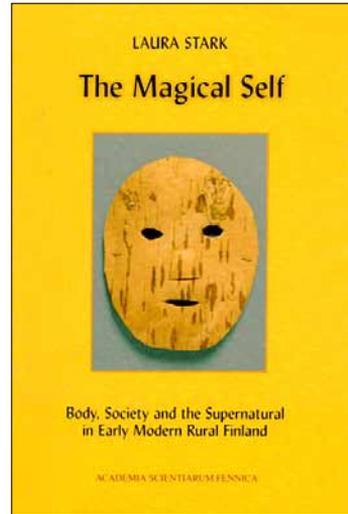


## BOOK REVIEW

### THE ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY OF THE MAGICAL SELF

Laura Stark 2006. *The Magical Self. Body and the Supernatural in Early Modern Rural Finland*. FF Communications 290. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 521 pp.

The bulky, 521-page study by Laura Stark is an indepth analysis of rural life in Early Modern Finland and focuses on villagers' self-perception and self-conceptualisation. The book is divided in four chapters, each of which is further divided in several subchapters. The book opens with 'Preliminary perspectives', introducing the key notions *magic*, *self* and *society* and characterises sources and the origin of sources (especially subchapter 4, 'The Dialogic Production of Magic Texts'). The study is based on stories collected to and stored in the Finnish Folklore Archives, which, as the book clearly shows, enables researchers to make indepth interpretations even tens of years after the time of collection. One of the earlier reviewers of the book, Marja-Liisa Keinänen, a religion anthropologist and folklorist at the University of Stockholm, has also acknowledged Laura Stark's skill in compiling a brilliant study into a phenomenon in its sociocultural context on the basis of archive materials. Even though the author could not carry out fieldwork, interviewing people on magic and the practitioners of magic in the nineteenth-century villages in Finland, she has managed to create an effective dialogue with archive texts (1,750 narratives and religious texts). A part of the introduction gives some idea of the views to the Early Modern self and the main characteristics of what the author has called high-risk surroundings, where this self had to cope in. Risks arose from things and the surrounding people and the precondition for coping was to be in good physical condition. Stark also outlines the changes in the concept of the self during the modernisation of the socio-economical situation. Methods of research are discussed in subchapters 3 – 'From Text to Historical Subject: Fact, Fiction, and the Narrative Construction of Self'; and subchapter 5 – 'The Open Body'. Laura Stark points out the limited choices of the populace to put their foot down, and magic proved an actual or seemingly functioning alternative. The central principles that the author closely adheres to are, first, noting that the stories people told of their own activities do not necessarily mean that people acted precisely in this way, and second, the understanding that while characterising the Early Modern rural society one cannot proceed from the social norms and ways of perception of the Modern Society. Stark shows that developing strategies for expressing one's personal interest was socially unacceptable and were not supported by economic relationships. This viewpoint could be applied to



some conclusions that have been made about the genre system of folklore. After all, personal experience story, as a genre, could be viewed as a more recent narrative mode of expression, not to speak of autobiography, which, according to the author, requires from the narrator unique memories and the expression of a clear personal identity. Stark appears to have explained the narrative phenomenon that scholars of folktales have noticed but have not managed to decode its essence. In narratives, a story-teller seemingly adopts elements from the tales of other narrators without the audience noticing any shift in his or her identity as a narrator. In this type of narration, the storyteller can enter other narrative worlds and recount about an event as if he or she had experienced it himself or herself. In her work with archive texts Laura Stark has come across examples where a course of events is told as a first-person narrative while the events must have happened during the lifetime of the narrator's grandparents. Such observations do not seem to allude to ostentation, but lead to a different path of analysis.

Even though Stark's narratological observations are valid and inspirational for any scholar of folktales, these are not the focus of this study. Instead, the study centres on magic, magical practices, narratives recording its use, believing and not believing in magic, and also the physical perception and performing of magic. Stark shows that both a personal and collective identity is constructed by the use of narratives and narratives even take part in constituting reality. People, however, still convey their understanding of the world through their physical body. The most significant achievement of this study is the consistent interpretation of culture-specific physicality and bodily experiences of humans in the course of which the author provides explanations for the functional mechanisms of magic, the views of the reasons and cures of diseases, and the methodological overview of magical thinking. On the basis of an extensive corpus of the source material, Stark has concluded that in Early Modern thought, the important aspect of the way a person perceived himself in the world was his understanding of the limits of the body, the body schema, which generally was in balance but could be perturbed by external factors. Since the physical body was perceived as open, its influence was believed to extend outside the body schema, and this influence could be magically guided, for instance, by means of secreted bodily fluids. According to this view, however, the open body was susceptible to permanent danger, for example, someone else's force or physical power could invade the body and cause the damage. Power or some external magical attack could have come from people and also from places and objects; a person of an extremely powerful nature could have stored his or her power in certain places and objects. Such interpretation explains why it is dangerous to interfere in the quarrel of two powerful individuals: when an ordinary person is exposed to the enhanced power of two strong persons, the former will be in great trouble.

Chapter Two entitled 'Tensions between the Individual and the Collectivity' discusses the nature of witchcraft and hurting with magic. Stark shows how the tensions between the individual and collective demanded solutions and alternatives, and channelled in their perceptions of witchcraft and magical practices and also in incriminations of other villagers for practicing witchcraft. The discussion of the purpose and application of magic was persistently prominent in the community. According to Stark's interpretation, magic can be viewed as a form of social currency which is used in the battle of powers and which is part of the weapons of socio-economical strategy. Also,

tales about practicing magic turn into a kind of social currency. Even though Stark describes magic and Christianity as two different moral systems, she also demonstrates how both could exist by mediation of certain popular explanations.

A separate, and lengthier chapter, 'The Body and the Threatening Environment' is dedicated to the observation of the body and the perception of the surrounding environment. In this chapter the author introduces the perceptions of the Finnish animistic force, or *väki*, *luonto*, *nenä* and *viha* (dirt that enters the wound and makes it infectious) as components of ethnotheory, and demonstrates how people have perceived all these phenomena and how it has influenced their behaviour in trying to protect themselves from the attack of these agents. During all such attacks – a person may be startled, fall, or fear something – occurs a loss of agency. The chapter also speaks about the persons of special magical orientation, like *tietäjät* (wiseman) and healers. Unlike ordinary villagers, *tietäjät* and healers could significantly enhance their individual energy. Evidently, Laura Stark has managed to find out why the treatment suggested by a folk healer could be effective: between the healer and the patient a dialogue takes place, in the course of which the healer determines the origin of the disease, and which agent or trauma broke the consistency. The treatment will entail the regulation of the body schema. Treatment with magic is based on internal bodily knowledge, which an individual obtains by learning cultural existence, and in the mutual effect of speaking and physicality and objects.

Chapter Four observes 'The Self in the Social Hierarchy'. The author points out the means of social control that were effective in an Early Modern village society and under these mentions shame, disgrace and fear of being subject to a situation in which someone's position in the social hierarchy is questioned or emphasised. Even a glance can be interpreted as a means of control, an instrument of magical force, as are the tales of the "evil eye". Among the strategies of maintaining the social structure Stark demonstrates collective test situations: a fine example of this is a village party, where the ability to attract the attention of the opposite sex is put to test. Another example of an important test situation is going to court, which always required magical preparation.

In the conclusion, Stark arrives at describing the social character of narratives of magic, revealing of the culture-specificity of the body schema, and the formation of the ethnic theory of the self.

Stark's study is an invaluable continuation of former Finnish-Karelian studies. Building upon similar sources she draws the readers' attention to the economic and political circumstances instead, while being innovative in her approach.

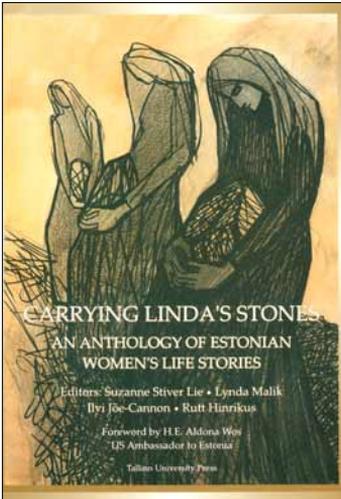
As Finnish and Karelian folklore share common features with the corresponding legends and religious reports connected with witchcraft in Estonia, Laura Stark's study offers several *déjà vu* effects and triggers the intuitive comparative parallel reading. For those who can read Finnish, original source texts have been added. Without further discussing the comparison of two rural cultures, it could be briefly mentioned that among the similar features are situations described in religious (magical) legends and memorates (being lost in the woods, etc.), explanations of the reasons behind events and changes in the situations (the cow's milk becomes viscous because a specific person has cast an "evil eye" on it) as well as ways to solve a problem (seeing a folk healer to find cure for a mysterious rash) and not only because these might be plots of universal migratory legends. Laura Stark expresses her opinion that the thinking of a prac-

tioner of magic can be interpreted as the description of her experiential reality (p. 38).

The book is an important milestone in the ethnological knowledge production, and brings the study of beliefs and practices connected with witchcraft and popular medicine to a completely new qualitative level. An Estonian proverb – *Kui pole nõide uskujat, siis pole nõida lausujat*, literally, ‘When nobody believes in witches, the witch has no reason to practice’ only confirms the validity of Laura Stark’s statements.

Mare Kalda

## MEMORIES AT WORK: LIFE STORIES OF WOMEN CAUGHT BY THE FORCES OF THE 20TH CENTURY



Suzanne Stiver Lie, Lynda Malik, Ilvi Jõe-Cannon, Rutt Hinrikus (eds). 2006. *Carrying Linda's Stones: An Anthology of Estonian Women's Life Stories*. Tallinn: Tallinn University Press. 600 pp. including Appendix with Glossary and maps.

This great book, *Carrying Linda's Stones. An Anthology of Estonian Women's Life Stories* (2006), edited by Susanne Stiver Lie, Lynda Malik, Ilvi Jõe-Cannon, and Rutt Hinrikus, is built around fifteen life stories about gender relations and women's emancipation during contradicting oppressions. It is a bulky book formed like a brick for further work on the construction of identity, while underlining the need for memory and oral history from various perspectives.

This collection of written life stories was necessitated to keep alive the memories of “those who remained in Estonia, those who were deported, and of those who fled to the West” (p. 21) from Estonia in the 20th century. The need is even greater because memories forced aside will not be forgotten but remade into something else. If not shared by the group they could be torn apart. The process of uttering the once forbidden thoughts, dangerous words, even tabooed, is a process of reconciliation. The history of personal experience is needed to counterbalance official archive documents, which have been redacted by ideological policies. The demand for source criticism is necessary to treat these documents which were handed down from history in order to legitimise the ideology of the Soviet state. Among other things, this collection of experienced life stories can provide the context of agony and terror.

The fifteen life stories, presented for non-Estonian readers in English in 2006, can be read as fifteen thrillers. The readers may need the explanation that the title, *Carrying Linda's Stones*, alludes to the Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg*. Once the reader's interest is captured, he/she cannot stop reading. Together the stories answer many questions that may be too difficult to ask one's friends and colleagues in Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania. The editors seek to present the widest selection of life stories to illuminate the phases of disasters that befell the people of Estonia during the 20th century. Women, caught in the forces of events, are now ready to sum up their lives.

Four overview chapters on theory of knowledge, life stories as memory, sociological and gender research, and the outlines of Estonian history and gender history, all work together as a solid foundation for the non-Estonian readers in need of clarification of contradictions. Some overlapping will only serve the reader's request for underpinned reminders. This foundation is a great contribution of the editors to render a sense of security to readers outside Estonia. Since my school years in Gothenburg, I have met people who fled to Sweden but seldom heard their full story. Since the 1990s, literary novels have been published about those who fled and since the 2000s about those who were deported, while not so many books about people who stayed have reached the Swedish reader until lately. In 2007, for instance, *På stället flyg* (Estonian *Paigallend* 'Treading Air') a novel by Jaan Kross and *Förträngda minnen* (Estonian *Tõrjutud mälestused* 'Memories Denied') an evaluation of memory by Imbi Paju were published.

Abroad we know least of the lives of those who stayed. When reading *Carrying Linda's Stones* we learn that women's liberation movement in Estonia was moulded between the force of traditional subordination to patriarchy, and the continental emancipation and education movement, beginning even before 1918, the beginning of the first period of independence in Estonia. The pressures of dictatorial occupation of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were mounted on the population with contradictory effects to the little woman.

The perspectives of personal experience from different angles underline the need for autobiographical writing, interviews and anything that supports the contemporary re-addressing of oral history, as facts of history are made by human beings; 'facts' being made of Latin *facere*, 'to make'. They can even be made up or revised by an oppressor who wants to show his "washed hands" to posterity.

In the service of the process of witnessing, the book's four editors worked closely together, translating, organizing, shortening and editing the book. Rutt Hinrikus, researcher of the Estonian Cultural Archives at the Estonian Literary Museum, chose the life stories presented from the widest range possible, taking into consideration generational spread, geographical location, social class, political orientation, public prominence, and post-war residence. Women's and men's lives differed considerably during the period beginning with the Second World War. The women's stories do not only concentrate on themselves, like the writing of the men tends to, as they strived to survive while being separated from their families.

*Priority was given to narratives in which an entire family's life was represented, illustrating not only the forcible disruption and separation of families, but the emergence of new networks of solidarity under survival conditions, both at home and abroad (p. 20–21).*

Ilvi Jõe-Cannon, director of the Estonian Women's Studies and Resource Centre at Tallinn University in Estonia, has provided the chapter 'A look at Estonian history' and has translated most of the stories into English.

Two sociologists, Lynda Malik, from the U.S., and Suzanne Stiver Lie, an American-Norwegian, provide the analytical framework of sociological and gender theoretical perspective, while Rutt Hinrikus analyses how the archives of life stories aids the process of national memory by connecting material ranging from "small history" to "big history". In Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, the collections of written and recorded life stories are extensive and of utmost importance for the memory work needed to construct the national identities in the 21st century. There are extensive archives of folk life studies in the Nordic countries but the scholarly interest of life stories in Sweden is carried out by folklore scholars rather than by scholars of history. As Sweden was spared in the Second World War, the need for reconciliation by memory work is not quite the same there. Rutt Hinrikus carefully discusses the interplay between history and memory, the forgetting and remembering, the silence when there are no words of taboo. The issues of credibility and selectiveness of memory are also considered.

Suzanne Stiver Lie and Lynda Malik point out the coping strategies presented in the experience stories using a gender theoretical as well as an autobiographical perspective in their concluding chapter on the interrelationships between social and individual worlds. The stories end at the point where they carry on an orientation of the contemporary situation, up to the year 2006, of strive for gender equality.

"Those who remained, those who were deported, and those who fled" all suffered beyond what is possible to grasp by the reader. There must have been tensions between the groups. If so, these are downplayed for the benefit of future progress.

Those who fled seem eager to record every detail that happened during the escape and the refugee period. They offer a piece of history they witnessed. In their new homelands they formed Estonian groups, sometimes with Latvians and Lithuanians, also Finnish immigrants, to protect their heritage of the interwar period. For Estonians this period of the independent republic is treasured. The terror and deportations of the following fifty years forced the people to adjust to the authority of the conquerors. Silence was a strategy of coping. As if terror would not be enough, the mark of 'an enemy of the people'<sup>1</sup> ruined the life and chances of the person, the spouse and the children for decades. Vivid impressions of this fate are given by the personal experience stories of life. No matter how horrible the experiences, the writers keep their distance. They do not load the burden on to their readers, which makes them even more impressive. They cope with their memories. They can be also humorous. When reading I had to remind myself that these stories were written by the women who survived. As we cannot hear the others, they have to tell their stories as well. Towards the end of the book I started to think about the topics that were not mentioned. The editors knew – for instance, there is very little mention of sex and even less of rapes at war, though these certainly occurred.

The ways men and women are expected to lead their lives are normatively organized in every society. We record changes in expectations during our lives. Times usually change slowly under normal circumstances, unless there are upheavals like war, famine or revolutions. These things happened in Estonia and other countries in the Soviet

sphere. As everywhere, gender norms and expectations intertwine with aspects of class and ethnicity. They intersect. Even though there is no such concept as ‘intersectionality’, it is impressive how the four analysing editors have managed to treat the manifold aspects of the life stories and the impact they have on each other. The concept ‘intersectionality’ serves as a checklist for remembering the impact of various conditions on the context, though it is difficult to deal with more than two at a time when analysing their impact on each other. As an attempt of a model I imagine a woman’s plait – loosely tied in various colours, twisted and uneven – to visualize the shifts of power that these women had to cope with. Gender, class, and ethnicity intersect, twist and change places as do force, scope, and hierarchy (Thurén 1996).

The European patriarchal tradition used to be strong in Estonia but was matched by a model of the capable farm woman who carried out her responsibilities with a good deal of autonomy, which can be seen in other Nordic countries. These competing trends are said to be still working. Women are expected to be capable, coping with themselves and their families. They are also expected to defer to their husbands and other authorities including the church and the government, which are traditionally run by men though seldom acknowledged as gendered institutions. The Soviet policy of gender equality forced the equal pressure upon unequal men and women, bringing about different effects on the parties, such as double burden on women, and thus brought along a resistance to women’s emancipation, which proved contaminated if associated with the Soviet Union. As in most countries, during the Second World War the complementary gender roles were modified in Estonia.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Baltic German nobility dominated the class hegemony in Estonia. German ethnicity and language, along with upper-class and middle-class education, was considered exemplary. Well-educated ladies of the upper class as well as their governesses and servants with knowledge of foreign languages had their share of a good life in the class society. During the first period of independence in Estonia in 1918–1940, the striving for national identity blended in the traditional complementary gender roles for men and women. Ethnicity and class formed the voluminous strands of force and scope in the plait. The ideal model was a family farm where the husband communicated with the world and the wife cared for the family.

By the first wave of the Soviet invasion, class and education became suspicious, with reversed importance of force and scope. Again, by the Nazi invasion the traditional formation of ethnicity, class, and gender was restored. Many German-speaking persons found an outcome until the return of the Soviet rule: some of them left for Germany with the Nazis, where mothers of young children were spared from labour in German camps. In this case the gender strand was of great force in the plait.

Those who stayed were oppressed for reasons of ethnicity and suppressed as a class, while supposedly treated as gender equals at work, causing the unequal effect of mothers and housewives having extra burden to provide for their families. The Soviet ideal of a female tractor driver could raise a girl, provided that she accepted the male norm, which proves that gender did matter. She made the strand of gender condition visible in a new colour, and perhaps the colours were different in the eyes of the oppressed and the suppressor.

In retrospect, individual women feel disgendered at turns of their life. They do not recognise themselves as women. Many of these writers do so, remembering the inhuman labour and terror that they never imagined women could be made to suffer. While making their own plait they might not recognise gender as a strand of small force, little scope and no hierarchy. But at this time of terror and deportation their husbands, brother and fathers were killed, which proves that gender was the overarching criterion for life or death. Young children died anyhow from hunger, cold and disease.

No wonder that feminist emancipation was contaminated after fifty years of enforced gender equality of the Soviet model. Class differences probably will be evened out, though education counts highly. Only one ethnicity is mentioned in the stories, the Estonian. A return to normal life could mean a yearning for Estonian nationalism which is closely tied with traditional expectations of gender roles of the lost Golden Age between the world wars. The rural world before the Second World War is gone. The everyday anguish of the oppression is also gone. The women whose life stories are represented in this book are facing economic difficulties at old age and meet them with great adaptability. Young women of today face new sets of problems. At the time of the restored independence in 1991, families used to have many children, while now there is a fall in birth rate. New generations of men and women growing up in the European Union share the responsibility for their families as well as occupational career and have economic imperatives to make it work.

Åsa Ljungström

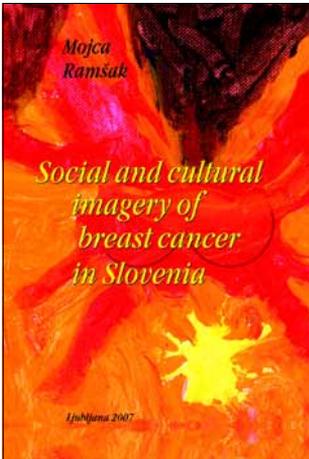
## Comments

<sup>1</sup> Enemy of the people – a name designating deportees, kulaks and political opportunists in the Soviet media and political jargon.

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## BREAST CANCER IMAGERY IN SLOVENIA



**Mojca Ramšak 2007. *Družbeno-kulturne podobe raka dojk v Sloveniji/Social and Cultural Imagery of Breast Cancer in Slovenia.* (Transl. by Mojca Ramšak & Franc Smrke) Ljubljana: Delo Revije, English translation, 57 pp.**

Folklorists have preferred to study folk healers and alternative treatment methods and have rather neglected the study of modern people and their pathographies, the illness stories or descriptions of their diseases. Thus, the contemporary illnesses and treatment approaches remain in the periphery of folklore studies. The Slovenian ethnologist Mojca Ramšak's work about the sociocultural thoughts and views of cancer patients represents the author's outstanding choice of theme. Remarkably,

the author has published her study in Slovenian and English between the same covers. In the following review I will analyse and comment on the 57 pages of the English translation of the book. Out of courtesy, I have to mention that the pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline supported the publishing of the book.

As an ethnologist borrowing methods from medical anthropologists, Ramšak analyses in her work the stories of Slovenian breast cancer patients. Her source material consists of 66 accounts, written by women in response to an online survey conducted in 2006. Although the author's original intention was to collect breast cancer stories also from men, the survey included only women. Men are much less susceptible to breast cancer, but their experience would have definitely contributed to the material. The collected material is based on responses to an open-ended questionnaire. The author's main goal is to disclose the myths and beliefs, emotions and behavioural patterns, culture-specific norms, and social attitudes associated with breast cancer. In addition, Ramšak wishes to reveal the patients' attitudes towards official and alternative medicine and the commercialisation of diseases. The author notes that the central issue of her study is the last major taboo in the Western society – the meaning of life.

Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer among women. In Estonia, with the total population of 1.3 million, approximately 600 new cases of breast cancer are diagnosed each year. In Slovenia (the total population exceeding 2 million) the corresponding number is 1,083. In Western countries every tenth woman is expected to fall ill with breast cancer at some stage in her life. The probability of cure is higher if the disease is diagnosed at an early stage. Statistics indicate that about 60% of breast cancer cases are cured; that is, the patient, depending on the type of cancer is still alive five or ten years after the surgery. The possibility of cure is dependent on early discovery of cell mutations. This is why various support organisations organise campaigns that instruct people to monitor changes in their physical condition and encourage seeking medical attention as soon as any changes occur. In addition to disease prevention, cancer organisations collect donations to support individual psychological guid-

ance of cancer patients and the activities of support groups. It has become a common practice that the organisations involved in helping cancer patients organise writing contests which aim to detect the more acute problems of cancer patients but also offer the patients a chance to write down their experiences and analyse their feelings. In Finland such writing competition took place in 1994 resulting in 672 responses. Mojca Ramšak's work is based on a similar writing contest. The collection and study of the texts was supported by Europa Donna (the European Breast Cancer Coalition) and the Association of Slovenian Cancer Societies.

Autobiographical or biographical stories about diseases, treatment and death encompass narrative strength and potential. Ramšak writes that breast cancer is a biting, confusing and self-enclosing experience: a trauma which not only hurts the body but also the spirit. Such a dramatic experience inspires people to talk and write about it. Pathographies that focus on the disease at a specific phase in life may be written as first- or third-person narratives. Regardless of whether it was a physician, patient or a close relative who wrote the pathography, the stories convey people's individual experiences and feelings connected with the illness and falling ill.

Relying on the categorisation by Anne Hunsaker Hawkins (1991), Ramšak has grouped the pathographies discussed in the book in four categories. The first consists of *didactic pathographies* in which the writers wish to share advice and make practical suggestions to other people, relying on personal experience. The second group consists of *angry pathographies* in which people point to flaws in the behaviour of doctors and problems in medical science. These tales of criticism focus on the doctors' neglect and lack of regard towards the patient as a human being. The third category covers *alternative pathographies*, which also reflect criticism of medical science, though without the feeling of anger. Discontent makes patients search for different methods of treatment and turn to healers for alternative treatment and medicines. The fourth group, according to Hawkins' categorisation, consists of *ecopathographies*, in which patients analyse the environmental, political and culture-specific problems of their disease by focusing on and emphasising the influence of changes in the society in the development of the diseases. Though highly expressive, these are still analytical categories that cannot convey what people have been thinking or a story based on that. In analysing the texts of Finnish cancer patients I have experienced that a single account may entail all the four types of pathographies.

In her work, Ramšak departs from these categories and proceeds to pass on imagery or killing metaphors. The American author Susan Sontag (1978), a breast cancer victim herself, was the first to introduce the idea of disease as a politically, socially, and medically loaded metaphor. On the example of Sontag, Ramšak introduces the metaphors of illness and body, relying on Lakoff's and Johnson's metaphor theory (Lakoff 1987; Lakoff & Johnson 1980). Western metaphors, which have emerged in a reference to human anatomy, consist of oppositions. According to this, people tend to perceive the parts of the body above the waist as good and those below as bad. These metaphors centre on the opposition of good and bad: a metaphoric thought associated with any illness is bad while things related to health are good.

Similarly, Estonian language contains a number of analogous phrases, positive and negative, such as:

*kahe jalaga maa peal = hea*

*ühe jalaga hauas = paha*

‘with two feet on the ground’ = good

‘one foot in the grave’ = bad

Thus, after being diagnosed with a serious illness, people *descend* into depression, they feel the *pressure* or *burden* of their illness, or *the shadow of darkness* comes upon them. The illness marks the end of their *life’s journey*. On the other hand, people describe recovery by means of positive metaphors, such as *rising* from the sickbed, getting *rid of the burden* of illness or *stepping out of the darkness (into the light)*. When a person is cured, the experience turns into an important and thought-provoking stage in life. Susan Sontag describes her cancer experience as a milestone. Finnish cancer patients have used similar expressions (*merkittävä mittapylväs*) in their cancer narrative.

In parallel to the advances in Western medicine and the emergence of modern system of laws, people started to abandon the treatment methods characteristic of ethnomedicine. Ordinary people started to change their views about falling ill and diseases: diseases became an abnormal condition and had to be fought with all the possible measures. All the presented metaphors rely on the opposition according to which health is a normal and illness an abnormal physical condition. Mojca Ramšak believes that metaphors of war and battle must have become established in the medical language during the First World War. However, such binary thinking has been introduced to the Western society around the mid-nineteenth century, when scholars of medicine revealed the division between the normal and the pathological in medical science. It is likely that around the same time doctors adopted in their speech military expressions of disease and prevention (see Foucault 2006 (1963): 40–41). The fact that people are becoming increasingly enlightened in all aspects of healthcare has emphasised the central role of an individual in the process of battling with diseases. This means that from the society’s perspective people are first and foremost responsible for their own physical condition. Thus the society leaves people in a paradoxical situation where they have to fight against the inevitable. As a result, a failure in this situation means a stigmatisation of the ill person by the society and the social group. Cancer patients perceive the situation as particularly distressing, because people have long been unaware of the actual causes of cancer; also, healthy people believe that being inflicted with cancer equals death. Healthy people, therefore, are quite erratic in their behaviour around cancer patients: People suffering from cancer are as if “buried alive”, the healthy ones tend to look down on “diseased ones” and even avoid cancer patients. In everyday life this may mean that people suffering from cancer may lose their close friends and colleagues, which adds tension in the already difficult psychological situation.

Inadequate knowledge of cancer has inspired a number of myths and misconceptions. In Slovenia, some people believe that vulnerable, repressed and submissive people are particularly susceptible to cancer. The most susceptible, however, are people who suppress their anger and sexual needs.<sup>1</sup> Also, people who do not care about their health are prone to be inflicted with cancer: Drunks are in danger of getting liver cancer, smokers lung cancer, those who eat overly fatty foods stomach cancer, and people who expose themselves to too much sun or repress their needs are in danger of getting skin cancer. In addition to eating too much unhealthy food and the lack of

physical activity, breast cancer patients tend to have problems with family relationships and suppress personal desires and needs. Culture-specific thinking also associates the myth of cancer with problematic childhood, a negative worldview and the person's inner wish to fall ill.

Sociocultural stigmatisation is only one of the problems that cancer patients have to tackle with. Since medical science only focuses on the treatment of cancer, the patients often feel deprived of the psychological support they need to work through the depression, changed body image, self-conceptualisation, sexual needs and the anxieties and fears for future associated with the disease. Cancer patients have to face the daily fear that the disease may return and the fear may hold them back in returning to normal life. Their position in the society has weakened; they are unsatisfied with the work of the medical institutions and the results of the operation. Many who have undergone breast cancer surgery feel uncomfortable; they often suffer from swollen arms, pains in different parts of the body, fatigue, and insomnia. Since people generally perceive breasts as symbols of femininity, the breast cancer patients feel that they have lost their feminine side together with their breast(s). For example, in the stories of cancer patients in Finland, women have started to call themselves 'half-women' or even 'torsos' after the surgery. Ramšak emphasises that the weakened internal energy and the loss of self-confidence are not helping cancer patients to deal with all the named problems. This is why many cancer patients turn to alternative medicine and its methods in search of mental balance and to what has been called a 'holistic' healing.

Breast cancer triggers all kinds of emotions in cancer patients. The most common of these are loneliness, anger, anxiety, vulnerability, guilt, shame, a feeling of helplessness, envy and a dismissive attitude towards the surrounding people. Men reportedly focus less on the loss of appearance, but they fear losing their physical strength, and, consequently, the loss of job. Women's emotional attitudes towards their body and breasts, in particular, are influenced by the fact that in the Western culture breasts are perceived as symbols of femininity, motherhood and sexuality. Losing breasts is therefore directly related to losing the role of a woman, mother, and lover. The pathographies indicate that over time, some cancer patients learn to adapt to their new body without breasts and learn to live with themselves as they are. In these stories women stress that the chance to live means more to them than a lost breast or femininity and having looked death in the eye they understand that life is an enriching experience.

Various campaigns (pink ribbon, yellow Livestrong wristband) enhance public awareness of cancer and being affected by the disease. In a way, these campaigns even help women affected by breast cancer emotionally "survive" after the surgery. Support groups and open communication certainly help cancer patients but first the women have to arrive at the stage where they are mentally prepared to share their problems and concerns. The stories of cancer patients in Finland, for example, indicate that some women may find even identifying oneself as a cancer patient an unsurpassable task. The central idea behind these commercial campaigns is that they guide people to consume certain pink products. Mojca Ramšak asks, rightly, whether such campaigns are justified in countries like Slovenia. The 2006 survey among the cancer patients in Ramšak's subject group revealed that half of the respondents had not even heard of the pink ribbons and the other half had heard about these but did not think they needed it.

In this situation, Ramšak argues, it is much more important to increase the level of financial support from state programs on cancer research and on improving the quality of cancer treatment. The pink ribbons may, contrary to their intended purpose, add a sense of disappointment for cancer patients, who may think that they had not fought hard enough and have not been brave enough to avoid the disease<sup>2</sup>.

Cancer patients feel stigmatised as culprits and sinners; at the same time, healthy people rarely think that every one of us may be affected by cancer. Therefore, researchers of culture have a variety of challenges, today and in the future, to work with. The most important of these would be busting the myth of illness and health as a binary opposition, and this way saving cancer patients from guilt when faced with physical problems. From this perspective, Mojca Ramšak's work serves as a valuable point of departure for studying unsolved problems and questions left unanswered. The author discusses how breast cancer patients use their knowledge and strength to tackle with everyday problems, but has avoided going deeper into theoretical issues. In the interests of future, I would recommend that the topics discussed in the book be analysed from the aspect of people's socio-cultural beliefs and limitations of language, and that the single stories be analysed in more detail. Since Ramšak deals with content analysis I would have preferred if more examples were given to support the author's arguments. At the same time, adding sample texts could be problematic, because it might violate certain people's privacy. The book is a must-read for anybody involved in working with cancer patients in their daily life. While studying the pathographies of cancer patients, Ramšak points to the contemporary culture-specific myths and misconceptions associated with the disease and being affected by it. For folklorists and other scholars of culture, the book as if serves on the platter the various socioculturally established norms and beliefs that deserve further research and analysing in the context of other countries of Western mindset.

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## Comments

<sup>1</sup> The association of suppressed emotions and cancer was first introduced in Europe by W. Reich (1897–1957) in his *The Cancer Biophaty*. Reich, among other things theorised about the reasons why his friend and colleague S. Freud had cancer, connecting these with Freud's suppressed sexual desires in his marriage (Reich 1973).

<sup>2</sup> In Finland, health authorities have raised awareness of breast cancer with advertising campaigns which feature a young female model in a bold pose wearing a pirate's eye-patch over her missing breast. An advertisement like this is also questionable, as pirates have the reputation of independent rebels who fight with no regard to rules, and ordinary middle-aged patients who are suffering from physical and emotional traumas cannot possibly identify with them.

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