in late spring, the National Board of Education decided that the Finnish deaf schools in Turku, Oulu, and Mikkeli would accept more students. Therefore, the crisis was rather a storm in a teacup, but as such, it represents a very interesting scene of experience where experiences of the past and expectations of the future were crystallized. However, the experiences brought forth depended on the desired outcome of the crisis. As the goal of both deaf and hearing writers was the perseverance and continuation of the Borgå school for the deaf, experiences relating to the high quality of education, the warmth of the teachers, and the comfort of the school building were emphasized. This was a layer of experience common for the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, which omitted experiences of, for example, language deprivation and physical punishment that later research has exposed.<sup>36</sup> The interwar period can be seen as the “most oralist” era in the history of Finnish deaf education, and there were few opportunities for deaf people to criticize the oral method or residential school living. Therefore, oralism was often internalized by deaf people, affecting their sense of self and view of sign language.<sup>37</sup> When the writers account for their expectations for the future of deaf education should the plans to enroll Finnish students be realized, they do so by accounting for how the everyday life of the Finland-Swedish student would play out—there would be a breakdown of communication among the students as well as in the educational setting.

#### EDUCATION IN SIGN LANGUAGE AND THE FUTURE OF FINLAND-SWEDISH DEAF PEOPLE IN THE LATE 1980s

During the course of the twentieth century, the residential school in Borgå continued to be a vulnerable institution as developments in deaf education and variations in the number of Finland-Swedish deaf children repeatedly caused uncertainties for the future of the school. For example, the number of the students dropped in the 1970s and the school building was in urgent need of repairs, which again aroused discussions on the future of the school.<sup>38</sup> The 1970s was furthermore a transformative period in deaf history as ideological shifts caused changes in the conceptualization of

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Katsui et al., *Vuototut muistot*.

<sup>37</sup> Salmi and Laakso, *Maahan lämpimään*, 170–81; Homi, *Oralismen uhrin*, 43–4, 78–9.

<sup>38</sup> Lindberg, *Att värna om en minoritet inom en minoritet*.

deafness and deaf people. From the late 1950s onward, deaf people in Finland started to publicly assert their right to sign language, especially within education, and claim sign language as their mother tongue. Furthermore, research into sign language linguistics in the US, Sweden, and Denmark in the 1960s and 1970s, in combination with the deaf awareness movement that gained prominence in Finland during the late 1970s and early 1980s, strengthened the political awareness of deaf people, who positioned themselves as a linguistic and cultural minority centered around sign language.<sup>39</sup>

At the center of the debate was the course of deaf education and the use of sign language within it. In the 1960s, the dominance of oralism started to wane, and new manual methods were introduced and propagated by educators and deaf advocates. These methods relied on the simultaneous use of speech and signs, and although initially seen as a positive development, the problem of not using authentic sign language as well as the teachers' lack of knowledge of sign language became evident as the 1970s and 1980s progressed. Furthermore, the 1970s marked the end of state school dominance in deaf education in Finland, which in turn would lead to the weakening of the residential school model. In 1972, it was possible for municipalities to establish schools for deaf and hard-of-hearing children as well as children with speech impairments, which decreased the number of state-owned deaf schools and led to the quick rise in the number of municipal schools, where the students could live at home while attending school. The new structure was part of a global development toward deinstitutionalization and integration in special education. Both in Finland and in other countries, members of the deaf community were, however, highly critical toward the closure of residential schools, as schools exclusively for deaf students were seen as the best guarantor for the further development of sign language and the preservation of deaf culture.<sup>40</sup>

The number of Finland-Swedish deaf students was too small to form municipal schools, and they lived in a large and geographically scattered area. Therefore, the Borgå school remained as a state-owned residential school until its closure in 1993. The threats against the school in the 1970s had been averted through political lobbying, which secured funds for the renovation of the school, and furthermore, attendance started to

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Salmi and Laakso, *Maahan lämpimään*, 302–11.

<sup>40</sup> Salmi and Laakso, *Maahan lämpimään*, 345–7; for more on the issue of integration, see Patterson, *The Disability Rights Movement in the United States*, 445–6.

rise again in the 1980s. The children came to the school usually the year that they turned six and first attended two years of kindergarten, whereafter nine years of compulsory school followed. In the 1970s and 1980s, the number of students varied between eight and 33, and therefore grades were merged to create larger groups.<sup>41</sup> The children came from all parts of “Swedish Finland,” and many lived at the school, travelling home for the weekends and holidays. Several things had changed since the 1930s, and whereas the children in the 1930s often had no common language with their hearing family members, in the 1970s and 1980s, many parents of deaf children actively worked to learn sign language. Some parents had also chosen to relocate to Borgå while their children attended the school.<sup>42</sup>

A new crisis was made public in the end of the 1980s, this time involving both the school faculty, students, parents, and other members of the Finland-Swedish deaf community. This crisis continued for much longer than the crisis of 1936. While the discussion in the 1930s centered around preserving the Borgå school as it was—that is, for the continued production of similar experiences that the Finland-Swedish deaf school had thus far generated—the crisis of the late 1980s and early 1990s was about change and diverging ideas about what type of change was needed.

The first signs of conflict arose in the summer of 1985, which summarized some of the main issues under debate during the years to come. The public conflict involved Ralf Mattsson, the principal of the Borgå school, and Brita Edlund, one of the founding members of the parents’ association, DHBS (Döva och hörselskadade barns stödförening). Edlund, who had two deaf children, had been in different respects active in improving the rights of Finland-Swedish deaf people and had worked as a substitute teacher at the school. The local newspaper *Borgåbladet* interviewed Mattsson in response to a statement released by a working group on deaf education at the Ministry of Education, which stated that sign language was the first language of deaf people and should therefore be the main teaching language in schools for the deaf. Mattsson supported initiatives to strengthen the status of sign language in society at large but considered the line proposed by the working group, which had already been taken in Sweden where sign language had achieved the status of mother-tongue in

<sup>41</sup> Eriksson, West, and Hannus-Gullmets, *Dövskolan i Borgå 1946–1993*, 34; *Borgåbladet* 26 September 1986.

<sup>42</sup> Wallvik, *Du måste vara döv*, 57; Hoyer, ”Vi kallade dem Borgåtecken,” 41; Interview with Brita Edlund.



1981 and bilingual education was given to deaf students, as going too far.<sup>43</sup> The role of the school was to enable communication with the surrounding society, and an emphasis on sign language would steer the students away from learning how to read and write Swedish. Furthermore, all facts could not be conveyed in sign language, according to Mattsson. The following day, Edlund replied to Mattsson's comments, stating that deaf people are a linguistic minority, and that they therefore have the right to education in their own language. The school had offered one hour per week of sign language tuition to the students, but this was not enough, as all education should be provided in sign language, while Swedish should be taught as a foreign language.<sup>44</sup>

From the late 1960s and early 1970s onward, signing was used in the teaching of deaf students, but as stated above, not as sign language but rather as a support to speech, which meant that students continued to have difficulties comprehending the content of their education.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, as sign language was not included in the training of deaf school teachers, their skill level varied greatly. This was a general problem in schools for deaf people both nationally and internationally, and it was therefore not specific to the school in Borgå.<sup>46</sup> However, as a residential school, where the role of the school went beyond only providing the students with an education, the lack of proficient sign language skills also had disciplinary consequences.

The disciplinary problems of the school were made public in the spring of 1988 when both the Finnish broadcasting company Rundradion and the local newspaper *Borgåbladet* widely reported on the crisis at the school. Under the title "Emotions are surging around the school for the deaf," the newspaper interviewed students, parents, teachers, and the boarding house staff about the increasing dissatisfaction with the school. The students Monika Saarikoski and Belinda Småroos described to the reporter their experience of chaos at the boarding house. Different groups of students were in conflict with each other, and due to the lack of knowledge of sign language, the employees of the boarding house had few ways to defuse the situation. One employee had even resorted to violence when

<sup>43</sup>For the development in deaf education in Sweden during the 1980s, see Lundström, *Kampen för ett språk*, 107–17.

<sup>44</sup>*Borgåbladet* 3, 4 July 1985.

<sup>45</sup>Salmi, Kielelliset käänteet kuurojen opetuksessa, 28.

<sup>46</sup>Salmi and Laakso, *Maahan lämpimään*, 351, 356–9.

unable to communicate with the students. The girls wanted staff who were proficient in sign language and able to mediate if conflicts arose. The manager of the boarding house acknowledged the problems and added that the continuous circulation of staff added to the students' feelings of insecurity.<sup>47</sup>

Members of the faculty also acknowledged the problems that the students raised. Birgitta Björkén-Kurki, a teacher, testified to how challenging it was to learn a new language as an adult and to thereafter use it in teaching. Björkén-Kurki also described a faculty riddled with conflict with weak loyalties amongst its members. When commenting upon the problems at the school, Gustaf Öller, the representative of the parents' organization, stressed that the parents did not blame the teachers for the conditions at the school but regarded it as a problem of the leadership by the principal, Mattsson. In a letter to the national newspaper *Hufvudstadsbladet* later in the spring, Öller wrote that as a parent to a child attending the school for the last five years, he had experienced widespread ignorance by the National Board of Education as well as the Ministry of Education regarding the needs and demands of the students and parents.<sup>48</sup>

Conflicts at the school did not only affect the students but the entire Finland-Swedish deaf community. The Borgå school was more than just a school; in the 1980s, it was the center of Finland-Swedish social activity. The local deaf club met at the school, and the meetings gave the students an opportunity to socialize with deaf adults. Therefore, Boris Kankkonen, Barbara Andersson, Kari Rautiainen, Håkan Westerholm, and Karin Kronlund-Saarikoski, all members of the local deaf club, some of whom had children at the school or had themselves recently graduated from the school, wrote a letter to *Borgåbladet* in response to the report to give their view of the conflict. The letter-writers stressed that their experience of the children differed greatly from that of the school staff; the children always behaved well at the club meetings, and therefore any form of ill behavior at the school and boarding house had to stem from communication problems and the lack of deaf awareness of the employees at the boarding house. As the children lived the better part of their time at the school, it formed their sense of self and was the main site of their childhood experiences. According to members of the Finland-Swedish deaf community, the

<sup>47</sup> *Borgåbladet* 5 March 1988.

<sup>48</sup> *Borgåbladet* 5 March 1988; *Hufvudstadsbladet* 17 May 1988.

problems could be avoided through making the school and boarding house a milieu submerged in sign language, which not only included skills in the language but also knowledge of deaf culture and the deaf world. Another suggestion by Kankkonen, Andersson, Rautiainen, Westerholm, and Kronlund-Saarikoski was to partly dismantle the residential school system and to let older children live outside the school in smaller units.<sup>49</sup> In addition to the boarding house, students at schools for the deaf in Finland could live in homes close to the schools, and the discussion was intensified by developments in Sweden, where this had been the norm from the 1970s onward.<sup>50</sup>

Whereas the crisis of 1936 had been averted through a simple decision to enlarge Finnish deaf schools, and thereby preserving the Borgå school as a Swedish institution, the conflict of 1988 was not as easily resolved and would continue for several years. Both the representatives of the parents' organization and the members of the deaf club stressed that the responsibility for improving the situation in the school lay with the school leadership and the state, as the school was state-owned. In the following years, the National Board of Education proposed a series of measures to improve conditions at the school, among them hiring a consultant to mediate between the conflicting parties. However, the hired consultant resigned after visiting the school only once, claiming that the issues first had to be worked out between the persons involved before someone from the outside could step in.<sup>51</sup>

The crisis of the late 1980s can also be studied as a scene of experience, exposing experiences and expectations of deaf education as well as residential school living, and thus creating new layers of experience. This time, current and former students as well as parents of deaf children shared experiences of feeling unsafe and their language and wishes not being respected. Compared to the crisis of 1936, the conflict did not expose overt forms of minority nationalism—the call for improvements in deaf education at the school in Borgå was not based on arguments of Finland-Swedishness or “the Eastern-Swedish race”—and language conflicts were by the 1980s largely in the past. However, as a layer of experience, the same ideas were partly present in the concept of the “minority within the

<sup>49</sup> *Borgåbladet* 29 March 1988.

<sup>50</sup> Birgitta Wallvik, Finland är ett trespråkigt land för döva. *Dövas Tidskrift* 12–13/1987, 30–1; Katsui et al., *Viitotut muistot*, 78–9.

<sup>51</sup> *Borgåbladet* 20 May 1988.

minority,” which had started to be used in the 1980s as the main slogan by advocates of Finland-Swedish deaf people to stress the urgency for improving conditions.<sup>52</sup> There was nevertheless a change in emphasis. Of the two components included in the “minority within the minority”—Finland-Swedes and deaf people—the focus of the 1980s conflict was on the rights and experiences of the latter and on the position of sign language in education and wider society.

In the early 1990s, the loss of students at the school became once more a grave matter of concern. Ever more parents were choosing mainstream schooling for their deaf children, and the residential school system was also otherwise increasingly seen as an unattractive option. In 1989, the Peltolas from Ostrobothnia, whose son Patrik attended the Borgå school but lived with a family in Borgå with only deaf members, described their situation before connecting with the host family in an interview: they had to choose from several bad options. For the Peltola family, placing Patrik at the boarding house would not have been an option, and Patrik was described as lucky when compared to the children at the boarding house.<sup>53</sup> The lack of students was, however, not only a result of the dwindling interest in residential schools. In general, the number of deaf children was in decline as illnesses that had previously caused deafness were eradicated in the late twentieth century through vaccinations and better healthcare. Furthermore, by the 1990s, Finland-Swedes in general and Finland-Swedish deaf people in particular had a long tradition of emigrating to Sweden for work and education, and therefore the schools in Härnösand and Stockholm became more attractive options for some families than the Borgå school.<sup>54</sup>

In 1992, only a handful of students were left, and the Finnish National Agency of Education (the successor to the National Board of Education) founded a working group with members representing the school, the state, the Finland-Swedish deaf community, and the Finnish Association of the Deaf. The task of the working group was to develop a plan for the school and for deaf education for Finland-Swedes. Following the Norwegian example where state-owned deaf schools had been transformed into resource centers, the group discussed how the task of the

<sup>52</sup> Lindberg, *Att värna om en minoritet inom en minoritet*.

<sup>53</sup> *Vasabladet* 12 February 1989.

<sup>54</sup> Eriksson, West, and Hannus-Gullmets, *Dövskolan i Borgå 1946–1993*, 37–8; Lindberg, Kohti sivistystä.

school could be widened to include children with other disabilities who also benefited from sign language and other educational services for Finland-Swedish deaf individuals.<sup>55</sup>

In the discussion within the working group on how the Borgå school could be saved, one can find similar arguments as in the 1930s for why the school should be exclusively reserved for Finland-Swedish deaf children. Håkan Westerholm, who represented the Finnish Association of the Deaf and who was a member of the Finland-Swedish deaf community, mentioned plans to open the school for Finnish deaf students, but he did not believe that three languages in the same school would be a viable option and would weaken the educational quality of the school. Like the contributors to the debate in the 1930s, Westerholm also stressed that the school was essential for cultivating identity and culture, but instead of Finland-Swedishness he stressed deaf identity and deaf culture. Furthermore, he stressed his own experiences when discussing different educational options for Finland-Swedish students. Born in 1949, Westerholm had experience of both mainstreaming and attending the Borgå school, and he told of the difficulties he had faced as a deaf child in a hearing environment and therefore did not consider this to be beneficial for learning outcomes.<sup>56</sup>

The working group presented to the National Agency of Education a series of suggestions on how the school could be developed and transformed, but no steps were taken despite these suggestions, and the school closed its doors the following spring. As some of the people involved have stated, measures were put in place too late to be able to save the school. Furthermore, the era of residential schools was, by the 1990s, coming to a definitive end. Finland-Swedish parents of deaf children were no longer interested in the residential school option, and also in other countries, residential schools for deaf children were closing their doors.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> NAF, Archive of the School for the Deaf in Borgå, Folder Aac Minutes by the working group set by the National Board of Education, Decision to establish a working group 12 February 1992 & The Working groups report to the National Board of Education.

<sup>56</sup> NAF, Archive of the School for the Deaf in Borgå, Folder Aac, Minutes by the working group set by the National Board of Education, 28 February 1992.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, interview with Birgitta Wallvik; Moores, Residential Schools for the Deaf.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have studied residential school experiences in relation to situations of conflict and crisis and how experiences were brought forth in public debates. I have studied the school for the deaf in Borgå, a residential school for Finland-Swedish deaf students that operated between 1846 and 1993, concentrating on two times of crisis: the spring of 1936 when plans to enroll Finnish students in the school were put forward and the spring of 1988 when a conflict involving students, parents, teachers, boarding house staff, the school board, and members of the Finland-Swedish deaf community was debated in the press. The two crises are partly different in character and separated by over fifty years, but as scenes of experience, they highlight how experiences—both personal, mediated, and imagined—interlinked with expectations of the future of Finland-Swedish deaf education. Furthermore, the two crises also expose changing layers of experience in relation to deaf education, the position of sign language, and the conceptualization of deafness.

The journalists at the local newspapers who first reported on the plans to enroll Finnish students at the Borgå school in 1936 had presumably no personal experience or first-hand knowledge of life at the school. Still, the main argument for opposing the plans was that it would disturb the everyday life of the school and confuse the Finland-Swedish deaf children, who through the school learnt their mother tongue, Swedish. The writers argued from an oralist point of view, possibly ignorant of the fact that Finnish and Finland-Swedish deaf people communicated in a mutually intelligible sign language. However, oralism also affected the way members of the deaf community argued for the perseverance of the Borgå school as a Finland-Swedish institution. When Irene Karlsson wrote about her experiences of the school as a young child during a transitional period when the school was changing from a bilingual to a Swedish school, she described different spheres within the school for the students from Finnish and Swedish homes, as if they were kept apart from each other. The 1930s was furthermore a period of conflict between the language groups in Finland, and the writers wanted to stop the enrollment of Finnish students, as it would prevent the fostering of Finland-Swedish culture within the school.

In the 1980s, language conflicts were rare, but the role of deaf people, sign language, and residential schools had undergone vast

transformations. The public conflict over the teachers' and boarding house employees' lack of sufficient sign language skills—and the disciplinary and educational problems that this led to—came to a head in the spring of 1988, when different parties in the conflict were interviewed by and wrote to national and local media. While the people who had participated in the debate of 1936 resisted change and wanted to preserve the residential school in Borgå as it was, the conflict of 1988 centered around the need for change. Experiences of deaf education, residential school living, deaf clubs, and dealings with school and state officials were at the heart of the conflict, and the parties argued for change either by referencing personal experience or mediated experience, for example, as a parent with children attending the school.

Times of crisis accentuate the need to put forth experiences. The way current and former students described their experiences of Finland-Swedish deaf education in the 1930s and 1980s was affected by the desired outcome: preservation or change. The wish to preserve the Borgå school led to the mediation of positive experiences, while the need for change in the late twentieth century accentuated the problems and disarray in the everyday life of the residential school. Change would happen, but not in the way any of the conflicting parties wanted. After the closure of the school, no sustainable alternative has been found, and as a consequence, the number of Finland-Swedish deaf people living in Finland has decreased significantly.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> According to the latest estimation from 2015, there were 90 Finland-Swedish deaf individuals who use Finland-Swedish Sign Language living in Finland at the time. Andersson-Koski, *Mitt eget språk*, 35.

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## CHAPTER 12

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# Stories of Silence, Echoes of Events: The Family as a Changing Site of Illness

*Marie Meier*

### INTRODUCTION

In the autumn of 1953, Clara's funeral in the small Danish province of Holbæk was held in absolute silence. Her late husband, Carl, saw no need to “gather a crowd participating more or less out of a sense of duty,” and since the ceremony was followed by her cremation, he declined to have any flowers at the funeral. He also requested the pastor, a good friend of the family, not to speak about Clara, as he did not consider that “the church is the place to talk about people—how often are eulogies not an offense—there are better things to talk about.”<sup>1</sup>

Why this hushed atmosphere? The enforced silence at Clara's funeral is echoed in thirteen oral history interviews I conducted in 2019, all

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<sup>1</sup>The quotes are from a letter posted in Hvalsø on 10 November 1953 containing Carl's reply to his son-in-law, who had written a letter to express his condolences in connection with Clara's death. All names in this chapter have been anonymized.

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revolving around the topic of family secrecy in relation to mental illness.<sup>2</sup> The interviews revealed that, due to the shame and taboo surrounding mental afflictions in mid-twentieth-century Denmark, causes of death have been concealed and lives erased through the deliberate exclusion of mentally ill relatives from family narratives. Secrecy, the stories disclosed, has served to safeguard family reputations and to shield individual family members from stigmatization.

In this chapter, I explore the entanglements of family secrecy and changing experiences of mental illness from the mid-twentieth century onward. Recently, scholars have unraveled the social aspects of secrecy and shown how family secrets change over time in accordance with shifting norms and values.<sup>3</sup> It has been shown how family secrets not only implicate the specific family members involved, but also have long-term effects on later generations.<sup>4</sup> As a form of “slow violence,” the hidden skeletons of the past can have damaging consequences for a family’s descendants.<sup>5</sup> My aim here is to link these social and temporal aspects of family secrecy to arrive at a more contextual understanding of experiences of mental afflictions. Employing an ecological approach to mental illness, I argue that secrecy and knowledge practices in domestic life form part of the culturally contingent context—or “ecological niche”—that constitute the situated and yet collectively shaped experiences of mental suffering.<sup>6</sup>

Since the end of the twentieth century, the concept of ecology has flourished across academic disciplines and beyond. The term is used in many ways and in many different contexts, including in discussions of mental health.<sup>7</sup> A common element in emerging ecological approaches to

<sup>2</sup>The interviews were conducted during fieldwork for my Ph.D. entitled *The Concealment of Mental Maladies*, which contributed to a larger collaborative research project on *The Politics of Family Secrecy*, based at the University of Copenhagen. I contacted my informants through different channels. I issued an advertisement describing my Ph.D. project and explained my interest in all kinds of stories concerning experiences of mental illness and secrecy. I advertised on social media and in Danish newspapers, but several informants were also found through word-of-mouth contacts. For more on this research project, see: <https://familysecrecy.ku.dk/>.

<sup>3</sup>Smart, Families, Secrets and Memories; Cohen, *Family Secrets*.

<sup>4</sup>Fewell, *Tattered Scripts*.

<sup>5</sup>Barnwell, *Family Secrets*.

<sup>6</sup>The notion of an ecological niche in relation to mental illnesses was developed by historian Ian Hacking, see Hacking, *Mad Travellers*, 26.

<sup>7</sup>Recent works that favor an ecological perspective on mental suffering include Fuchs, *Ecology of the Brain*, and Rose, *Our Psychiatric Future*. For a more thorough elaboration on both older and newer ecological approaches to mental afflictions, see Meier, *The Concealment of Mental Maladies*.

mental illness is the attempt to transcend the bifurcations between the body and mind and between the biological and the social, which, as historian Edward Shorter remarks, has haunted the discipline of psychiatry from the very beginning.<sup>8</sup> The ecological and phenomenological inspired theories all conceive of mental illness as an embodied, contextualized, and narrated experience.<sup>9</sup> Without questioning individual suffering as real, these perspectives imply a shift of focus from the individual to the afflicted person's interdependency with the close environmental and social surroundings. Taken together, the ecological approaches can be seen as a reaction to the neuroscientific turn in psychiatric practice, or what Shorter has characterized as the second wave of biological psychiatry from the 1970s onward.<sup>10</sup> Building on these perspectives—and acknowledging that mental illness is a fundamentally inter-relational phenomenon constituted by a multitude of elements—it is worth probing further how also subtle kinds of knowledge management, namely the changing dynamics of secrecy and exposure in the mundane practices of family life, have shaped the historically variated experiences of mental illness.

Even though families have been deeply involved in most experiences of mental suffering, the history of psychiatry has had a strong tradition of focusing either on ideological, institutional, and medical developments or on the demarcations of deviance and relations of power between doctors and patients.<sup>11</sup> The so-called “patient turn” in the medical humanities shifted the analytical lens to lived experiences of institutionalization.<sup>12</sup> Yet, it was not until recently that a focus on the family in the history of mental

<sup>8</sup> Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> For an elaboration of the phenomenological perspectives on mental illness, see also Svenaeus, *Phenomenological Bioethics*.

<sup>10</sup> Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry*, 239. A parallel challenge of the neuroscientific point of view can be found in Boddice, *The Developing Brain*.

<sup>11</sup> The works are too numerous to be mentioned here, but a few examples are Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*; Goffman, *Asylums*; Micale and Porter, *Discovering the History of Psychiatry*; Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry*; Scull, *Social Order/Mental Disorder*.

<sup>12</sup> For an elaboration of the “patient turn” in the medical humanities, in particular in the context of the social history of mental illness/psychiatry, see Porter, *The Patient's View*, and, in addition, the growing body of research based on the lived experiences/oral histories of individuals with a diagnosis of mental illness who experienced institutionalization in the twentieth century, such as Davies, ‘Silent and Censured Travellers’; Parr, Philo, and Burns, ‘That Awful Place Was Home’; Calabria, *Insider Stories from the Asylum*.

illness came to the fore.<sup>13</sup> These studies show how on the one hand families have been affected by the experience of mental illness of one of their members, and on the other hand, how families have helped shape experiences of mental illness themselves.

Building on and contributing to this line of micro-historical research, I approach “the family” as a genuinely historical phenomenon. As an institution, the family is partly conditioned by larger structural patterns and cultural norms, but it is also a situated microcosm in which contradictory and ambivalent dynamics of protection and repression co-exist. As sociologist David H. J. Morgan concludes in his work *Re-Thinking Family Practices* (2011), there is no such thing as “the Family.” Families are, he states, “constantly undergoing change, whether we are talking about families in general located in historical time or any individual family moving through that time.”<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Morgan draws attention to what he defines as “the fluidity” of family practices and argues that a focus on family practices must include ways of linking the emotional dimension of family living to other dimensions and “a much wider and larger set of complex social practices.”<sup>15</sup> Following Morgan, every family is affected by situated events and coincidences as well as by broader (shared) societal circumstances. Pushing this argument further, I wish to foreground how families are not only *done* differently across time and place, but how they also *do* differently: Families inevitably create and form the context with which they are intertwined.

However, gaining insights into previous knowledge practices in the intimate sphere of the family poses a methodological challenge. Facing this challenge, I employ the method of oral history. As an alternative to the first-hand accounts of the afflicted found in most oral histories in this field, I examine the relatives’ memories of how the knowledge management of a mentally ill family member was conducted in the everyday life of the past. This point of view, I argue, allows for insights into the inter-relational experience of mental illness and the material and affective impacts of silence and secrecy in the past, including from a cross-generational perspective. In some cases, I interviewed more family

<sup>13</sup>Jones, Families and Serious Mental Illness; Suzuki, *Madness at Home*; Coleborne, *Madness in the Family*; Holmes, Talking about Mental Illness; Meier and Vallgård, The Family as a Locus of Illness.

<sup>14</sup>Morgan, *Rethinking Family Practices*.

<sup>15</sup>Morgan, *Rethinking Family Practices*, 89.

members and was able to supplement their oral histories with written sources. Doing so enabled me to discern how secrecy related to mental illness has been experienced differently by individual family members, and this combination of sources also strengthened the oral testimonies and nuanced my understanding of how mental illnesses have been concealed.<sup>16</sup>

Following the post-positivistic approach to memory and subjectivity,<sup>17</sup> the recorded life histories provide more than autobiographical information.<sup>18</sup> Oral history accounts should, as Tumblety has argued, be considered as both a source and a subject.<sup>19</sup> This means that such stories tell us as much about the present as about the past. On the one hand, the recorded family narratives include detailed information on actions, knowledge practices, and experiences related to mental illness in the past. On the other hand, the memories of silence and concealment are also shaped and colored by the informant's current social context. The accounts of secrecy must be measured against new norms and new modes of communication. Today, a whole new medical vocabulary of mental illnesses has been developed, and although being mentally ill is still stigmatized, diagnoses are commonly shared in our everyday lives. This, importantly, might be part of the explanation why previous silences are now, in hindsight, conceived more as intentional acts of secrecy.

As Maurice Halbwachs has framed it, family memory is a typically inter-generational kind of collective memory,<sup>20</sup> but, as Astrid Erll has pointed out, family memory is also always a "re-creation and a dynamic, context-dependent construction that can change considerably over time as well as according to different settings and audiences."<sup>21</sup> Moreover, family memories might, as Claudia Lenz has suggested, oscillate between personal, autobiographical remembering on the one hand and public remembrance and official images of history on the other.<sup>22</sup> Hence, the stories also testify to how the relatives interpret their family memories considering the

<sup>16</sup> After full transcription and repeated listening through the interviews, I made a thematic analysis paying specific attention to descriptions of how secrecy operated and was experienced. See Yow, *Recording Oral History*.

<sup>17</sup> Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed account of the different trends and developments within the practice of oral history, see also Thomson, *Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History*.

<sup>19</sup> Tumblety, *Memory and History*.

<sup>20</sup> Halbwachs and Coser, *On Collective Memory*.

<sup>21</sup> Erll, *Locating Family in Cultural Memory Studies*.

<sup>22</sup> Lenz, *Genealogy and Archaeology*.



present and how their interpretations of secrecy in the past have come to impact their current lives.

Below, I will unfold and analyze three of the thirteen life histories to demonstrate how shifting dynamics of secrecy and disclosure within families have shaped the historically specific experiences of mental illness down the decades. I have chosen to concentrate on these three histories, convinced that a more detailed in-depth analysis most clearly conveys how secrecy and silence become co-constitutive of the situated—and yet collectively formed—experiences of mental suffering. The stories of Clara, Thomas and his daughter Edith, and Richardt all supplement each other by illustrating from different angles how secrecy became defining for the experience of illness, both for the afflicted and their relatives. The following recollections illustrate the ambiguities embedded in family secrecy and show how both the perception and the effects of secrecy change over time and thus alter experiences of mental illness in fundamental ways.

#### SECRECY AS A NEGOTIATOR OF MENTAL AND SOMATIC HEALTH

In September 2018, Adam told me the story of his mother Clara—or rather, his memories and the limited information about his mother he had been able to collect since she disappeared from his life at the age of eleven. He recalls his own first experience of something being wrong. Late one night in October 1951, his mother came back from a visit to some friends. She was crying and locked herself up in his father’s office. Both his parents were in there for a long time, and Adam “could sense that something was wrong.” The next day, when he returned from school, he saw an ambulance, and he knew right away that it had to do with his mother. The ambulance stopped briefly so that he could say goodbye, and then it left for the hospital. He was told that his mother was sick, but what she was suffering from was not revealed. Around Christmas the same year, he and his siblings were allowed to visit her once at Holbæk Hospital. It was the first time he had seen his mother since the ambulance had taken her away, and it was also to be the last time he ever saw her:

She was so well, she had been out to buy me a little red car, which, by the way, I still have out here, and yes, then she was gone—until she died in November 1953, that is two years after—and I hadn’t visited her, and I hadn’t known what happened, besides that she was somehow feeling bad.

As Adam recalls it, his father frequently visited his mother at the mental institution she was transferred to from Holbæk Hospital after her second brain hemorrhage a few months later, approximately every weekend. However, he never talked about those visits with the children at home. As Adam remembers it, he actually never mentioned her name again. “We repressed it, my sister and I; we buried our mother’s memory.”

Clara had four children: Paul, Kristine, Adam, and Gerda. As I found out through surviving written sources, the situation was slightly different for the two older siblings. In the memoirs of Adam’s older sister, Kristine, written in 2009, she describes how she and her older brother were allowed to visit their mother once she was in the mental institution.<sup>23</sup> As Kristine remembers it, Clara was very pleased about this visit, although for the children the experience was far from pleasant:

When she had been institutionalized for a while and, I guess, had become quite calm, Paul and I were allowed to visit her. It wasn’t a pleasant experience. We were alone up there, and she was lying in a big ward with lots of other patients and was restrained with straps. She was very happy to see us, but she had difficulties speaking and expressing herself. I cried most of the time, as I am now. Maybe we tried to tell her a little about what we were doing, I can’t remember.

Reading Kristine’s memoirs, I also discovered more details about Clara’s condition and the process of her hospitalization. After the first brain hemorrhage, she was admitted to Holbæk Hospital, where her eldest daughter could visit her frequently. The hospital was close to the high school Kristine had just started attending. Kristine describes these visits as “cozy.” They would go for short walks, and her mother definitely got better. Then the second brain hemorrhage happened, and she got worse. She was briefly transferred to the mental institution at Nykjøbing Sjælland before being admitted to the central hospital in the capital, Copenhagen, where she was operated on. After the surgery, her capacities were further limited, and the hospital staff could not do anything to help her condition. However, her blood pressure had stabilized, so the doctors advised that she be transferred to a nursing home. Yet, for some reason, probably both financial and emotional, their father decided to convince the doctors that

<sup>23</sup> Adam gave me his sister’s written memoirs on her mother’s history, a small pamphlet with pictures that she had made for her siblings and her own children. These are not included in the reference list in order to protect the family’s anonymity.

they should transfer her back to the mental institution in the north of Denmark. As Kristine concludes: “Nothing could really be done, and she was signed up for a place in a nursing home. That was more than my father could handle, and instead she was re-admitted to the mental institution at Nykjøbing Sjælland.”<sup>24</sup> This well-considered decision is confirmed in a letter Kristine’s father wrote to his son-in-law after the funeral:

The doctors were of the opinion that she was cured in so far as her blood pressure had stabilized. They would have preferred to send her to a nursing home, but I convinced them to keep her under the good conditions in the hospital [the mental institution], and luckily Dr Jacobsen [the doctor at the mental institution], who had been outstanding and supportive, agreed.

In Kristine’s memoirs, the conditions at the mental institution—in contrast to how her father depicted them—are described as being far from good or right for her mother. Rather, Kristine seems convinced that the experience had marked her mother negatively and had worsened her state of mind: “I think it must have been a terrible experience for her. I have read some of the letters she wrote to dad. She missed him and us a lot, and she also tried to jump out of the window.”

Clara was clearly affected by her brain hemorrhage, which changed her behavior significantly. However, she was capable of writing letters, in which she mentioned her children and expressed how much she missed her family and longed for her home. Her faith in God played a major role in these letters, and she prayed for strength and for the possibility to see her husband. Adam also comments on the frequent references to God when he shows me the letters, as if this convinces him of her insanity.

Clara’s case shows how blurred is the boundary between mental illness and somatic disease and how it may be negotiated in relation to emotional and perhaps also financial circumstances. Clara’s story also illustrates how maintaining secrecy about her transcends the discursive level. Her husband’s more or less conscious desire to conceal her condition from the rest of the family’s everyday environment implied her physical removal and admission to somewhere where she was cut off from her children and their

<sup>24</sup> In Danish, the expression *det var over fars formåen* can refer to either financial or emotional issues. It remains unclear whether the decision to transfer Clara back to the mental institution was made mainly because of financial concerns or because the father found it too hard to have Clara close by and to be obliged to take care of her. It was probably a combination of both factors.

wider social relations. The fact that Clara ended her life in a mental institution and not a nursing home became defining of her illness, but it also affected the way she was remembered and talked/not talked about not only historically but also in her children's future lives. As Adam reasons:

Basically, she had gone insane. And it's something I wasn't told before I had grown up. I didn't know anything about it, and it was a very difficult time for us. I had difficulties in school, but it was suppressed, it was never mentioned [...] no one ever mentioned anything about it to me, no one in the family ever spoke about it, no one spoke about it. So, there was something for me to deal with there.

The secrecy thus contributes to the children associating mental illness with something shameful, something that should be kept under wraps, an idea they carry with them into their future lives as a kind of embodied silence, as a form of "slow violence."<sup>25</sup> Adam does not blame his father for the silence, just as he does not question his mother's removal and admission to the mental hospital, even though he is convinced that it has been traumatizing for her as well as for him. The children did not question their father's conduct; instead, the unquestioned secrecy contributed to their own self-stigmatization.<sup>26</sup>

Adam explains and legitimizes his father's actions with reference to the substantial age difference between his parents (26 years) and the fact that his father was brought up in a different period, when one did not talk about emotions:

But when you imagine, he was born in 1881, and his father again in 1843, it was such an old family with old traditions, so back then they did not speak about emotions at all. So, you can't blame them, because they hadn't learned.

Another explanation for their father's silence and conduct in the early 1950s might be the common practice at the time to institutionalize women who did not conform to social norms.<sup>27</sup> An additional explanation for the silence surrounding Clara's condition could be the fact that

<sup>25</sup> Barnwell, *Family Secrets*.

<sup>26</sup> Perlick et al., *In Our Own Voice*; Corrigan and Rao, *On the Self-Stigma of Mental Illness*.

<sup>27</sup> Chesler, *Women and Madness*; Appignanesi, *Mad, Bad, and Sad*; Kirkebak, *Letferdig og losagtig*.

children were not included in conversations in the same manner as they are today. In the 1950s, family hierarchies and the focus on children and their rights were different, and the norms of emotional communication between children and adults have changed significantly.<sup>28</sup> This shift may also have contributed to Adam's and his siblings' increasing awareness of, and confrontation with, the secrets of the past. Finally, their father's silence and the "non-mentioning" of their missing mother can also be interpreted as an attempt to protect his children from unpleasantness. In the end, it does not have to be an either/or situation, as acts of secrecy can be motivated by conflicting and sometimes contradictory emotions and be suppressive and protective all at once.

Whatever the explanation for the father's silence, the secrecy around Clara became an inseparable part of her "mental illness" in the past as well as in the present. The family's secrecy, maintained mainly by her husband, became co-defining for her classification as "mentally ill." In the case of Clara, the secrecy included her physical removal and re-admission to the mental institution, despite it being in opposition to the doctors' recommendations. Thus, the secrecy constituted an essential component in the ecological niche of her illness, making it "mental" instead of "somatic." Moreover, even after her death, it influenced the way she was remembered by her children. Adam and his siblings embodied and perpetuated the secrecy for many years. Not until 2009 did his sister Kristine write down her memories of her mother, emphasizing Clara's liveliness before the illness, as a way to compensate for the many years of silence:

Not only was Mother fond of parties and sociability she also loved visiting other people. [...] Mother had something with hats. I remember mainly her "trouble-hat"—a fine dark blue straw hat, its crown resembled a pill box, and the shadow it cast was monumental. [...] Mother was completely un-nobbish—talked with everyone and was not afraid of voicing her opinion.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Vallgård and Larsen, *Emotional Echoes*.

<sup>29</sup> From memoirs of Kristine, Clara's daughter, written in 2009. This testimony stands in sharp contrast to the silence at Clara's funeral described at the beginning of the chapter.

## SILENCE AND DOMESTIC ISOLATION

While Clara was removed from her home, her children, and her familiar social surroundings, several other stories convey how isolation and exclusion within the four walls of the home have been part of being mentally ill. Wilhelm recollects how his childhood in the early 1950s was marked by frequently unexplained disappearances by his father, Thomas, who was hidden away in a room upstairs:

In our childhood we often experienced that my father simply [...] in the morning, then it was just mom. Father wasn't there. And a week could pass [...] fourteen days, I actually don't quite remember how long [...] we ate alone, mother took care of everything, got us to school and that sort of thing, kept up our good spirits, it was quite hectic, I think, now, when I look back at it, everything had to run while she also had to take care of the store, so she was awfully busy, and then [...] one fine day, then father was downstairs again. Handled the shop and everything. Everything went back to normal.

This description shows how concealing the mental illness of a family member does not afflict one person alone: the secrecy affects the whole family, creating a different atmosphere in the home and changing everyday routines. The “active non-knowing”<sup>30</sup> around the father's absence is, in this situation, enhanced by busy and hectic acts, and it becomes clear how the experience of mental illness is partially constituted by the silence that is enforced in a particular environment, an unarticulated absence that reconfigures the social situation and—at least for a while—the relationships within the family. This situation also shows how mental illness is a fundamentally inter-relational phenomenon. According to ecological perspectives on mental illness, the changed environment cannot be seen separately from the illness itself.<sup>31</sup> Just as the family is affected by Thomas's absence, his mental state inevitably takes shape and responds to the changes in his surroundings. The silence and the changed location, isolated in a room on the second floor, became part of his illness.

In addition to these regular and unarticulated withdrawals from family life, on one occasion Wilhelm's father, Thomas, was hospitalized in a mental institution quite far away. Wilhelm remembers that an older woman

<sup>30</sup> Konrad, *Nameless Relations*.

<sup>31</sup> Hacking, *Mad Travellers*; Fuchs, *Ecology of the Brain*.

took care of them, while his mother must have made very long journeys by bike from one end of the country to the other to visit him in the early 1950s. The children did not visit him at the hospital, and they did not talk about him while he was gone. Then he returned; suddenly he was back again. These frequent disappearances continued, mainly in the spring and autumn, as Wilhelm recalls.

The experience of mental illness was a reality that marked and was marked by more than one generation in Wilhelm's family. Besides the story of his father, the fate of his twin sister Edith serves as another illustration of how secrecy contributed to the situated experience of mental illness through physical isolation within the four walls of the home. In addition, the story of his sister also shows how gendered family practices have triggered and marked experiences of mental illness. The gendered aspect of mental illness is a research field in its own right. Both historically and to the present day, the number of women suffering from mental afflictions far exceeds that of men.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, Edith's life path was radically different from her twin brother's. In his narrative, Wilhelm reflects on how a different upbringing in the home and the limitations of women's educational possibilities in the 1950s might both have contributed to his sister's mental affliction: "Then I had a twin-sister, fifteen minutes older than I, Edith, a fresh, lively, *gifted* girl—she really was. I actually think she was smarter than me, but well [...] then came the time when our parents had to figure out what their children should do." Wilhelm further explains how his oldest brother was to inherit the family farm from an unmarried uncle. Wilhelm himself was fond of books and was the only one to be sent to high school. He remembers his parents discussing whether his intelligent twin sister should be allowed to follow him, but as it was not that common for girls in the 1950s to continue their education, they ended up choosing a different path for her:

I know mom and dad discussed whether Edith, my twin sister, should follow me and stay in school. But then dad reasoned, well, you know, it will probably turn out the same way for her as for every other girl, they get married, they have children, and all that [...] so he really did not think there was any purpose in letting her continue her education. So, when she was fourteen

<sup>32</sup> Garde, *Køn, psykisk sygdom og behandling*; Kirkebæk, *Letferdig og losagtig*; Appignanesi, *Mad, Bad, and Sad*; Larsen, *Opdragelse og diagnosticering*; Chesler, *Women and Madness*; Meier and Vallgård, *The Family as a Locus of Illness*.

years old, after seventh grade, she was sent out to serve in households. On different farms. And there she did *not* thrive.

Edith could not really adjust to life in the houses where she was a servant. She was sent to a lot of different places and ended up in a religious hostel in the town of Aabenraa, where she had her first serious breakdown. The hostel called her parents and asked them to come and pick her up. Since Wilhelm had a driving license and his parents couldn't really leave their work, they sent him to bring her home. "I'll never forget it, because [...] she was [...] absolutely gone, unrecognizable, she was talking complete nonsense, and I'd never experienced that before—it was a shock to me."

Their parents then kept Edith at home, and they really did not know what to do with her. Wilhelm remembers how they discussed the situation with a couple of friends in town, both priests. They advised against having her admitted or contacting the public psychiatry unit. Wilhelm's parents also belonged to the religious community, and he recalls that they were rather skeptical of psychiatrists. According to Wilhelm, they were afraid that the psychiatrists would start digging into the family's religious convictions and draw the following conclusion:

When she is from such a home, then it must be caused by some kind of religious trauma, right? And they didn't think it was. And I don't think it was either. But they were convinced that the psychiatrist would come to that conclusion immediately.

So, the family confined her at home until she got better, as she did. It took some time, but step by step, she got back on her feet. Unlike her father, Edith was not isolated in a room in the house, but she remained isolated at home from the outside world. Wilhelm was her primary carer, and he recalls her passivity, spending several months in their living room: "There she lay on our couch, and I held her freezing hands."

After she recovered, Edith wanted to become a secretary. She moved to the larger town of Kolding, where she passed all her exams except one. She could not handle the pressure and stayed away and then fell into a depression once again. Now it was the 1960s, she was medicated, and the strategy of secrecy changed. Edith was no longer isolated at home:



Realizing that her depressions were occurring frequently, something more had to happen apart from just letting the time pass and wait for her recovery, right? Well, yes [...] she was on medication for the rest of her life, lithium it was. And I *do* think the doctors were too lax in keeping a check on her in the way that [...] she was just prescribed the medicine and then, click, it was just automated.

The late 1950s marked an important shift in the public's understanding of mental illness. Due to the development of psychopharmacological drugs, the history of psychiatry now entered what has been characterized as the second biological wave.<sup>33</sup> The influence of the bio-medical model of psychiatry, with its reliance on drugs and somatic treatments, in some ways helped destigmatize mental illness from the 1950s onwards.<sup>34</sup> The "ecological niche," including the modes of communication around such illnesses, changed significantly.

Following the ecological approaches to mental suffering, Thomas' and Edith's physical and social isolation should be considered an inseparable part of their illnesses. As living beings, they constitute their experienced worlds through their ongoing interactions and embodied engagement with their environments. Their being hidden away in a protected room or in the home more generally influenced how they experienced their mental illness and, not least, how it was experienced and passed on by their close relatives.

Wilhelm's family narrative thus shows how secrecy and silence shaped the socio-material environment of mental illness for both his father and his sister. Moreover, the story shows how coping with mental illness in this family in the early 1950s was marked by religious belief and skepticism of the merits of psychiatric practice. This was a period before the invention and widespread use of psychopharmacological drugs in Denmark and comparable European and North American countries, and his family had little confidence in medical or therapeutic treatment. Furthermore, Wilhelm and Edith's parents wanted to prevent the authorities from questioning or inquiring into the family's religious values. In the 1960s, the strategy regarding Edith's suffering changed. Secrecy did not dominate anymore.

<sup>33</sup> Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry*, 239.

<sup>34</sup> In Denmark, the use of psychopharmacological drugs increased dramatically in the 1950s, and new medicines were developed that are still used in psychiatric treatment today; see Rosenberg, *Den psykofarmakologiske udvikling 1950-1970*.

### SECRECY AND THE POWER OF RELIGION

Religious conviction played a significant role in the silencing and concealment of mental illness in several of the life histories I collected. The story of Richardt serves as another example of how a religious family tried to keep a mental illness under wraps. The story also indicates how the same religious environment could have triggered the mental distress in the first place. Moreover, the narrative illustrates how secrecy itself is negotiated and interpreted differently by different family members.

In 1980, Richardt took his own life while staying at a large mental hospital in central Denmark, hanging himself with a robe in the bathroom. He was 42 years old. At the time, his daughter, Lisa, was 16 years old. However, she was not able to discover the details of her father's death until she was 30. For years, Lisa was very angry at her mother for not telling her the whole truth about her father's death right away. As she recalls it, the information was very indirect and sparse:

I found out because [...] his new wife called and, by coincidence, I picked up the phone in the house, where I now lived with my mom and her new husband. His wife said: "Lisa, I have to talk to your mother." I thought it was strange, and I wondered if he had perhaps been hospitalized again? I knew he was admitted occasionally. Then I went down in my room [...] no into my room [...] I lived on the first floor at this time, and then I could hear my mother whisper far too loudly to her husband: "Richardt has taken his own life," in a hysterical voice. And it was [...] she couldn't even tell it to me!

Today, however, Lisa and her mother Annabeth get along well, and Lisa suggests that I also talk to her mother to get the details of Richardt's story from more than one perspective. I agree and get in touch with 82-year-old Annabeth. It turns out that she has a slightly different version of the same event:

Well, Lisa was in the house, it was the day we returned from holiday. Birgit [the father's new wife] knew when we came home, and then she called and told me that Richardt had taken his own life [...] And I was [...] well it was terrible, right? And Lisa, she had a room in the basement and [...] [long pause] and she came, she could sense that something horrible had happened, because I started to scream out loud, and Herman was holding me,

and it was just too much for her. She thought I should have come to her first. And talked with her about it. But it was a tragedy, right?

These two divergent testimonies, including uncertainties about the location of Lisa's room, remind us of the unreliability of memory.<sup>35</sup> Yet, throughout the long conversations I had with both Lisa and Annabeth, it became evident that the family secrecy around Richardt's mental illness extended far beyond the disagreement between the two of them about the communication of his death. This secrecy was mainly built on a misunderstanding. Annabeth was told that Richardt had taken his own life, but she was not told *how*. Lisa thought her mother kept that information from her, but her mother said she did not discover the details about Richardt's death until many years later at a family gathering. At this event, according to Annabeth, an uncle, who was married to one of Richardt's sisters, suddenly referred to Richardt having hanged himself. Through the interviews, it became obvious that it was primarily Richardt's religious family, mainly his two sisters, who concealed both his mental illness and the details about his death.<sup>36</sup>

Richardt was raised in a family that belonged to a certain religious movement in Denmark called the "Inner Mission." His father developed Parkinson's disease and was in a wheelchair for most of Richardt's childhood, so the family was run by his mother and, for the most part, his two older sisters. At the age of 16, Richardt stood up in the church and made a scene. He was clearly attempting to break with his family's religious belief, but this inappropriate outburst led to his admission to the mental hospital in Risskov. According to Annabeth's recollections, no one in the family mentioned Richardt's admission to hospital or his mental illness to her before they married. Only after Lisa's birth did Annabeth discover that something was severely wrong. Richardt started acting in a psychotic manner and was admitted to the mental institution once again.

Annabeth visited him frequently, accompanied by their small daughter, Lisa. However, Richardt and Annabeth's relationship did not survive the struggle, and they divorced when Lisa was three years old. Both later

<sup>35</sup> Erll, *Locating Family in Cultural Memory Studies*.

<sup>36</sup> It is quite possible that the cause of death, being a suicide, might have enforced the secrecy around Richardt. Historically, as well as presently, suicide is surrounded with stigma and is rarely openly talked about. Moreover, especially in religious circles, suicide has been considered a sin and thus very shameful. See, for example, Sudak, Maxim, and Carpenter, *Suicide and Stigma*; Moksony and Hegedűs, *Religion and the Stigma of Suicide*.

remarried. Richardt's new wife, Birgit, was part of the hippie movement, and she did not recognize his mental illness as a disease needing therapeutic or medical treatment. At this point in time, the influence of the anti-psychiatric movement in Denmark was strong, and it clearly affected Birgit's attitude towards medical treatment.<sup>37</sup> According to both Lisa and Annabeth, Richardt then experienced some very turbulent years. At home, he and his new wife Birgit experimented with open relationships and drugs. When his mental condition was so severe that an admission to the institution in Risskov was unavoidable, he received LSD and electric shock treatment. Finally, he committed suicide.

After this tragic event, it was not just the cause of his death that was kept under wraps. Lisa and Annabeth were not invited to Richardt's funeral, nor were they informed about the time or place. Everything was taken care of by Richardt's two sisters. However, Lisa and Annabeth did have a closer relationship with Richardt's mother, Lisa's grandmother. Through her, they kept in touch with Richardt's relatives, and by and by, they also got on better terms with his sisters. When one of his sisters died, they were invited to her funeral. On this occasion, Lisa experienced yet another act of unpleasant secrecy. She realized that Richardt's existence had been erased from the family narrative:

I attended his sister's funeral; she'd got very old, I guess it was ten years ago. Then there was this very religious group of people. And the priest, he holds a speech, and he says: "Oh, it was such a lovely family, the "Petersons," living in this nice home at Stillingsvej in Aarhus. They had these two lovely girls, Elsa and Greta. It was such a warm house, and everyone was welcome," and so on and so on [...] and my father wasn't mentioned with even a word!

This experience was clearly very uncomfortable for Lisa. There she was, participating in the funeral, but no one knew who she was. Lisa's and Annabeth's accounts both claim that Richardt's religious family played a major role in keeping Richardt's mental condition a secret.

The recollection of Richardt's life through Lisa's and Annabeth's memories shows how secrecy is never stable but always negotiated, including

<sup>37</sup>The anti-psychiatric movement in Denmark was highly influential in the years that followed the young people's revolt of 1968. Initiatives such as "the mad movement" were established in 1979, in which mental illness was perceived merely as a social construct. See, for example, Rosenberg, *Den psykofarmakologiske udvikling 1950-1970*.

between the individual family members. What has for many years been thought of as a secret can easily turn out to be a misunderstanding caused by a lack of communication or by different perspectives on the same situation. Moreover, the story also shows how religious conviction, as in the previous story, has motivated the maintenance of secrecy, reinforcing the stigmatization of mental suffering. Yet, whereas Thomas and Edith were isolated within the religious family to avoid suspicion from the outside, Richardt was excluded from the religious environment and erased from the family narrative.

This pinpoints the diversity and situatedness of family secrecy practices. Families marked by religious structures and beliefs have also operated differently and engaged in different modes of concealment. Richardt's story shows how different imaginaries of mental illness impacted on his life and his experience of mental distress: the religious, the medical, and the anti-psychiatric paradigms all shaped and constituted his mental suffering. In addition to these different knowledge regimes, the particular secrecy practices carried out by Richardt's family were an inseparable part of his illness with respect not only to his own experience but also to the way his illness has been perceived and narrated by his close relatives.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown how keeping secrets works as a social practice that restructures the emotional environments of the family and thus shapes the historically contingent experiences of mental suffering. As my analysis has demonstrated, the time-bound modes of communication have had both private and public impacts. On the one hand, the dynamics of secrecy and disclosure have marked the way mental illnesses have been experienced by the afflicted. On the other hand, family secrecy practices have also created and reinforced a narrative on mental suffering that, through embodied silences and the work of memory, has been carried across generations. Oral history interviews offer unique insights into the intimate sphere of the family and have proved a valuable tool in arriving at knowledge practices of the past that would otherwise be left unspoken. Moreover, the testimonies made it possible to scrutinize and foreground the inter-relational aspects of mental suffering and to trace how ambiguous practices of secrecy, silence, and "active non-knowing" have had an intergenerational influence.

Religion played a significant role in several of the collected life histories. Not only did religious environments encourage secrecy, as in the case of Edith, where neighbors in the community warned against collaboration with the public psychiatric system, or in the case of Richardt, where the sisters kept their brother's funeral confidential and excluded his existence from the family narrative. The testimonies from the relatives also suggest that religious belief could have triggered the mental affliction in the first place or caused a deterioration. Edith's breakdown happened while she was serving at a religious hostel, and Richardt's first meltdown occurred at church, indicating a reaction toward the demands of the fundamentalist religious movement. In mid-twentieth century Denmark, whether religion should be considered a contributor or exacerbator of suffering, religious conviction definitely shaped both the atmosphere and the secrecy practices of domestic life and hence marked the way mental illness was experienced.

*Family secrecy*, as a kind of knowledge practice, will always mediate between collective norms in the public sphere and intimate matters in the space of the family.<sup>38</sup> Secrecy is formed by societal structures, but it also forms them. Furthermore, secrecy becomes "real" in respect of its consequences—that is, the effects it has on bodies and lives in the past as well as in the present. Depending on the moment, silence and speech can, as Sara Ahmed has formulated it, "have different even contradictory effects [...] which is a question not simply of their time, but also of the place in which we reside at a given moment of time, the worlds we find ourselves in."<sup>39</sup> To put it differently, secrecy can be simultaneously oppressive and protective, depending on the context, the perspective, and the specific situation.

While my focus has been on secrecy, I hope this chapter will also serve to foreground the socio-material aspects of mental suffering, thus contributing to an increasing awareness and re-articulation of the fact that questions of mental health are not to be dealt with solely within the medical paradigm. In the past as well as in the present day, the family, as a historically changing site of struggle, plays an important role as a context of mental suffering. This comprehension might be especially important in

<sup>38</sup> Probing how the spatiality of secrecy and experiences of mental suffering have intertwined, the study also ties in with the growing research on mental health geographies. This scholarship posits that space and mental health are intrinsically linked and that the social, cultural, and political contexts are always part of the situated experiences of illness. See, for instance, Philo, *Across the Water*; Parr, *Mental Health and Social Space*.

<sup>39</sup> Ahmed, *Secrets and Silence*, xvi.

“the post-asylum era,”<sup>40</sup> where families, as a consequence of the implementation of district psychiatry and the general trend towards deinstitutionalization in several European countries, are given greater responsibility and are once again more directly involved in the caring process.<sup>41</sup> In this situation, it is crucial to keep in mind how every family is also determined by the more invisible cultural structures of power that affect knowledge management in private life and thus shape experiences of illness.

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<sup>40</sup> Larsen and Topor, A Place for the Heart.

<sup>41</sup> Suzuki, *Madness at Home*, 1.

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# Redressing or Excusing the Past? The Evaluation of Sexual Child Abuse in the Swedish Redress Scheme for Historical Abuse in Out-of-Home Care

*Johanna Sköld, Bengt Sandin, and Johanna Schiratzki*

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, experiences of welfare institutions have emerged on the political agenda. Experiences can be understood as lived or remembered events that happened to people, but also as the “culturally and situationally bound social process” of sharing and mediating experiences to

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wider communities.<sup>1</sup> Through such social processes, scandals of historical or non-recent child abuse in various institutional settings have become known to the public, and this has led to demands for investigations, reparation, and redress. It is a result of victim-based activism that has pushed for justice, redress, and recognition of the child abuse that has thrived in residential institutions, foster homes, faith-based institutions (churches), schools, and other extrafamilial institutions.<sup>2</sup> The political response in many countries has been to establish inquiries to investigate the alleged abuse by collecting testimonies from adult care leavers. Since the 1990s, inquiries into historical child abuse have been launched in more than 20 jurisdictions, and tens of thousands of victims or survivors have testified before them.<sup>3</sup> In the Nordic countries alone, 20 national or regional inquiry reports were published between 2003 and 2016.<sup>4</sup> In these reports, adult survivors broke the silence and taboo to speak about child abuse, and this happened in a context in which their experiences were given new meanings. Rather than being fragmented individual accounts of more or less disrupted memories, experiences became narrated in relation to a public discourse on historical child abuse, resulting in a collective political force.<sup>5</sup> As a result, adults have come forward as child abuse victims, positioning themselves as people with experience of institutional child abuse. The child category, which is usually an age-related category, thus became open to people who once were children.<sup>6</sup>

In some countries, the inquiries' findings have pushed the responsible bodies, whether it be governments, municipalities, or faith-based institutions, to initiate reparation frameworks through official apologies and the establishment of financial redress schemes. Globally, at least 36 redress schemes aimed at compensating victims of historical child abuse had been identified in 14 jurisdictions by 2017, and the number has probably increased since then.<sup>7</sup> Redress schemes constitute new welfare institutions that people who identify as victims of institutional child abuse meet and experience in their claim for justice. Reparations, such as public apologies

<sup>1</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, Introduction, 12–13.

<sup>2</sup> Wright and Henry, Historical Institutional Child Abuse, 2–3.

<sup>3</sup> Wright, Sköld, and Swain, Examining Abusive Pasts, 162.

<sup>4</sup> Sköld and Markkola, History of Child Welfare, 143.

<sup>5</sup> Murphy, Memory, Identity and Public Narrative, 307–9; Kivimäki, Suodenjoki, and Vahtikari, Lived Nation, 10–12.

<sup>6</sup> Davet, “Jag är ett finskt krigsbarn!”, 77–8.

<sup>7</sup> Daly, Inequalities of Redress, 204.

and financial redress schemes, ideally have a transformative element in that they can encourage society to acknowledge the wrongs committed and promote state authorities and other bodies to take responsibility for what happened, and through this, promote victim healing. The sheer number of inquiries and redress schemes, as well as their arguably victim-centered focus, is an indication that they are a vital part of the transitional justice frameworks that are underway in established democracies today. However, as McAlinden has outlined, “there are several means by which individuals and collectives can ‘apologise without apologising’.”<sup>8</sup>

In this chapter, we explore how such a “non-apology” can feature in financial redress and how the transformative aspect of a transitional justice framework can vanish during its practical operation. The aim of acknowledging the individual victims’ unjustifiable suffering in order to offer redress was in the Swedish redress scheme juxtaposed with the question of whether caregivers (the representatives of the state) had failed in their responsibilities. This chapter sets out to explore this dual focus of the financial redress institution. As a case study, we look at the Swedish financial redress scheme for victims of historical child abuse in out-of-home care and how this resulted in renewed experiences of the welfare state. Taking sexual abuse as a starting point, we want to demonstrate how such abuse, understood as the worst kind of child abuse, was evaluated within a scheme that at first glance seemed to be inclusive but, during its practical operation, came to be exclusive.

## CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: THE ULTIMATE CRIME AGAINST CHILDHOOD

Child sexual abuse has become a major focus in a number of inquiries and redress schemes internationally.<sup>9</sup> There are several explanations for this, such as the media’s interest in child sexual abuse scandals<sup>10</sup> and the long-standing social activism of victims and survivors forcing the issue onto the

<sup>8</sup> Gallen, *Jesus Wept*; Hamber and Lundy, *Lessons from Transitional Justice?*; Henry, *From Reconciliation to Transitional Justice*; Sköld, *Historical Abuse*; Winter, *Transitional Justice in Established Democracies*; McAlinden, *Apologies & Institutional Child Abuse*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Smaal, Kaladelfos, and Finnane (eds.), *The Sexual Abuse of Children*; Daly and Davis, *Unravelling Redress for Institutional Abuse*, 1272; Wright and Swain, *Speaking the Unspeakable*, 146–8; Wright, Sköld, and Swain, *Examining Abusive Pasts*, 169–70.

<sup>10</sup> Greer and McLaughlin, *Theorizing Institutional Scandal*; Greer and McLaughlin, *The Sir Jimmy Savile Scandal*.

political agenda.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the silence around sexual abuse and sexuality in general has been challenged, and consequently, a language to verbalize what happened to them is now more readily available to victims.<sup>12</sup> Clergy abuse scandals within the Catholic Church have also finally received major attention after decades of cover-ups.<sup>13</sup> Most importantly, child sexual abuse has come to be seen as the ultimate crime against childhood—a criminal act that deprives the child victim of his/her childhood.<sup>14</sup>

The exclusive focus on child sexual abuse within institutional settings in the redress responses in Australia, England, and Wales has been criticized by care-leaver advocates for ignoring the extreme vulnerability of children in care when they were abused and exploited in various ways as laborers in both closed institutions and in foster families.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to schemes focusing exclusively on sexual abuse in institutional settings, the Swedish redress scheme intended for victims of historical child abuse in out-of-home care had, at first glance, a wider remit. It included care leavers who had been in out-of-home care in both institutions and foster homes. Moreover, it was oriented towards severe abuse, which was defined as frequent, “serious violations and repeated abuse or neglect meant to seriously harm the child’s self-esteem”; occasional, “very serious physical abuse”; occasional, “sadistic or torture-like conditions”; and gross sexual abuse.<sup>16</sup> While these definitions include physical and emotional abuse and neglect as well as sexual abuse, the Swedish scheme was guided by criteria that restricted the claimants’ eligibility in other ways. As this chapter will argue, redress schemes that include a plethora of abuse of different characters can also fail to recognize the vulnerability of the child in instances where negotiations about the state’s responsibility overshadow recognition of the child victims’ suffering. As this is a process that involves agents who are not equals, such an approach risks subordinating the interests of the victims to the interests of the state.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Wilson and Golding, *The Tacit Semantics of ‘Loud Fences’*; Wright and Henry, *Historical Institutional Child Abuse*.

<sup>12</sup> Swain, *Why Sexual Abuse? Why Now?*; Wright and Swain, *Speaking the Unspeakable*.

<sup>13</sup> Gallen, *Jesus Wept*, 344; Golding, *Sexual Abuse as the Core Transgression*, 198–9.

<sup>14</sup> Kitzinger, *Who Are You Kidding?* 161.

<sup>15</sup> Golding, *Sexual Abuse as the Core Transgression*.

<sup>16</sup> Government Bill 2011/12:160, 23.

<sup>17</sup> Winter, *State Redress as Public Policy*, 35.

## MONEY AS A SYMBOL OF RECOGNITION AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE SWEDISH SCHEME

The financial redress scheme was the final government response to a decade-long process of victims seeking an apology and redress for injustices committed against them as children in public out-of-home care. The process commenced in 2006, when the government established an official inquiry into child abuse and neglect in institutions and foster homes (Sw. *Vanvårdsutredningen*). During the period 2006–11, this inquiry interviewed 866 care leavers who had been placed in out-of-home care between the 1920s and early 2000s. An official government interim report (based on 404 interviews) released at the end of 2009 contained shocking revelations of abuse and neglect, in which 90 per cent of the interviewees reported various forms of neglect, approximately 50 per cent reported physical abuse with weapons, 75 per cent other kinds of physical abuse, 50 per cent reported that they had been exploited as laborers, and equally as many reported that they had been sexually abused.<sup>18</sup> The interim report prompted the government to respond, and it did so by setting up a parallel inquiry with the task of proposing recommendations for how the state could organize redress for the abused care leavers—the so-called Redress Inquiry (Sw. *Upprättelseutredningen*).

While this inquiry suggested a commemorative museum exhibition, actions to prevent future abuse and neglect, and an official apology to the collective of care leavers, which was eventually delivered by the chair of the Swedish Parliament in November 2011, the most important and far-reaching recommendation was the financial redress scheme. In the Government Official Report, the Redress Inquiry Commission concluded that victims of historical child abuse would face serious difficulties in achieving justice through civil litigation due to the time-barred statute of limitations. Instead, the inquiry proposed a kind of *ex gratia* compensation, which should be considered as “recognition by society that the person eligible for compensation had been exposed to unjustifiable suffering and not as compensation for concrete damages.” This recommendation was endorsed by several victim advocacy groups.<sup>19</sup> Money is transformative in character, and as Stephen Winter argues, financial redress “respects

<sup>18</sup> Swedish Government Official Reports 2009:99.

<sup>19</sup> Swedish Government Official Reports 2011:9, 138; Arvidsson, *Att ersätta det oersätliga*, 140–1.

the survivor's agency by providing the means to pursue and obtain a wide range of goods and services. Unlike redress 'in kind' or through service provision, money is extremely fungible—putting power into the hands of survivors."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, financial redress is often favored by survivors, and it is also a response promoted by many inquiries.

After heated political debate about whether any financial redress should be issued in Sweden, a temporally enacted piece of legislation to be in effect between 1 January 2013 and 31 December 2014—the Redress Act—was passed by the Swedish Parliament in 2012. The aim of the redress scheme was, precisely as the Redress Inquiry had put it, to symbolically (through money) acknowledge the victims' unjustifiable suffering in order to offer redress rather than compensate for concrete damages, as in a tort case.<sup>21</sup> The scheme was constructed as a flat-rate payment in which eligible claimants would receive 250,000 SEK. The payment would symbolize the present society's sincere apology for, and acknowledgment of, the suffering that was caused to children that were wards of the Swedish state.

This financial redress scheme was operationalized by a court-like administrative body—the Redress Board. This consisted of 16 members who were experts in social work, pediatrics, and child psychiatry, as well as several judges. Each case was adjudicated by three or four board members, presided over by one of the judges. The board was guided by the Redress Act and another important document—the Government Bill. In the Swedish legal context, government bills "summarize one or several Governmental Official Reports as well as the responses of a referral process among authorities and stakeholders," and they are used by those enacting legislation to analyze the aims and possible interpretations of a legal act.<sup>22</sup> The Government Bill, the Redress Act, and the Redress Board altogether constitute a new welfare institution with which claimants for historical justice have been confronted.

The idea of money as a symbol of the state's or the government's recognition of victims' suffering is something other than a financial redress scheme's legal practice and outcome. What redress schemes actually do is to clarify for whom the symbolic recognition is intended and for whom it is not. Kathleen Daly has described this as the scheme's money logic:

<sup>20</sup> Winter, *State Redress as Public Policy*, 39.

<sup>21</sup> Government Bill 2011/12:160, 27.

<sup>22</sup> Schiratzki, Sköld, and Sandin, *Redress in Context*, 104.



“how to decide and how much to pay.”<sup>23</sup> The how-much-to-pay dimension of the Swedish scheme was straightforward because, in contrast to many schemes internationally, it did not contain any graded steps. The claimant got either the flat-rate payment or no money at all. The how-to-decide dimension, in contrast, was far more complicated and was outlined in the legal criteria specifying who was eligible for compensation. These criteria were specified in the Redress Act, to some extent defined in the Government Bill, but ultimately interpreted by the Redress Board in their assessment of each individual application.

In order to be awarded money under the Swedish scheme, applications had to meet four specific criteria: applicants had to prove that (1) *they had been taken into care between 1920 and 1980* (2) *under specified Child Welfare Acts*, and they had to (3) *give credible evidence of exposure to severe abuse* that occurred (4) *in conjunction with municipal out-of-home care*. Our previous research suggests that the four criteria functioned as excluding mechanisms that fragmented the applicants’ narratives of abuse. Any incident an applicant reported that failed to meet one of the criteria was excluded from the final ruling. Consequently, many of the abusive incidents in an applicant’s story and documentation could be considered non-valid, with the result that the whole application might be rejected.<sup>24</sup> This runs contrary to the explicit position taken in the Government Bill that, in its final ruling decision for each case, the board should “make an overall assessment of whether the abuses or neglects that had occurred in total could be determined as being of a serious nature.”<sup>25</sup>

As we shall see, this practical implementation of the money logic of the Swedish scheme was not always as logical and predictable as expected. In total, the scheme compensated only 46 per cent of the approximately 5000 claimants who sought financial redress for past harms. The fact that more than half of all claimants received nothing stands out in international comparison.<sup>26</sup> The money logic alone cannot fully explain the outcome of

<sup>23</sup> Daly, *Redressing Institutional Abuse*, 126.

<sup>24</sup> Sköld, Sandin, and Schiratzki, *Historical Justice Through*, 196.

<sup>25</sup> Government Bill 2011/12:160, 25.

<sup>26</sup> Sköld, Sandin, and Schiratzki, *Historical Justice Through*, 179. The final report from the Redress Board does not contain information about the exact number of individual applicants, but according to the Redress Board, 46 per cent of the applicants received the payment. We know that 5285 applications were filed with the board, and approx. 300 of them were renewed applications from people who had had their first application rejected before the closing date of the scheme, see Ewerlöf, *Slutrapport*, 9–10.

the scheme. Rather, it is important to address how the design of the redress scheme and the assessment carried out by the Redress Board (the redress institution's praxis) affected the scheme's aim of symbolically acknowledging childhood suffering. To do this, we need to investigate how individual cases were adjudicated. Such an approach is still quite unusual. In previous research, the outcomes of redress schemes for historical child abuse have been analyzed either at an aggregate level by examining official reports<sup>27</sup> or else by scrutinizing interviews with officials working with the schemes<sup>28</sup> and interviewing victims who have been, or will be, affected by the schemes.<sup>29</sup>

## DATA AND METHOD

The data for our analysis comprise a sample of the three- to six-page decision texts in individual cases adjudicated by the Redress Board. Every decision text has a formal structure, consisting of the background to the applicant's placement history, the grounds on which the applicant claimed redress, and the board's summary of the applicant's story, concluding with the board's assessment, in which the decision to reject or award compensation is justified. The decision is the final document in a case file that consists of many other documents, such as the submitted application form, the applicant's written submission, any other written evidence (witness testimonies, verdicts, etc.), archival documentation, the memorandum that summarized the case prepared by clerks (*Sw. föredragande*) assisting the Redress Board members, notes from the oral hearing that was held with 82 per cent of the applicants, and so on.<sup>30</sup> The decision text, in contrast to any other document in a filed case, is regarded as a public document under Swedish law and was therefore accessible to us. However, personal information, such as names, places, and even the number of years

<sup>27</sup>Daly, *Redressing Institutional Abuse*; Studsrød and Enoksen, Money as Compensation for Historical Abuse; Winter, Two Models of Monetary Redress.

<sup>28</sup>Daly and Davis, Unravelling Redress; Studsrød, Utføre oppreising; Winter, Redressing Historic Abuse in New Zealand.

<sup>29</sup>Lundy and Mahoney, Representing Survivors; Hamber and Lundy, Lessons from Transitional Justice? Pembroke, Historical Institutional Child Abuse in Ireland; Studsrød and Enoksen, But Then Again.

<sup>30</sup>Ewerlöf, *Slutrapport*, 16–17.

a person was placed in care, are excluded from these decision texts.<sup>31</sup> We collected every fourth decision—1225 in total. Of these, 521 applications were successful and 704 were rejected.

Firstly, we processed all the decisions in an Excel spreadsheet. Each decision text was coded according to the following variables: whether the application was successful or rejected, the applicant's gender, the number and character of placements, the grounds for claiming redress, the categories of abuse the applicant had described (differentiating between physical abuse, sexual abuse, work exploitation, detention, discrimination, violation, and neglect), what perpetrators were registered in the applicant's story, and what arguments the Redress Board gave to justify its decision.

This initial coding allowed us to identify cases that contained allegations of sexual abuse (551). While the Swedish scheme included various categories of abuse, our sample of every fourth decision from the Redress Board demonstrates that child sexual abuse was prevalent in 65 per cent of the successful applications in our sample. This indicates that child sexual abuse was an important aspect of what the Redress Board considered to be severe abuse worthy of compensation. However, allegations of child sexual abuse are also mentioned in applications that did not meet the criteria for being eligible for compensation. In this chapter, we analyze 215 rejections, out of the total of 704 in our sample, in which the applicant reported child sexual abuse. It is important to note that an applicant's story as summarized by the Redress Board often contains allegations about several types of abuse, which sometimes occurred at various placements during the applicant's childhood—thus, the sexual abuse was one abuse amongst several. Determining why the incidents of sexual abuse did not meet the eligibility criteria required us to return to the decision texts and subject them to close readings. Special attention was directed towards how the Redress Board balanced a recognition of the victims' suffering against their understanding of how the state's responsibility for past abuse in out-of-home care should be comprehended, based on their interpretation of the Redress Act and the Government Bill.

<sup>31</sup>The information collected guarantees the applicants' privacy in accordance with the Ethical Review Act that guides any research involving living persons in Sweden, and the research project was approved by the Regional Ethical Vetting Committee in Linköping on 10 March 2015.

Let us take a closer look at the 215 rejected applications in our sample that contained information about sexual abuse and the grounds upon which they were rejected.

Table 13.1 presents the grounds for rejection in relation to the criteria that outlined the Swedish scheme's money logic. In a previous article, we presented the four criteria in more detail, concluding that, among other things, the credibility criterion inherited a requirement that the applicant must have the capacity to provide details of traumatic experiences.<sup>32</sup> In Table 13.1, we can see that 28 of the 215 applications containing reports of sexual abuse failed to meet this requirement or failed to present sufficient evidence for the board to presume that the applicant had indeed been exposed to severe abuse. Five applications were also rejected because the applicant abstained from the legal process—that is, he or she did not

**Table 13.1** Grounds for decisions to reject the application among the applications containing reports of sexual abuse

<i>Grounds for decisions to reject the application among the applications containing reports of sexual abuse</i>	
<i>The severe abuse criterion</i>	
The sexual abuse was not considered severe enough	89
<i>The credibility criterion</i>	
The applicant presented vague memories, few details, or non-credible evidence	28
The applicant abstained from the legal process	5
<i>The care criterion</i>	
The applicant was not taken into care under one or more of the specified Child Welfare Acts	27
The abuse happened after 1980	6
<i>The conjunction with the care criterion</i>	
Caregiver was not aware of the abuse	43
Caregiver was not aware of the abuse, despite indications	12
Caregiver became aware of the abuse and acted to prevent it	7
Sexual abuse happened outside the foster home or institution	6
<i>Incomprehensible decisions</i>	
TOTAL	236
	( <i>n</i> = 215)

Comment: As some applications were rejected with reference to several grounds, the total number of grounds (236) exceeds the total number of applications (*n* = 215)

<sup>32</sup> Sköld, Sandin, and Schiratzki, *Historical Justice Through*, 15.

appear at the oral hearing or made a renewed application without adding new information to the case.

When it comes to the care criterion, those whose abuse occurred after 1980 (6) or who were not taken into care under any of the Child Welfare Acts specified in the Redress Act (27) were not eligible for compensation, no matter how severe the sexual abuse may have been. The second most common ground for rejecting applications containing information about child sexual abuse was the conjunction with the care criterion, which we will comment on in the second section of this chapter. First, we turn to the severe abuse criterion, which was the most common ground for rejecting applications.

### CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CONSIDERED NOT SEVERE ENOUGH

The conceptualization of severe abuse in the Government Bill indicates a difference between gross sexual abuse that should be awarded compensation and other forms of sexual abuse that were not conceptualized as severe.<sup>33</sup> In this first section, we analyze how the Redress Board made the distinction between gross sexual abuse entitling the applicant to compensation and sexual abuse that was not considered severe enough, resulting in rejected claims.

Of 215 rejected applications in our sample in which the applicant had reported child sexual abuse, 89 were rejected because the abuse was not considered to meet the severe abuse criterion. What kinds of sexual abuse were not considered severe enough?

It is not easy to establish a rationale for how to group incidents of child sexual abuse. Any categorization carries the risk of trivializing the suffering of the applicants. However, in order to gain an overview of the reported abuses that were not considered severe enough by the Redress Board, we have distinguished between hands-off and hands-on abuse, because such a distinction might have influenced the decisions of the board. A similar distinction was made in one of the preceding government official reports.<sup>34</sup>

Table 13.2 shows several categories of hands-off sexual abuse that were not considered severe enough to entitle the applicant to compensation. For example, 11 applications contained allegations of perpetrators exposing their genitals or masturbating in front of the applicant. This might

<sup>33</sup> Government Bill 2011/12:160, 25.

<sup>34</sup> Government Official Reports 2011:61.

**Table 13.2** Categories of child sexual abuse that were rejected because the abuse was not considered to meet the severe abuse criterion

<i>Categories of child sexual abuse</i>	<i>Hands-on/ hands-off</i>	<i>No. of applications</i>
Perpetrator exposed genitals or masturbated in front of the child	Hands-off	11
Child forced to watch porn/sex or listen to sex talk	Hands-off	6
Child asked to touch/masturbate or have sex with perpetrator	Hands-off	3
Perpetrator sneakily looked at the child	Hands-off	2
Child exploited for sexual photography	Hands-off	2
Child witnessed the rape of another child	Hands-off	1
Fondled over clothes	Hands-on	36
Genitals fondled beneath clothing	Hands-on	29
Child forced to masturbate or touch perpetrator	Hands-on	10
Rape attempt	Hands-on	6
Rape (penetration)	Hands-on	5
Sexual relations with carer (described by applicant as mutual)		2
Unclear or the applicant was the perpetrator		3
<b>Total number of categories</b>		<b>116</b>

Comment: As some applications contained information about several sexual abuse categories, the total number of incidents exceeds the total number of applications ( $n = 89$ )

happen frequently, as in one case of a girl aged 18 or 19 years, whose foster father used to masturbate in front of her each time she took a bath (case 2013:106).<sup>35</sup> It is plausible that the girl's age was of relevance to the board's decision here. Age was a decisive factor: the younger the child, the more serious the abuse was considered to be.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the Government Bill only stated in one section how age could matter:

The younger or more helpless the child is, the greater the responsibility the home [the caregiver, our interpretation] has for the child's protection. With

<sup>35</sup> Each case in our sample is provided with a number. This number does not correspond to the original reference number in the archive, only to the number in our database. This is due to the Swedish Ethical Review Act that guides us to safeguard the applicants' privacy. Therefore, the decisions' original reference numbers were redacted when we collected the data from the archive. All decisions are preserved in the National Archive, The Redress Board's Archive, 3.2-17 Kopior på beslut i ansökningsärenden, aidentifierade.

<sup>36</sup> Persson et al., Tillämpningen av ersättningslagen, 18.

increasing age and maturity, however, children become more independent and the protective role of the caregivers changes and becomes more difficult to some extent.<sup>37</sup>

This reflects that if the applicant was understood as a young child at the time of the abuse, the state, through its representatives, was responsible for what happened, but if he or she was older (mature), the caregivers—and hence the state—could not be expected to protect this young person.

If we now turn to the hands-on abuses listed in Table 13.2, most of the allegations concern applicants being fondled over their clothes (36) or under their clothing (29). In some cases, the applicant has not been able to verbalize in more concrete ways what happened. One male applicant stated that a male staff member had lured him into a room and did things to his penis. It is stated in the board's decision that the applicant had trouble giving a more detailed description of what had happened (case 2014:326). Consequently, this narrative is categorized as fondling, although it might have encompassed even more serious abuse. Fondling beneath clothing includes several cases in which the perpetrator touched or masturbated the child's genitals.

In addition, ten applications reported that the child was forced to masturbate or touch the perpetrator, which also did not qualify as severe abuse, according to the board. Nine of these ten applications concern cases in which the child had been forced to masturbate or touch an adult carer, and one case concerned peer-to-peer abuse—a boy who was sexually abused by his ten-year-older foster brother (case 2015:407). It is difficult to extract the motivation as to why this category did not count as severe abuse, but it is apparent that the board did not assess these cases as gross sexual abuse nor as frequent “serious violations and repeated abuse or neglect meant to seriously harm the child's self-esteem.”<sup>38</sup> Some of these decisions contain information that the abuse happened only once or twice, which perhaps did not count as frequent. In one case (2013:135), however, a boy was molested by his foster mother on frequent occasions (two or three times a week) in a foster home where the applicant claimed to have been placed for about two years. The board, in contrast, argued that the archival documents could only support a claim that the applicant had been placed in this foster home for about two weeks. The board explicitly

<sup>37</sup> Government Bill 2011/12:160, 20.

<sup>38</sup> Government Bill 2011/12:160, 25.

stated in its decision that such a short period of time was sufficient to conclude that the abuse was not severe.

This case demonstrates that the archival documentation was pivotal for the assessment of the severity of abuse. While archival documentation was needed to prove an applicant's custodial status, the Government Bill also stated that an applicant "should present evidence to the board to presume that the applicant, in conjunction with care, had been exposed to severe abuse or neglect."<sup>39</sup> The Bill gives a few examples of how severe abuse may be evidenced through archival documentation or by calling witnesses, but it does not explicitly mention that archival documentation on placement periods should trump the applicant's narrative. This is an effect of the board's interpretation of the Bill. However, previous research, as well as one of the inquiry reports foregrounding the redress scheme, have demonstrated the difficulty of following a child's journey through the child welfare system based on child welfare records. Documents may be missing, incomplete, or inaccurate.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, child welfare records must be treated with caution, and their veracity can only be determined in light of how complete the whole case record appears to be. We do not know the status of the child welfare record in the above-mentioned case, only that the Redress Board found archival documents that contradicted the applicant's narrative.

The most disturbing result in Table 13.2 is that at least on some occasions, neither rape nor attempted rape qualified as severe abuse. Our sample of applications rejected because the sexual abuse was not considered severe enough contains five cases of rape and six cases of attempted rape. As the same individuals reported both attempted and completed rape in some cases, nine individuals were affected by these decisions to reject the application—two men and seven women.

The two men both reported rape. One of them was between 11 and 15 years of age when he was raped by another boy at an institution (case 2013:102). This happened once, and despite the fact that the applicant told the staff, no one reacted. The other boy was 11 years old when a female staff member at an institution forced him to have intercourse with her on three occasions (case 2013:211). Without being explicitly stated in the decision, it is possible that the board deemed this a voluntary act because the decision text also contains information that the applicant and

<sup>39</sup> Government Bill 2011/12:160, 17.

<sup>40</sup> Sköld, Foberg, and Hedström, *Conflicting or Complementing Narratives?*



other boys used to peep beneath this woman's skirt because she wore no underwear. The fact that the boy was only 11 years old when the sexual abuse took place was not taken into consideration.

Three women also reported having been raped as children in care, all by adult men. One was raped by men with no connection to her care placement, and two were raped by their foster fathers when 14–15 years of age. Interestingly, one of these decisions to reject the application was decided on by a divergent board. Two board members opposed the decision, but as the chair of the board had the casting vote, the decision to reject the application was upheld anyway. The case concerns a 14-year-old girl who was raped once by her foster father after he got her drunk. The dissenting members of the board argued that the applicant should be compensated because the foster father took advantage of her sense of security in the home and got her into a helpless state by giving her alcohol. However, the majority argued that, because no violence, threat, or other abuse was reported, the board had to decide whether a single rape was considered gross sexual abuse. The board cited in its ruling a statement in the Government Bill that the assessment must not “completely ignore conditions that today would generate the same settlement of damages as the proposed compensation.”<sup>41</sup>

This quote indicates that the assessment of the severity of abuse should relate to contemporary tort law, despite the fact that the purpose was not to compensate for concrete damages as in a tort case but to symbolically acknowledge the victims' unjustifiable suffering.<sup>42</sup> In contrast to tort cases, where a lower settlement of damages would be an option, the Swedish redress scheme had only two possible outcomes—the claimant either received SEK 250,000 or nothing at all. This comparison between a flat payment *ex gratia* response and a tort settlement had negative consequences for many applicants, as the above-mentioned case exemplifies, because tort settlements in Swedish practice are normally low compared to other national standards. For example, the suggested compensation for a child rape victim at the time when the redress board adjudicated the cases was SEK 100,000 upwards, according to the Swedish Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority (*Brottsoffermyndigheten*).<sup>43</sup> In a previous article, we argued that the extent to which contemporary tort law

<sup>41</sup> Government Bill 2011/12:160, 25.

<sup>42</sup> Government Bill 2011/12:160, 27.

<sup>43</sup> Brottsoffermyndigheten, *Brottsoffermyndighetens referatsamling*, 32–5.

came to influence the assessment of these historical redress claims was probably not foreseen during the political process leading up to the establishment of the Redress Act.<sup>44</sup> The symbolic acknowledgment of victims' unjustified suffering was translated into a legal assessment of historical abuse in accordance with contemporary tort law, which does not seem to be intentional and was not included in the ambitions of Parliament when they settled for an *ex gratia* payment. In such cases, the legal/judicial practice seems to have obscured the explicit political intention.

### THE WEB OF CRITERIA AND REJECTED CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE VICTIMS

Even if an applicant's report of sexual abuse qualified as severe abuse according to the board's assessment, other criteria could still disqualify the applicant from being awarded compensation. In this section, we turn to the conjunction with the care criterion that, after severe abuse, was the most common ground for rejecting applications containing information about child sexual abuse. As we will show, this criterion was complex, and it often had paradoxical consequences for applicants. We take the conjunction with the care criterion as a case study for how the character and extent of the state's responsibility overshadow the recognition of victims' suffering. Finally, we will present a few decisions to reject the application that have proven difficult to categorize because they appear incomprehensible to us.

The conjunction with the care criterion means that the abuse must have occurred within the institution or foster home, not outside it (for example, at school, in hospital, when the child had run away, etc.). In addition—and this is a more critical dimension of the conjunction with the care criterion—the caregivers, if they were not themselves the perpetrators, had to be considered to have been aware of the abuse and would have had to have deliberately chosen to refrain from taking preventive action.<sup>45</sup> We have previously shown that this criterion in effect meant that, if the applicant admitted that as a child, he or she did not tell anyone about the abuse committed by someone other than the caregiver, the application was rejected.<sup>46</sup> This is exactly what happened in 43 of the 215 rejected

<sup>44</sup> Schiratzki, Sköld, and Sandin, *Redress in Context*, 8.

<sup>45</sup> Government Bill 2011/12:160, 19–20.

<sup>46</sup> Sköld, Sandin, and Schiratzki, *Historical Justice Through*, 186.

applications containing information about sexual abuse. It is possible that these applications contain information about gross sexual abuse, but because the applicants did not tell anyone, their caregivers were not aware of the abuse and thus could not act to prevent it from happening again.

However, during a close reading of decisions to reject the application referring to the conjunction with the care criterion, we found at least 12 cases where the decision text contained indications that the caregivers were indeed aware of the abuse. The board rejected these cases anyway. Why? One example concerns a boy aged between 13 and 15 who was sexually abused by two male friends of his foster mother. The first perpetrator abused him on six or seven occasions, mostly at the male perpetrator's home but once in the foster home. The applicant disclosed the abuse when he was moved to another foster home, which eventually led to a trial where the male perpetrator was convicted. According to the applicant, it was revealed during the trial that this man had also tried to lure other children to come home with him. He was infamous and rumored to be a pedophile. In the decision text, it is claimed that the applicant never personally told his foster mother he was residing with at the time of the abuse, but that he believes she knew about it. The second male perpetrator was a neighbor of the foster parents, and he sexually abused the applicant on four or five occasions. The applicant never told his foster mother about this. In the motivation for the decision to reject the application, which included an assessment of the violations of both perpetrators, the board states:

Nothing has indicated that the foster parents knew or had reason to suspect abuse. Therefore, they cannot be considered to have failed in their responsibility to care for the applicant in the manner required for the abuse to entitle [the applicant] to compensation.<sup>47</sup>

Despite clear indications, such as rumors about one of the perpetrators being a pedophile and an alleged guilty verdict, the board concluded that there was nothing to indicate that the foster parents knew about the abuse. The decision text does not reveal whether the board made efforts to track down the trial verdict. However, had they done so, a non-existent verdict would almost certainly have been mentioned in the decision, as would a verdict that could support or contradict the applicant's narrative.

<sup>47</sup> Case 2014:347.

An even more delicate aspect of the conjunction with the care criterion is that we found seven applications rejected on the ground that the caregivers became aware of abuse and acted to prevent it. Therefore, the caregivers had not failed in their responsibility to care for the applicant, according to the Redress Board's assessment, even if they had failed to protect the child from abuse. Consequently, the conjunction with the care criterion resulted in a paradox in which the applicant was damned if he or she did not tell anyone about the abuse but also damned if he or she did disclose the abuse and the caregivers acted upon it. A passage in the Government Bill was decisive in such cases:

In order to assess whether the child in such cases has been exposed to abuse or neglect in conjunction with care, one must take into consideration what a home [caregiver, our clarification] normally could have been expected to be aware of or act upon. If the home has taken responsibility and demonstrated such care concerns as are expected, it cannot be claimed that flaws have occurred in conjunction with care.<sup>48</sup>

Case 2013:97 demonstrates how this passage was put into effect. The applicant was sexually abused as a seven-year-old girl by a man who was a tenant in the foster home. He used to lie on top of her and ejaculate, and he also photographed her genitals while threatening her with severe consequences if she told anyone. On one occasion, the foster mother discovered them. The foster mother took the applicant out of the room and gave *her* a spanking. After this incident, the applicant was moved to stay for a short period of time with a female friend of the foster mother. When the applicant returned to the foster home, the man was gone.

Interestingly, in its motivation for the decision to reject the application, the board does not say much about the abuse to which the applicant had been exposed but more about whether "normal care concerns could have prevented what occurred [the abuse]." With explicit reference to the Bill, the board concludes that "It has emerged that the applicant's foster mother acted to protect the applicant when the sexual abuse was disclosed. The foster parents cannot therefore be considered to have failed in their responsibilities."<sup>49</sup> It is significant that both the Bill and the decision of the board rests on the premise that it was sufficient that the caregiver acted

<sup>48</sup> Government Bill 2011/12:160, 20.

<sup>49</sup> Case 2013:197.

after the abuse had taken place in order to fulfil his or her responsibilities.

This passage in the Government Bill together with the board's interpretation of it exemplify how the redress scheme came to shift and narrow its focus from the victim to the limits of the state's responsibility. The purpose of the scheme—to acknowledge victims' unjustifiable suffering by offering redress—was downplayed in favor of a focus on proving whether the caregivers (the representatives of the state) had failed in their responsibilities or not. The abuse in itself was not regarded as a legitimate claim for compensation. Instead of redressing historical child abuse, the scheme came to accept it.

Finally, three applications containing information about sexual abuse were rejected for reasons that must be explained with reference to fragmentation and distinctions made between single events of abuse. The board had an obligation to make an overall assessment of each applicant's abuse according to the Government Bill, but it seems to have failed to do so in a couple of cases that cannot be understood otherwise. Incomprehensible decisions are particularly delicate within a redress scheme in which the applicant had no right to appeal the board's decision, as in this Swedish scheme.<sup>50</sup> Two of the three incomprehensible decisions to reject the application concern cases in which the sexual abuse was ignored in the motivation the board gave for its decision, while other incidents listed in these cases were disqualified with reference to other criteria.

In case 2014:275, the applicant claimed compensation on the grounds that she had been sexually and physically abused, offensively treated, and exploited as a laborer during numerous placements at several institutions and foster homes. She had been sent back and forth to out-of-home care from the ages 2 to 3.5 years and from 12 to 18 years. The sexual abuse occurred in a foster home where she stayed for a short period of time as a teenager (a week, according to the archival documentation). The foster father used to touch her genitals beneath her clothing and on one occasion pushed his fingers into her anus. In its decision, the board motivated its rejection by stating that the volume of individual placements was not a

<sup>50</sup> While the board's decision could not be appealed against, those who received a rejection before the redress scheme's closing date—31 December 2014—could make a renewed application before that date. In a few cases, the redress board reconsidered its first decision if the board members agreed that new decisive information had been added to the case. See Schiratzki, Sköld, and Sandin, *Redress in Context*, 114.

ground for compensation, and moreover, the placement periods were very short, and therefore, the abuse could not be considered severe. The sexual abuse was not even mentioned in the motivation. We argue that this is an example of how the board came to fragment the applicants' narratives so that a childhood with a lot of different experiences of abuse in many different locations did not fit the outline of the money logic, whereby each incident had to meet all the different criteria. This case also shows that the board did not meet the requirement of the Government Bill to make an overall assessment of the child's vulnerable situation—the child had been moved from place to place and abused constantly in different ways, including sexually, for many years.

### CONCLUSIONS

This chapter demonstrates how, during its practical operation, a redress scheme can shift away from its explicit aim to acknowledge the victims' unjustifiable suffering, moving instead to conditioning victims' interests in relation to the state's interest in only granting compensation for abuse for which the state could be considered responsible. While some aspects of this shift were detectable in the Government Bill, and therefore must have been obvious to, if not intended by, the designers of the scheme—the Swedish parliament—other aspects are effects of the legal operation that were probably difficult for politicians to foresee. The devil is in the details, and, in this chapter, we have outlined which details were pivotal for why 215 victims of experiences of child sexual abuse did not receive compensation from the Swedish financial redress institution. We have identified several possible explanations for this.

Firstly, the Government Bill did not state that all kinds of sexual abuse would count as severe abuse eligible for compensation. Instead, the Bill made a distinction between gross sexual abuse that clearly would be compensated for and “serious violations and repeated abuse or neglect meant to seriously harm the child's self-esteem” that would also be compensated for if occurring frequently. Consequently, the text of the Bill urged the Redress Board to consider some child sexual abuse as being insufficiently severe. Our data demonstrate that the board certainly did not evaluate sexually abusive acts—such as fondling, the perpetrator exposing his or her genitals, masturbating in front of the child, or forcing the child to touch or masturbate the perpetrator—as serious violations, even if they occurred frequently. Moreover, not even rapes or attempted rapes by caregivers

were considered gross sexual abuse or serious violations if they only happened once or occurred during a placement of only a short duration. Such experiences of child sexual abuse were consequently not considered grounds for redress.

Secondly, a less obvious detail that came to influence the board's decisions is how the historical abuse described by the applicants compared to current understandings of compensation under tort case law. While the Redress Inquiry argued that contemporary tort case law should not apply when the government was issuing an *ex gratia* payment as a symbol to acknowledge the victims' unjustified suffering, the Government Bill, on the contrary, suggested that the definition of severe abuse "could not ignore circumstances that today might lead to equally high damages as the proposed compensation."<sup>51</sup> In the internal guidelines of the Redress Board, this was expanded upon when it was stated that the board, in defining severe abuse, should "glance at what is required for settlement of damages of SEK 250,000 in a corresponding situation."<sup>52</sup> As tort case compensation in Sweden is rather low compared to other national standards, a single event of abuse, even if it concerned child rape, could not easily reach SEK 250,000 in contemporary tort case damages.

In effect, the compensation amount set the standards of what counted as severe abuse, which prioritized a legalistic view of the responsibilities of the state over the victims' experiences of sexual abuse and suffering, as well as need for redress. The extent to which contemporary tort law would influence the assessment of the historical redress claims once the law was passed was probably not foreseen by the politicians in Parliament. This is an important reminder for designers of forthcoming schemes internationally to be observant about how other contemporary legislation can relate and shape the court practice of redress schemes.

Thirdly, the ambition to both acknowledge the suffering caused by the experiences of severe child abuse in welfare institutions and to assess the responsibility of the state in legal terms proved difficult to combine. This resulted in renewed experiences of suffering within the welfare state institutions. Ultimately, this had devastating effects for applicants who were able to prove they were severely abused, including grossly sexually abused, while in municipal out-of-home care, but were still not granted the

<sup>51</sup> Government Bill 2011/12:160, 25.

<sup>52</sup> National Archive (Riksarkivet), Utredningen av inrättande av Ersättningsnämndens arkiv, volume 7, Ewerlöf, G. *Processbeskrivning*, 1 December 2012, 24.

compensation or the state's acknowledgement of their suffering. A significant factor here was the details in the outlining of the conjunction with the care criterion, and how they were interpreted by the Redress Board. This criterion explicitly states that compensation could only be granted for abuse for which the state, through its representatives—the caregivers—could be proven responsible. The Bill specified that the state could only be held responsible for abuse occurring within the home and in cases where the caregivers either were themselves the perpetrators or deliberately refrained from taking preventive action for abuse of which they were aware.<sup>53</sup> The effects in legal practice of these details of the Bill were probably difficult to foresee.

One of the most surprising and disturbing results of our study is that applicants ended up in a catch-22 situation. They were denied compensation if they had acted as many child abuse victims do by remaining silent for fear of the consequences and not being believed, or perhaps because they did not understand the full ramifications of what had happened to them. They were equally denied compensation if they had spoken up or if the caregivers found out about the abuse in other ways and acted upon it *after* the abuse had occurred. The caregivers were not held responsible if they did not know or if they knew and had taken some action to prevent further abuse. The fact that caregivers had not been able to protect the children from abuse did not make them responsible in the eyes of the board. Instead of pursuing the message that child abuse within out-of-home care is always the adult caregivers'—and ultimately the state's—responsibility, the message to claimants who failed to receive financial compensation was that the victims are to blame if they do not speak up, or that no one is to blame for severe abuse in out-of-home care. We argue that this is not at all compatible with the Swedish redress scheme's explicit aim to acknowledge the experiences of victims of historical child abuse in out-of-home care.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Government Bill 2011/12:160, 19–20.

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