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GOOD LIVES, HIDDEN MISERIES
An Ethnography of Uncertainty in a Finnish Village

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ABSTRACT

This is an ethnographic study, in the field of medical anthropology, of village life among farmers in south west Finland. It is based on 12 months of field work conducted 2002-2003 in a coastal village. The study discusses how social and cultural change affects the life of farmers, how they experience it and how they act in order to deal with it. Using social suffering as a methodological approach the study seeks to investigate how change is related to lived experiences, idioms of distress, and narratives. Its aim has been to draw a locally specific picture of what matters are at stake in the local moral world that these farmers inhabit, and how they emerge as creative actors within it.

A central assumption made about change is that it is two-fold; both a constructive force which gives birth to something new, and also a process that brings about uncertainty regarding the future. Uncertainty is understood as an existential condition of human life that demands a response, both causing suffering and transforming it. The possibility for positive outcomes in the future enables one to understand this "small suffering" of everyday life both as a consequence of social change, which fragments and destroys, and as an answer to it - as something that is positively meaningful. Suffering is seen to engage individuals to ensure continuity, in spite of the odds, and to sustain hope regarding the future.

When the fieldwork was initiated Finland had been a member of the European Union for seven years and farmers felt it had substantially impacted on their working conditions. They complained about the restrictions placed on their autonomy and that their knowledge was neither recognised, nor respected by the bureaucrats of the EU system. New regulations require them to work in a manner that is morally unacceptable to them and financial insecurity has become more prominent. All these changes indicate the potential loss of the home and of the ability to ensure continuity of the family farm.

Although the study initially focused on getting a general picture of working conditions and the nature of farming life, during the course of the fieldwork there was repeated mention of a perceived high prevalence of cancer in the area. This "cancer talk" is replete with metaphors that reveal cultural meanings tied to the farming life and the core values of autonomy, endurance and permanence. It also forms the basis of a shared identity and a means of delivering a moral message about the fragmentation of the good life; the loss of control; and the invasion of the foreign.

This thesis formed part of the research project "Expressions of Suffering. Ethnographies of Illness Experiences in Contemporary Finnish Contexts" funded by the Academy of Finland. It opens up a vital perspective on the multiplicity and variety of the experience of suffering and that it is particularly through the use of the ethnographic method that these experiences can be brought to light.

Keywords: suffering, uncertainty, phenomenology, habitus, agency, cancer, farming

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Taking the cows to pasture.

1. SOCIAL CHANGE IN A FINNISH VILLAGE

The first time I drove on the winding country road leading to Norrås village on the island of Koppars I was struck by how undulating and beautiful the landscape was. It was as if it were taken from a postcard or tourist book as “must see” locations of aesthetically pleasing landscapes. Maybe it is because I am socialised through childhood summers spent not far from this region of the country to appreciate this particular type of landscape, but whatever it was it was soothing to know that this was the place I would call home for the coming months. I had borrowed my uncle’s canary yellow Volkswagen which really stuck out like a sore thumb among the ancient Saabs of the eighties and the slightly newer, unassuming family cars. Spring arrived exceptionally early that year, the sun glistening on the rapidly melting snow in the yards of the village houses. Arja and Rainer, my host family, received me at the gate of their garden trying to keep the over excited dogs at bay – they were yapping and throwing themselves onto the gate in a wild frenzy. We chatted for a while and Rainer said I should take a look at the barn roof. Written in bricks of contrasting colour was the phrase “No EU” in large, bold letters “so that even the satellites can spot it”, he informed me. During the course of my field work in this idyllic corner of Finland there was frequent mention of the satellites, the watchful eye in the sky, and also numerous occasions when the deeply engrained work ethic of these village people together with their emotional bond to the land was presented to me.

Already on the first evening of my stay Arja suggested we take a walk with the dogs so she can show me “the local sights”. She said we would wander every evening so that I would eventually become familiar with the village and its surroundings. She faithfully kept her promise, and as the days grew warmer, unfreezing the mud and gravel roads which crisscross the forest, she guided me, accompanied by local stories, through the landscape. We traversed the boulders that had been a stone quarry where “stone cutter Kalle” spent many years of his life carving his way through the granite. His little cottage still stands below the chiselled rock face surrounded by a small kitchen garden and lush berry bushes.

She took me to the view-point hill and pointed out the spires of three churches and the spectacular archipelago stretching out below us dotted with sailboats and islands populated by deep green fir trees.

We walked through their forests, where she pointed out good berry and mushroom picking spots, patches where aromatic marsh flowers grow in the early summer, as well as the boundaries separating their land from the neighbour's. She said that later on in the summer we would take the horses to a forest pasture with a natural spring. Tall swaying grass grows there, which keeps them healthy and tranquil throughout the summer months. She told me of the tragic loss of their beach front cottage because they had needed money to pay a lawyer to defend them in a bitter inheritance conflict and of the relatives who build and rebuild boat sheds, saunas and garages. The area is packed full of cottages, many belonging to relatives of the present inhabitants of the village, but some owned by city dwellers in search of rural peace and harmony. We passed the house of the local sporting association built with materials donated by community members and constructed with voluntary work contributed in true *talkoo* work spirit. Throughout our wanderings in this beautiful landscape she recounted to me who owns each field, every stretch of forest, drawing me a symbolic map of ownership patterns, social relations and core values of the place which is her home. There is a bouquet of smells that have etched themselves as olfactory maps in my mind: sun-roasted gravel road and heather, the freshness of blueberry bushes, the earthy aroma of newly ploughed fields, the musty smell of the dung pile settling by the stable, the dizzying sweetness of honeysuckle by the rug washing table behind the barn, tangy sea breeze, pork chops fried for lunch.

The location and layout of the village is significant and it has profoundly influenced local history and social bonds between people. Situated on a narrow peninsula it is flanked by sea on both sides. The village itself is close to one of the by-roads leading off the island via a small ferry. It is a so called row village, few of which remain in the country and also in the local area itself. The houses are of wood, long and two storied, often with two entrances, surrounded by flourishing gardens bursting with flowers, berry bushes and fruit trees. A village "high street" runs through it separating the barns from the dwelling houses with the fields of each landowning family stretching out below it. The proximity of the houses gives each villager a perfect vantage point from which to follow the mundane, everyday actions of the neighbours. It inspires in them both a sense of security and of being captured in the inspective gaze of their peers. In the summer vivid, green grass and golden wheat stalks billow in the wind. Every morning Arja stood gazing out from her kitchen window, through the back garden into these fields. She spotted birds, deer and moose. She commented on what the neighbours' are doing on their fields and on the signs of the changing seasons. On occasion we saw the horses galloping by the window and knew that

they had, once again, broken through the pasture fence. They had headed off on an excursion into the neighbour's commercial garden to munch on rare species of sun flowers and exotic salad greens, destroying a garden much appreciated by the bus loads of pensioners visiting the barn café at the height of the growing season. The rogue animals of my host family were known all over the village. Few had been able to escape the pleading gazes of the burly, brandy coloured dog begging by their gate or the piercing shrieks of the black mini-pig that had a tendency to yank itself free from the leash when it was being led into its summer pen in the spring. Villagers saw us chasing ponies, horses; the pig and me on a bicycle with a sausage in my hand speeding off after the dog down the main road. The house of Rainer and Arja welcomes stray and estranged people, weary travellers and wayward children that love to swing from the enormous oak tree that spreads a soothing shadow over the garden in the sweltering days of July. They knew that inside there would be a table laden with juice, cookies and sweet bread and that this was a place they could call their second home. I readily identified with and was proud of, the anti-hero but warm-hearted image that the family and all its human and animal members represented. If any bad word was ever uttered of them I would staunchly defend their honour, generosity and hospitality.

In the cosy farm house kitchen of my village home and during the many walks we had with the dogs I heard stories of the strange and wonderful characters that lived in Norrås, this village that was by outsiders defined as a quarrelsome place. Nonetheless, I truly felt this was a special place, but, then again it was the only village I became closely associated with on Koppars. Not far from my house, couched in a garden overrun by wilderness was a house, locally known as the house of Ivanov. It was built by a travelling Russian salesman who was a master carpenter, which explains the intricate wooden designs used to decorate it. According to rumour it was originally built for Xenia, the mistress of one of the big farmers in the village. It was later bought by two eccentric sisters, Anna and Silvi Söderman, who made it into a multi-purpose establishment housing the village telephone exchange, a barber's shop, a fish shop, a public sauna and an illegal liquor store. There was even said to be a secret, hidden room in the house used as a clandestine bar. Barber sessions would take place in the kitchen where a whole wall was filled with cuckoo clocks emitting a deafening sound should one be there on the hour. Boys who came for a haircut were seated on chairs along one wall of the kitchen with a chair placed in the middle for the boy who was next in line. Silvi and Anna would each sit at some distance facing the boy to keenly observe the procedure. The house was filled with cats and one in particular, Mirri, had been taught to drink milk from a cup with his paw. At the time of payment the barber's fee would be added to a wad of notes that Silvi kept in her pocket and she

would proudly exclaim “in this house we lack nothing!” Next door lived Oleg, a Russian man believed to have escaped from a circus. He had a habit of doing somersaults on the village road in his riding boots and baggy trousers, a knife hanging from his belt. In the winter he would ride his kick sleigh all the way to a town some 40 km away, keeping up such a high speed on the sanded road that sparks flew from the runners. There was also talk of the village idiot Hentonen and Leena Koivunen, said to be raving mad and the mother of a mentally disabled illegitimate child.

It is here in this picturesque place that I came to understand what the land, the home, a farm means to those who live in it and from it, a familiar and safe place, a container of memories and desires, hopes for the future, a stage on which the performance of work and the everyday is acted out. It is through their work that farmers communicate a sense of endurance so typical of rural people, a kind of tolerance that keeps them going even in a situation where the future looks uncertain. Through the calluses in my hands, my own bodily labour I placed myself on this same land and in the lives of these people. By working the landscape with farmers I came to understand the central symbols of farming life and the impetus that keeps these people going although outside forces are reducing their living space, both symbolically and literally. I slowly become aware of the minutiae of farming tasks that produce a morally acceptable home and the amount of sheer physical work involved. Before me unfolded a story of uncertainty, sacrifice and survival – a deep-seated emotional engagement with the land and with life.

CHANGE IN A RURAL SETTING

My original idea when entering the field in 2002 was to look at how farmers in a village on an island – here called Koppars – in south western Finland dealt with social and cultural change. Based on stories featured in the media about farms and farming in decline, the need for modernisation and expansion in the sector, and the changes that have occurred since we joined the European Union seven years earlier – a move that farmers had reluctantly accepted because they were left no other choice – I assumed that membership had also affected farmers on Koppars. Grand promises had been made at the time of the referendum that a severance package would be offered to farmers and that the subsidy policies would change gradually so the transition from national level support frameworks to European Union level ones would be smooth. These promises were soon forgotten when the ballots had been counted and the victory for those who voted for membership was clear. Prices of agricultural goods crashed and subsidies were smaller than promised. Farmers were in for a struggle, but one they entered with dignity. Although the politico-economic

changes that resulted from European Union membership were not the sole factors affecting change they were there in a train of political events that have impacted on the working conditions on farms in Finland. Change has always been a feature of farming, like so many other professions, but the nature of change has differed in terms of political and moral implications. European Union membership just served as a concrete focal point around which to discuss issues of change while in the field.

Although the title of this thesis suggests that this is a study of the meanings of uncertainty among farmers, I approached the field with a general enquiry about working conditions and the nature of farming life. At the same time this study forms part of a broader research project, “Expressions of Suffering. Ethnographies of Illness Experiences in Contemporary Finnish Contexts” and within the framework of it we were interested in exploring the cultural differences that exists within the country and particularly those existing between the east and the west of Finland. I asked people about their life histories, the meaning of the home, work, social solidarity and social interaction, notions of illness and well-being. I was primarily interested in finding out how people experience social change and what they do to deal with the issue of it. What is interesting from an anthropological point of view is how individuals communicate experiences of social change, both good and bad – on the one hand there is talk of the good life, hope and belief in the future and on the other hand misfortune and suffering. Change brings about uncertainty. So, I ask, how do people deal with this situation and how do they communicate experiences of social change?

STUDYING SOCIAL CHANGE IN MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Within the field of medical anthropology change has been studied through “lived experiences” (Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1998), expressions or idioms of distress and through narratives taking place in an inter-subjective space that reveals the inherently interactive nature of the agency of human subjects. Disruptions in the life course, be it through a change in circumstances, loss, tragedy, death or illness always require a response from the affected individuals and the social environment. Misfortune demands a social answer, one that is negotiated between competing interests and actors.

Suffering and uncertainty

In discussions within medical anthropology, suffering is considered a social response to a particular situation in life. Every culture devises its own manner of expressing suffering and the feelings that are connected to it. The ontological

consequences of suffering are that it demands an instrumental and social response. In bodily terms it means discomfort, dissatisfaction, anguish, and an unwanted state of being. Suffering is somehow an inevitable part of life and if we cannot avoid it then we learn to live with it. What is interesting about suffering, as I venture to understand it, is that it is both a consequence of the changes that have recently happened in the farming sector, but also an answer to the situation at hand. Farmers are hindered from going about business as usual, so they devise ways to handle the changing circumstances they are facing. It is not a drastic process, but one that moulds itself according to the rhythm of life.

Much of suffering is communicated through illness (suffering expressed in symbolic terms), but in my material it is communicated also through perceptions of illness, namely cancer perceptions. They become a locally accepted way of expressing distress. Mental distress that is not verbally communicated can be made visible through subtle means like gestures and actions, a common symbolic language. The action of working the land is both an explanation of suffering and a way of dealing with it. Descriptions of cancer causes are based on farmers' position in society and the ideologies that support this position. It is the experiences of everyday life that form the basis of farmers' suffering. Their perceptions of cancer, I posit, mirror their social relations, unresolved conflicts and their moral perceptions of what a good life and a good person is. There is ambivalence in their life because the politico-economic situation in Finland, the fact that we are members of the European Union, makes them dependent on the government. They wish they could have the freedom to produce the way they feel is the best way to produce, according to "good farming practice" without being subject to a control system that judges and controls how they work and what their home looks like. There are implicit moral codes that state that farming should be a free profession and one should be able to earn one's living from it. For the government and the EU the moral code is to follow the set regulations and to control agricultural production in terms of quantity and environmental compatibility on an EU wide scale. There are contradictions between what farmers think life should be like and what life in reality is like – they are captive in the circumstances of their lives.

Throughout the ages people have learned to deal with distressful situations in life and have devised ways of living through adversity. Diverse groups have used divinatory practices, reconstructing past events and uncovering future ones, in order to assign moral responsibility and determine suitable, mitigating action. The tradition of studying suffering has roots older than those found within the sub-discipline of medical anthropology. It can be traced back to the study of magic, religion and ritual – the manners in which people deal with the issue of misfortune in life, like the Azande, studied by Evans-Pritchard

(1937), employing divination and rituals as a means of intervention. The issue of ontological security is, according to Anthony Giddens (1990), present in all societies. People have throughout time tried to make sense of the unexpected. Today talk of misfortune has been replaced with a discourse on risk (Beck 1992; Douglas & Wildavsky 1982) that points to the moral and political character of it and how it is influenced by socially embedded values and beliefs. According to medical anthropologist Deborah Lupton (1999), the notion of risk “has come to stand as one of the focal points of feelings of fear, anxiety and uncertainty”, feelings which have been intensified by a general “mood of malaise and disorientation, a sense that we are living in a time of ending and major disruptive social change” (Ibid: 12). Risk features in a vast range of different fields of research and most approaches discuss risk in relation to notions of danger, trust, fear, safety, responsibility, management, etc. In most of these studies risk has been ascribed with crisis-producing, normatively negative qualities. When the idea of danger or risk is removed from the divine or religious context it can more easily be connected with the moral approbation of individuals; that each one of us is responsible for the misfortune that befalls us. This is a discourse that stifles agency, neutralises and reduces human experience of suffering to a realm that lies outside of political economy, structural inequalities and the overall precariousness and unpredictability of life. It makes people, not systems, responsible for states of affliction. It ignores the innovative potential of individual actors.

In this thesis I have taken a closer look at the cultural and social nature of distress and suffering resulting from the uncertainty of life among farmers in south west Finland. In contemporary society, even in the welfare states of the industrial societies, increasing numbers of individuals are faced with conjunctures in life that create insecurity, a sense of losing one’s foothold in life. In the lifeworld of farmers this “something”, a foreign element, is threatening the moral core of farming life; the nuclear family, the continuation of the ancestral home/farm, a reciprocal relationship to nature. The impending loss of the farm means losing everything: your identity, continuity, your future and the meaning of the good life. Not knowing the future causes distress, which is expressed locally as worry, anxiety, sorrow and silent endurance. In this thesis I, thus, see the term “uncertainty” as an extension of suffering, an existential state that can bring about suffering. The EU comes to represent metaphorically the foreign or “other” that has entered the intimacy of farmers’ social world. This “other” could have been another foreign influence in another historical era, like a general fear of the eastern neighbour Russia, but in 2002 its main guise was the EU. Although today it is the European Union that has come to represent this “something”, which is alien or “other”, it is but one in many setbacks that farmers have had to face. Throughout the ages they have been socialised into

enduring difficulties and challenging life situations like the unpredictability of the weather, the hard work and the moral imperative to feed the nation.

I primarily want to distance myself here from the discourse on risk, mentioned above, that has been dominating much of contemporary research in medical anthropology, and the social sciences in general. And although I use suffering as a kind of notion from which to start my exploration, my aim is to investigate the applicability of this term in the light of the empirical material collected during my field work and to see how it can be extended into other kindred terms. I focus on the more subjective, dynamic term “uncertainty”, which I use to denote an overall sense of the chanciness of life, often also employing it synonymously with the term “*contingency*”, in other words “the condition of something being liable to happen or not in the future; uncertainty of occurrence or incidence” (Oxford English Dictionary 1989: 825).

Communicating illness

Expressions of distress, I posit, are a product of a complicated interplay of individuals’ choices within structural conditions. Following Whyte (1997: 23) and Honkasalo (2003) I view idioms of distress as guides to action and I understand them as being culturally and socially constructed ways of expressing, explaining and identifying discomfort or anxiety, a way of understanding and being in the world (Nichter 1981; Parsons 1984; Parsons & Wakely 1991; Honkasalo, Utriainen & Leppo 2004). Distress idioms convey meaning, and meaning, in turn, is revised through practice in a constructive, reciprocal dialogue. They are a way for individuals to communicate the meaning of ‘being-in-the-world’ (Jackson 1989) and, as such, they should be seen as a moral statement.

Part of this felt distress is expressed locally in the form of talk about high cancer prevalence in the field research area. When talking to people in the field I started repeatedly hearing the phrase that “there is a lot of cancer here”. It could happen during informal discussions or during life history interviews, specifically when health issues or death were discussed. This was not substantiated by actual cancer statistics – there is not more cancer in the south west than elsewhere in Finland (Finnish Cancer Registry 2003). What interested me was what this cancer talk meant and upon closer inspection, the way cancer was spoken of through the means of metaphors revealed cultural meanings tied to the farming life. This “cancer talk” was replete with metaphors of the “it” of cancer, its actions, its personality and its intentions. There were other idioms too, talk of illnesses and distressful states like fibromyalgia, diabetes, heart disease, suicide and weak nerves and, in a number of cases, these discussions were linked to a mention of cancer.

Difficult conjunctures in life can leave us at a loss for words, making speakers conceal the source of distress that makes life hard. This is when metaphors become useful “tools to think with” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980) which both conceal and reveal what is “at stake”. Metaphors make it easier for individuals to talk about illness experiences. They serve the strategic purpose of making it possible to deal with situations by objectifying and making concrete diffuse subjective experience (Fernandez 1986: 8). Metaphors can assist us in making the experience of distress palpable, making it accessible to communication. Kirmayer (1992: 325) talks of how metaphors are bodily and socially grounded and how “the body’s influence on thought is more presentation than representation, given in substance and action rather than in imagination and reflection.” The agency, cast in a symbolic and inter-subjective mode, i.e. how it is revealed in cancer metaphors, is at the same time a reflection on agency in everyday life situations. The symbolic and metaphoric action of cancer, thus, becomes a vehicle to make sense of what happens in life.

Communication of illness experiences through narrative discourse serves to bring persons, and their illness experiences, rather than pathologies into focus. Cheryl Mattingly and Linda Garro (2000), who have analysed stories of illness and healing, remind us that when faced with uncertainty, individuals tell a story through their own enactment, through a performance of the known and the familiar. Narrative here has a phenomenological and situational perspective, a performance-centered approach. Illness narratives emerge not only through discourse on a verbal level, but also through action as a way of socially constructing reality and meaning (Ibid: 186–187). Stories are often about life on the breach, events that involve risk, chance and danger (Ibid: 189). Discourse in the form of talk and action can act as a kind of guide that leads us through times of change and disruption in life, becoming, like metaphors, tools to think with, helping us order experience and construct reality. What I am primarily interested in is not the disease of cancer, but what people on Koppars think of it, how they analyse it and how it can be understood as a representation of what happens between people and society. Although I look at “cancer talk” I am not primarily interested in discourse analysis as such. The reason why I mention talk is that felt uncertainty was partially expressed in the form of talk about what causes cancer and perceptions about there being a high prevalence of cancer. Also, it is specifically the combination of talk with action that interests me. It is not primarily a question of what words mean, but what people do in using them. Unni Wikan (1993: 193) expresses the essence of how words can be understood in the analysis of social action. Her position is that “It may be necessary – compellingly necessary for our purposes – to go beyond; and to transcend the words, we need to attend to the speaker’s intention, and the social position they emanate from, to judge correctly what they are doing.”

PLACING THE STUDY

Placing my study in a rural village on an island in western Finland was motivated by several factors. Firstly, I wanted to describe the lives of farmers in a particular location at the border of the country because in the era of globalisation even their lives are touched by forces beyond the purely local or even national (see Hannerz 1992 & 1996; Appadurai 1996). Village studies have been the traditional gambit of anthropological studies and for long there has been an idea that life is somehow un-changing or less changing in the rural areas, as if there was such a slow pace of life that not even the forces of neo-liberalism and aggressive market reforms would impact on the lives of farmers. In the global era the outside world has truly entered rural villages on many levels and this is a reality I wanted to depict through my research.

Secondly, islands are special places; self-contained units bordered by the sea which represents adventure, foreign lands, the bringing of tidings from far away places. Also a village is a self-contained social unit built on social relations of mutual dependence. Several cultures within cultures and sub-categories of people can be identified, as well as a specific history tied to the particular geographic features of the natural environment and the social relations between the inhabitants, so that an intricate web of connections is laid out to the outside observer, one that becomes visible only after a sustained presence in the area. And, additionally, the self-contained nature of island life provides a specific backdrop for anthropological fieldwork giving the anthropologist a clearer sense of entering the field when one has to take a ferry to get there.

Thirdly, the geographic location of western Finland was also tied to a desire to highlight the issue of cultural difference within Finland, comparing a village in the west with one in the east through the research project of Docent Marja-Liisa Honkasalo on perceptions of heart disease and symbolic meanings of the heart in a village in North Karelia.¹ In a national context North Karelia is a region that differs in significant ways from the western parts of the country. It has been a typical “development area” being profoundly affected by economic power relations and the political history of Finland. War, separation and abandonment have been salient features of the area because of its location in the border zone. It has for hundreds of years suffered from the governmental

¹ Doc. Marja-Liisa Honkasalo research is also part of the project “Expressions of Suffering. Ethnographies of Illness Experiences in Contemporary Finnish Contexts” at the Department of Social and cultural anthropology, University of Helsinki which published the anthology “*Arki Satuttaa - kärsimyksiä suomalaisessa nykyluultuurissa*” (Honkasalo, Utriainen & Leppo 2004).

² In 1809 Finland, then a Swedish province was ceded to Russia, until Finland gained independence in 1917. Before 1809 it had been a Swedish colony for around 500 years.

policies of two great powers – Russia and Sweden – who have fought wars over the territory of Finland since the 14th century.² During the winter and continuation wars many able men from the local area were lost as was land – the local population has been evacuated twice during the war years. The memory of these losses and the grief felt over them still live vividly in the minds of people who inhabit the area. There has been a gradual emptying of villages since the 1960's due to the lack of livelihoods and resources (Honkasalo 2003a) Signs of the marginalisation of these villages are visible when one drives in the area – there are many abandoned farm houses that have been empty for decades already. More material poverty and unemployment is found in North Karelia and also health-wise its population has had higher morbidity and mortality rates from various illnesses, notably heart diseases and depression, but also violent death. People die earlier in North Karelia than in other parts of the country (see e.g. Turpeinen 1986 and Kannisto 1947). There is a theory on the “eastern excess in mortality” which outlines that the incidence of cardiovascular diseases, depression and suicide decreases as one proceeds from the east to the west in Finland (Koskinen 1994). Forced conversion between Lutheranism and Orthodox religion has also taken a toll on the North Karelian people in the course of history, depending on which of the two great powers was in charge (Björn 1993; Hämynen 1993). In Finland around 1% of the total population are Greek orthodox, but in eastern Finland in the area where Marja-Liisa Honkasalo conducted her research it was 17% (Honkasalo 2007).

The south west is a contrasting example, not only in terms of material wealth of farmers, but also in terms of the permanency of its population and a history that “leans to the west”; to a continuity with a historical past shared with our western neighbour Sweden. Already in the 12th century they colonised Finland, bringing first Roman Catholicism and later, in the 16th century, Lutheranism. The area has historically been characterised by permanence and many families have owned their farms since the 15th or 16th century. Although people did migrate out of this area in the 1960's the scale of it was much smaller than in North Karelia.³ Nor has the war had any direct effect on the south west in the sense of it being actively present in ones “backyard”. There was one raid by the Russians on a light house beyond the southern tip of Koppars and scattered bombs were dropped. Families did, of course, loose men at the front, like everywhere in Finland. The southwest has always been a growth area with large, estate like farms, ideal climatic conditions for farming and small scale industries. Many cities are within an hour or a few hours drive from Koppars, including the capital Helsinki. The health status of coastal inhabitants also indicates significant differences compared with that of the eastern parts of

³ Electricity came to some villages in the area of Marja-Liisa Honkasalo's study first in the 1960's (Honkasalo 2003a) compared to the villages on Koppars where electrification started in the late 1930's.

the country. Scientific research on the longevity, happiness and healthiness of the lives of coastal inhabitants of Ostrobothnia, where the majority of the population are Swedish-speakers just like on Koppars, has been an issue of debate in both popular and scientific literature in recent years through the work of medical doctors Markku Hyyppä and Juhani Mäki (Hyyppä & Mäki 1997; Hyyppä & Mäki 2000; Hyyppä 1990; Hyyppä 1995). They introduced the hypothesis that a possible explanation for these different health and mortality statistics was the fact that the coastal inhabitants of Ostrobothnia have more social capital. Concretely this meant participation in choir groups, voluntary associations, membership in religious communities and having many close friends. These striking research results made me wonder if this was a reality found in other Swedish-speaking areas of the country and also to ponder what social and cultural background factors can be used to explain the meaning of “good health” among coastal inhabitants.

AIMS

One of my aims with this thesis is to attempt to describe the *lived quality of uncertainty* and what this means to people within the context of their lives. It is a study of social change where both the good and bad effects of a felt uncertainty in life are taken into account. On the one hand I look at what I call suffering, as expressed through bodily idioms and illness narratives, and on the other hand at how hope and luck is expressed in discourse and action. With this my aim has been to bring issues of health and illness out of the hospital setting into the world of everyday, community life. Illness perceptions as a subject of study have been investigated in many different geographical contexts within medical anthropology, as well as the issue of how individuals deal with illness. In Finland there have as yet been only one other anthropological study combining the community approach in a rural setting with that of perceptions of distress and illness, namely that of Marja-Liisa Honkasalo (2003 & 2006). The second aim has been to look at *how a rural village is touched by global structures* where the EU as a vehicle of change becomes a term employed by farmers for the threat of the foreign, of globalisation, the new historically constructed enemy. My third aim is to investigate how *farmers deal with social change* and which strategies and actions they employ to come to terms with change.

There is an underlying assumption in Finland about cultural uniformity and the stereotypical images arising of contemporary Finns is that of the urban dweller. Somewhere, obscured in the background, is the image of the rural areas populated by farmers and others. My hope is that this thesis can contribute to balancing out this skewed picture of “the typical Finn” and to focusing on what life is really like in the rural areas and why it is becoming increasingly difficult

to survive in farming, a profession with age old roots globally. I also hope to draw a picture, albeit locally specific, of what are the matters that are “at stake” in the local moral world that Koppars dwellers, predominantly farmers, inhabit. The issues should not only be studied through experience and descriptions of these experiences, but also through an investigation into what people *do*, how they emerge as creative actors in this particular local moral world.



The anthropologist's room - fit for a genuine horse girl.

2. DOING ETHNOGRAPHY

In the early evening I go to the municipal beach where the village action committee is building changing rooms with *talkoo* work. I have baked some cinnamon buns and packed a thermos of coffee in a basket. When I am about to leave the house two of the dogs squeeze their way through the gate and set off towards the forest at breakneck speed. This happens often, almost daily, but the problem this time is that one of the dogs is my tutor's dog, Peppi, that I am dog sitting for a month and she is not familiar with the forest. I hope and assume that the house dog Repe will guide her home. I tell Arja what has happened and we agree that the most sensible thing to do is let them run because when they are exhausted and hungry enough they will come home. When I get to the beach the small building site is teeming with men from Norrås and adjacent villages carrying materials, setting planks on each other and nailing them together. I offer to help, but feel rather superfluous because there are so many skilled builders there and it is obvious that this is a man's job. The men are competing with each other in terms of how fast they can build the small cottage. Antti offers me a beer and there is a general note of bustle and positive energy in the air. When I return to the house Christian has arrived to help Rainer shoe the horses. Rainer immediately calls out to me that "your dog has run away and what a way to carry on having old women [meaning Arja] out looking for it in the forest." I don't reply and just retire into the house where I plan to start making berry juice. In the kitchen I feel an enormous rage welling up inside me, a rage larger than I have ever felt before in my life. My heart is pounding and I am almost blinded by the thought of the unjust accusations that have been hurled at me, publicly, on top of it all. I stomp out of the house, through the gate and into the yard where Christian and Rainer are just completing their work with one of the horses. I scream at Rainer with all the might I can muster up that he is behaving like a shit and that I do not need to accept that kind of behaviour from anyone, that he should apologise and that he has no idea what Arja and I have discussed. I scream so loud that the whole village, without doubt, hears and before he has any opportunity to

react to my verbal lashings I speed off on my bicycle to look for the dogs. When I cycle along the road still shaking from my emotional outburst I call Arja and tell her what has happened. She calmly replies “Good. One should let the anger come out. It is good for him to hear what you think.” I cycle to the summer cottage area and by Riitta’s cottage I spot Repe and soon also Peppi emerges from the garden, worms her way under the gate and willingly follows me home. I call Teemu, my partner, in the evening and tell him of my attack and he expels a worried sigh over the fact that I have not been able to contain myself within the neutral researcher role. I count the days I have left to stay in the village and sincerely hope it is over soon. My sole solace is to have the two worn fugitives sleeping peacefully on the rug by my bed.

(Field diary, July 2003)

Many are the tribulations that researchers have to live through while in the field and fieldwork is a special trade in the guild of scientific work because of the emphasis on direct human contact, subjective understanding of other’s motives and wants and broad participation in daily affairs. When the anthropologist becomes deeply immersed in the lives of others she can meet with conflicts and clashing interests, but also these bad moments tell us vital things about the people whose lives we share while in the field. This particular incident illustrated in a dramatic way what my relationship was like with the master of the house. It was an isolated incident and my frustration over his “*macho*” ways were often contained and usually I ceded to the traditional role of farmhouse women of his generation, serving the needs of the man. Above all, dramatic emotional clashes and confrontations in the field, in spite of their loaded circumstances, tell us something about gender relations, family dynamics, the division of labour and the various roles that people take within a social setting. They are as much part of fieldwork as the less dramatic moments of everyday life and in my case I felt it cleared the air between me and Rainer and, in hindsight, actually enriched our relationship. It is not wise, nor desirable to hide one’s emotions, one’s humanity, because the need to stake out boundaries for appropriate behaviour is just as relevant in the field as at other times in life.

THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AS RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Ethnographic research is particular due to its method by which the collection of empirical data is not about a laboratory setting or the use of special high-tech equipment – in ethnography the main instrument used to measure the empirical data is the researcher herself with all her personal experiences, history, feelings, thoughts and opinions about the life she sets out to study (Fetterman 1989: 41). It is a job, par excellence, where there are no boundaries between work and

home. When you are in the field you are always at work, or, rather it means adopting a new way of living because: “Long-term immersion through fieldwork is generally a total experience, demanding all of the anthropologist’s resources; intellectual, physical, emotional, political and intuitive” (Okely 1992). And basically, no anthropologist arrives in the field as a *tabula rasa*. Being in the field is acquiring a certain state of mind (Geertz 1973) and a sense of prescriptive do’s and don’ts, a kind of process that is integral to the performance of the embodied schemata of the *habitus*. Fieldwork then can be viewed as both a state of mind and a state of body where the anthropologist as agent acts with a sense of placement in pursuing interests (Lau 2004). What then is the ethnographic endeavour in a nutshell? I borrow Fetterman’s (1989: 11) words: “Ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture [– –] The ethnographer writes about the routine, daily lives of people”. Its purpose is to understand and describe the insider or *emic* perspective and “the ethnographer is both storyteller and scientist; the closer the reader of an ethnography comes to understanding the native’s point of view, the better the story and the better the science” (Ibid: 12). In doing ethnography we can come to know the world through our informants by living that world with them. In this inter-subjective sense we are creating meanings with them. Understanding social experiences is a process of becoming, of moving into understanding and awareness for both the informants whose lives we share and for ourselves as anthropologists and human beings. Being open to learning in this manner makes it possible for us to find the *emic* point of view through everyday practice which enables us to understand the culturally specific nature of suffering and uncertainty and how they are dealt with in a quotidian world. With *emic* I here mean it as something created intersubjectively, of meanings constructed in unison with our informants. Sharing everyday life with the farmers of Koppars meant coming to know the problems they are facing presently and tuning myself in to the distress they are experiencing. In that way we came to have a shared present and a shared cultural understanding of what this affliction means.

I also subscribe to an ethnographic process of deep contextualisation, something Geertz has called “thick description” (1973: 6–10) where the objects of ethnography are produced, perceived and interpreted according to a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures. I am also here concerned with an ethnography of the particular or of locality, looking at how people experience and express their difference from others and how it informs the process and social organisation in this particular locale. This means that we as ethnographers, “should begin to make the cultures we study intelligible to ourselves through the terms in which they are meaningful to their members, rather than by attempting to isolate their putatively ‘objective’ manifestations” (Cohen 1982: 3). The main quest of fieldwork is to achieve the ability to possess

concepts of culture in the experiential worlds of selves and in finding evidence for our theories through resonance between our own and their experiences⁴. It is also about finding out what is at stake for particular people in particular local contexts by interpreting the logic of practice they follow. But to understand one must cut oneself loose. When we move from knowing a shared social reality to understanding it we are dealing with a transformation of largely implicit local knowledge into an external, explicit understanding of reality which includes and transforms local knowledge (Okely 1994: 56).

Fieldwork is intimately intertwined with our research subject because the fieldwork experience shapes the themes we later treat in our monographs and this, in turn, is shaped by how people in the community of my study perceive me and what I feel comfortable with in my relations with them. This is why it is necessary to outline the experiences that have shaped my life and the various roles and relations I had in the field (see also Abu-Lughod 1988). This said, it is necessary to give a brief picture of who this research instrument is in order to understand how my background may have impacted on my approach to the data I collected in the field. From an early age I have been socialised to adapt to vastly different environments, people and cultural customs as the child of a diplomat. At the same time the preserving and fostering of Finnish identity and traditions was important in my family – this was, after all, partially the tool of my father’s trade. Traditions such as Christmas, midsummer and the national day were part of the cultural calendar of my family and the special props needed for these occasions were transported from country to country such as particular foods, drinks, decorations and songs. Both my parents came from predominantly Swedish-speaking family backgrounds and Swedish is my maternal tongue. Around the age of ten my parents had private tutors teach me and my sister Finnish language, and Nordic history. My father was fluent in both languages – a requirement of his job and a result of having a bi-lingual mother and growing up in a bi-lingual area in Helsinki. Because I have not grown up in a typical Swedish-speaking environment I have always had a positive attitude towards learning Finnish, which was something I engaged in on a day-to-day basis first around the age of 30. I was also not socialised into what in colloquial terms is called the “duck pond” of Swedish-speakers who socialise with each other, go to the same schools and universities and generally uphold “old-boy networks”.

The roots of both my mother’s and father’s family are urban and we have not had any relatives who are farmers. Stories of the countryside were told to me by my mother who spent her summers between the ages of 9–11 on the dairy farms of Finnish-speaking farmers. It was a common practice among Swedish-speaking families to send their children to the so called “Finn pasture”, which

⁴ Okely (1994) elevates Unni Wikan’s (1992) concept of resonance to an epistemological level.

meant submerging the child in an environment where no other language than Finnish was spoken. From these summers she has told me about riding bareback on the Finnhorse Jalo, making hay, weeding the strawberry fields, collecting moss, cooking, fishing, cleaning the barn. In her youth it was common that one was engaged in manual labour, working in the family vegetable patch or having a summer job. It was shameful not to work and it was part and parcel of the idea of summer. The early 1950's was a time of scarcity and rationing of food stuffs. Spending summers in the countryside meant a relative abundance of food like butter, milk, cream, fresh vegetables. The image of farmers and farming life that she conveyed to me was a very positive one and she had a deeply engrained respect for farmers and for the value of manual labour and the food they produced. The value of good home cooking and the staple fare of Finnish everyday eating habits were taught to me by my mother, giving me a positive attitude towards these basic foods.

Anthropology, combined with development studies was a natural choice of study for me due to my interest in and familiarity with diverse cultures and countries. A curiosity and respect for cultural traditions other than those of my home country was inculcated in me by my parents who with enthusiasm embraced the cultural traditions of the countries we lived in. As an adult I worked as a volunteer for four years in development work in Bangladesh. It was there that I was concretely touched by suffering as a part of daily existence, of the masses of landless rural labourers and urban slum dwellers who struggled with meagre earnings at the bottom of the social ladder. The situations of extreme exploitation and blatant use of violence and power in subjugating the rural poor were at times hard to swallow. At the same time I was annoyed at the way the concepts of poverty and "poor people" were presented. "The poor" were bunched together like a passive mass, meekly accepting their lot in life, incapable of implementing change in their own lives, when in reality there was a lot of action taking place on the micro-level of social life. People were surviving and they used innovative ways of staying alive. These stories were much too seldom told or lauded.

I strongly felt that an important step in the emancipatory struggle for rights and justice was collecting information about the everyday life of people who suffer and attempting to present their voice to those who make decisions that impact on their lives. Working for a health organisation in Bangladesh put me in touch with the issue of HIV/AIDS and how a lack of information on sexual behaviour hindered the design of appropriate intervention strategies. The experience influenced my choice of field site for my master's thesis – I studied the moral worlds of prostitutes and their clients in Managua, Nicaragua. Moral issues surrounding prostitution are tricky and as an anthropologist I strongly felt that my position was to describe a social world without judging people's

behaviour. Women sacrifice their lives to the profession and engage in it in spite of the risks and the shame. This fact in itself communicates something vital about human behaviour – the ability to endure hardship and to give it a purpose grounded in their experiences of everyday life. This aspect of human behaviour – why we keep at something which both causes us suffering and at the same time alleviates suffering, a kind of real dichotomy – is what continues to fascinate me. Describing the social reality in another country made me realise how little I knew about my own society and this was also a question posed to me by an Indian social scientist, Ritu Priya. She asked me why I should conduct PhD research on experiences of distress in Nicaragua if I am not acquainted with how people deal with distressful situations in life in Finland. At this point I realised that it was my own country that to me was the “familiar, yet strange” and the location I now needed to do research in. The exotic or the strange had been a part of my life since childhood. It was almost like second nature to me and adapting to a culture in a far away country was too easy for me. So easy that I opted out of, for example, doing research in Bangladesh – a country I felt I knew too well already. I switched my geographic focus from Nicaragua to rural Finland and farmers as a particular group of focus for my PhD research for the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Helsinki.

Then we come to the question of why medical anthropology? Throughout my years of working in development cooperation I always came up against the lack of being specialised in some area of anthropology and it was specialist knowledge that was sought by many agencies and organisations. They also wanted proof of field experience. The interest in the social and cultural aspects of medicine is related to working in the field of medicine; first as an orderly in a geriatric hospital while an undergraduate student in Sweden, then later working in Bangladesh for a local non-governmental organisation specialised in health information (Voluntary Health Services Society) and eventually doing my master’s level field research in a health organisation providing free medical services to female sex workers (Instituto Centroamericano de la Salud – ICAS) in Managua, Nicaragua . All these experiences communicated to me that our perceptions about health and illness and the behaviour that is born out of it are intimately linked to the social and cultural aspects of everyday life. Whether we are healthy or ill the preoccupation with the welfare of our bodies is a natural part of our lives. It is all around us. After completing my master’s thesis I was invited to join a research project, “Expressions of suffering – Ethnographies of Illness Experiences in Contemporary Finnish Contexts”, run by Docent Marja-Liisa Honkasalo at the University of Helsinki.

When I have explained the subject of my research to friends and acquaintances they think it is interesting and particularly the focus on Finland, but as a sideline some of them sometimes wondered why study something

so difficult and emotionally taxing? Talking to people about the difficult situations they have faced in life is, no doubt, heavy to take at times. On numerous occasions I cried during my interviews. Empathic identification with the plight of the informant in anthropological research has been beautifully described by Wikan (1990) as *resonance*, an emotive-cognitive capacity that allows ethnographers to understand other people, to make sense empathically. Because resonance is a vital aspect of social research, I feel, it gives research a political agenda, whether we want to take on this mantle or not. It can be argued that social research is always affected by values, and always has political consequences, and it means that ethnographic research should apply its findings to bring about change and not only understand and describe a particular social world (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 15). Additionally, my positioning as a native ethnographer illustrates the paradoxical in the participant-observer identity because, as DiGiacomo (1992: 130) has pointed out: “It is simply impossible to be both emotionally engaged *and* coolly dispassionate while doing research in one’s own society, and still be regarded as a plausible human being, though one might just get away with it in a society in which one is clearly an outsider.” (emphasis in original) How could I ignore the societal messages and ideological issues inherent in stories of struggle? By partaking in these people’s lives I become a participant in a political agenda because I place their concerns in the wider social and political arena of change and modernity. This is my conviction and my approach. I never hid my ideological convictions from my informants and I clearly communicated that I had not been in support of European Union membership, for example. As a matter of fact it was a way for me to build rapport with a group of people – farmers – who are suspicious of outsiders and particularly wary of investigators due to their experiences of being subject to inspection. I feel it is my responsibility to communicate the stories of my informants to a wider audience such as the media, if at all possible.

ENTERING FAMILY AND VILLAGE LIFE

When I was planning my research I was grappling with an essential problem – lack of funding. I was getting tired of waiting for a positive response from a funding agency and the spring would soon arrive so I felt I just had to get to the field at any cost. In the autumn I had spoken to Emil Lindman, a retired teacher and resident of Koppars about a suitable village to conduct my research in. He was not able to give me any definite recommendation, but gave me a general outline of what Koppars was like. I ended up calling the tourist information office and explained to the employee there that I was looking for a farm to work on and that the only skills I could offer was experience with horses. I had during my childhood been an avid rider for ten years and was a professed “horse

lover” and a general “animal lover”. She listed some options and provided me with telephone numbers. Later one of my close friends remembered that she knew a man who lived on Koppars and per chance it was in one of the villages where a small animal farm, mentioned by the tourist office, was located. I called him to get in touch with his wife who ran a café and often employed people over the summer months. Her employee quota was filled so she suggested I call Arja and ask her about the possibility of helping her out at the animal farm (no pun intended!). This is how I came to live in the house of Arja and Rainer in Norrås and to work with them in exchange for a “food salary”. I was fortunate because by sheer coincidence I ended up in the most socially active house in the village where social life was unpretentious and gossip flowed over cups of coffee and newly baked cinnamon rolls. It was known as a house where you could just drop by for a chat and a pot of coffee would be brewed.

I was, no doubt, a strange character to many at the beginning of my stay as I sped along the small village roads on my red Suzuki Love city moped in a red whole body ski suit from the 1970’s. People would recognise the moped because it belonged to a woman in the village who seldom needed to use it as she lived at walking distance from her job at the rehabilitation centre in Norrås. Moped riding is usually the gambit of those who do not have a driving license such as teenage boys and elderly people who cannot afford to own a car or never bothered to get a driving license. There was also a trend among men with *viidenkymppin villitys*, the craze of the 50’s (as in age) who had dug out the moped of their teenage years from the shed, repaired it and drove around in small gangs in the villages when they had a spare moment. Eventually people came to know who the new Suzuki Love owner was and they would extend me the typical greeting gesture from the tractor or car when passing me on the road. I was a bit weary of passing the municipal centre because of the density of police cars there at times. I had a homemade register plate on the moped because the owner had never had the time to pick up real plates at the car registry centre and pay her insurance. She said to me that if stopped by the police I should “tell Berra that its Virve’s moped and they will let you go”. I did not want to meddle too much in her business so I kept to side roads and kept my fingers crossed that a policeman would not cross my path. People became used to seeing me at public events, shopping for groceries with Arja and Rainer or attending various local events. The reason why I had come to Koppars was revealed and clarified through an article in the local paper about my research which facilitated the issue of access once I started looking for people to interview.

Rapport: Access through manual work

Opportunities to establish rapport may emerge in the everyday realities of doing fieldwork and this was an opportunity I seized already before entering

the field. Access to the field was, in my case, guaranteed by having access to work. Working with local people turned out to be an excellent vantage point for intensive observations. I cleaned stalls, fed animals, groomed horses, took little girls for pony rides, sheared sheep, built fences, washed rugs, picked potatoes, did gardening, housework, cooking, baking and juice making. The value of working while doing anthropological research in a rural setting in Finland is of particular importance due to the centrality of work as a core value. Being a hard-working individual is seen as a positive moral signifier and it also became one of the main focuses of my empirical material around which other local values were grouped. Working while doing fieldwork is not an uncommon practice among post-graduates who are under-funded, but the issue of work is rarely elaborated upon. What can actually be more problematic in many field work situations is the status of having no apparent job at all (Goward 1984: 113). Along with Kaul (2004) I find that employment in the field can be used in a productive way because it teaches you to mirror local behaviour, enabling you to engage in a kind of intensive form of participant observation and it places the anthropologist in clearly understood local roles. Living in the most central part of the village and not in a rented house or cottage signals a different kind of commitment to the place itself and to being in the middle of social life. This, I believe, gave me a higher status in the eyes of the locals as someone genuinely committed to understanding what life on a farm and in a village was like. It was not only an issue of working, but of working hard, of being out there at different times and in different weather conditions, side by side with my host family and often also alone, of course. I believe it was through my work related activities that I gained rapport with people in the village. It also gave me insight into the specific rituals involved in working such as having a coffee break, lunch or evening meal. It was during these times that other villagers would visit the house because they knew we would be at home. Meal rituals were tied to the planning and execution of a number of activities directly linked to eating like baking, retrieving potatoes from the fields or picking berries to make juice. It gave me a better understanding overall of how time is managed on a farm and how the division of labour works in practice. Employment is of course not the only way to gain information, but it is a different way and definitely a facilitating factor in the data collection process.

Life on a stage: the visibility of work

Much of the work I was involved in was in the stable and its immediate surroundings and as the stable was situated right on the village high street the work I did was very visible to anyone residing in or visiting the village. The location of the work, thus, placed me physically and metaphorically in the path of other villagers. It was also a good vantage point from which to observe the

interaction between people in the village; I could easily see and hear, because of the barking of the dogs, that someone was coming to our house or to visit the neighbours; when Reino, the only active full-time farmer in the village set out to his fields, and when the neighbour was organising a big party in her barn restaurant or an exhibition in the chicken coop, used as a gallery. It was a perfect position from which to engage in gossip as people would stop to talk to me. Visibly displaying the work that you do also has a moral twist to it – it signalled to others that one cares for the welfare of the home and the overall beautification of the immediate surroundings, which was a project that most villagers engaged in, the construction of a “we” feeling and, most notably the “we who live in the tidy village” feeling. By doing the same work as my host family I also acquired the label of a good person. It gave me a different feel for the place that involved all my senses; sight, hearing, smell, touch and it gave me a deeper understanding of the emotional attachment that people have to their home, the land, the farm.

Roles: “Adopted” daughter, wife’s accomplice, “horse girl”

During fieldwork we have both self-ascribed roles and roles that are chosen for us. Gender, age, ethnicity, religious upbringing, political views are all markers that are relevant when “our subjects” objectify us and place us in their categories. Skills and abilities that we already have from our general life experience are activated during fieldwork. Then there are the roles that are our own creation through the choices we make like where we live, friendships, and what kind of work we engage in, if any. My first and foremost role was that of being a “horse girl” who had come to the family to help them care for the animals and assist in the pony riding activities during the summer. This role was confirmed by the way my bedroom looked in the house. It was Arja’s daughter’s old room, wall to wall with Arja and Rainer’s bedroom in the middle of the house. It had pink wall paper with flowers in white and numerous paintings and drawings of horses. It did feel strange to return to a role that I had last had as a nine year old girl when I started spending my leisure time in stables, and even stranger since I at the time was a 33 year old woman.

I adopted the clothing style typical of the household, old trousers and shirts, rubber boots or clogs and no make-up. I even found a bag of clothes in the village rubbish bin that I took into use and nobody ever seemed to recognise the sweater I regularly wore that had been salvaged. When we went into the municipal centre or to a nearby town it was customary to make an effort with ones clothing, using better clothes and having a groomed appearance in general. I was also introduced to guests as “a researcher doing research on us farmers”, sometimes in conjunction with a mention of my “horse girl” status. The researcher role became more prominent after a story was featured in the

local paper and I was interviewed for the local radio station. My clothing (very casual) and the scarcity of scientific props perhaps confused people as to the validity of my researcher status, but they never questioned it outright. They would ask questions about how my work was funded, someone even asking if my father was paying for it and they asked me what would happen after I became a doctor. While working on a potato picking machine with two teenage boys, two middle aged men and a middle aged woman, I was jokingly nicknamed “the professor” by the boys.

What is distinct about the various roles I had in the field was that most of them had a clearly gendered character. I was a horse *girl*, a kind of an adopted *daughter* and confidante of Arja and mainly her, not Rainer’s co-worker. She was the person I spoke to when I contacted the family the first time. The first impression I got was that her work burden was larger than Rainer’s because she did all the domestic chores and the work outside. It was mainly her responsibility to care for the “small animals” like the sheep, rabbits, hens, pig, ducks, and ponies. He would only care for the horses and generally it meant taking them on training passes, feeding them, taking them to the pasture and sometimes cleaning their stalls. He also did the field and forestry work. Rainer did not like my handling the big horses maybe because he felt it was a man’s job or a job given only to someone he trusted was skilled enough in handling them, like Arja.⁵ It was also his chance to have his own special time with her. For part of my fieldwork period he worked as an agricultural labourer on a large farm in an adjacent village. What was the most difficult thing for me to accept was to come face to face with a Finnish “*macho*” man and because I was in such intimate contact with him on a daily basis, washing his dishes and clothes, sometimes making his food and cleaning his house I felt his behaviour and attitudes were more “*macho*” than those of the men I had come across in Nicaragua. When other men like agricultural entrepreneurs would come to work and have lunch with us Rainer’s manner became even more “*macho*”. He would brag and swear, make sexual insinuations and loudly exclaim that he did not eat salad because it was rabbit food and not fit for a man, also prodding his guests not to have any.

In most practical matters it was Arja who made the decisions, but at the time of the fieldwork she carried constant worry about the financial situation of the

⁵ In the traditional rural society a distinct feature was the sharp division of labour between men’s and women’s work. Women’s work tasks mainly belonged to the domestic sphere. They cared for children, cooking, making clothing and household textiles and kept kitchen gardens. Women were also in charge of milking and caring for cattle and other small animals like chicken and sheep. Men’s sphere of work was on the fields and in the forests and in caring for the working horses. Men would in general not lower themselves to doing women’s tasks, but the opposite was true of women. They would pride themselves in being able to do men’s work (see Frölander-Ulf 1989). After the Winter and Continuation wars, when farm labour became more scarce it became more common that men entered the barn to muck manure and distribute feed to the cattle (Östman 1998).

farm. A bitter inheritance conflict requiring the assistance of a very expensive lawyer had put them in debt. Arja is in a vulnerable position because she is not legally married to Rainer and has no share in the farm property. Her income consisted of what she earned on taking children on pony rides and renting out lodging to travellers in the summer. Many were the times we sat and pondered the dire state of affairs around the kitchen table in the evening when Rainer had gone to bed. I was the same age as her daughter Marjukka and perhaps Arja saw in me a kind of second daughter. She confided many intimate and personal details of her life to me in the evenings when we sat around the large kitchen table drinking tea and watching TV. There is no doubt that my presence in their family affected the dynamics between Arja and Rainer and Arja and her daughter Marjukka. The spring when I arrived in their house Arja was clearly worn out both physically and mentally, but she would not hand over work to me without working herself and she worked almost constantly. She did not want to seem lazy. Only on rare occasions would she take a nap instead of cleaning, cooking or doing some gardening. Although I tried to remain as neutral as possible my loyalties towards Arja were established already on the first evening of my stay and this was something Rainer was very well aware of.

COLLECTING DATA

My fieldwork was divided into two phases of eight (April–November) and four months (June–September) during the years 2002–2003. Data collection techniques were based on participant observation and interviewing. Observations were recorded in a field diary on a daily basis and a separate diary for the purposes of recording personal feelings and attitudes about the field work process. Field diary material resulted in some 200 pages of type-written material. My main focus group was farmers, either active full-time farmers, active part-time farmers or retired farmers, but I also spoke to people of a farming background who were not farmers themselves and individuals working in the health sector either for the municipal health services or as practitioners of complementary medicine (health centre doctor, a former midwife, a health educator, a physical therapist, a practitioner of alternative healing therapies). A total of 45 interviews were conducted with 55 informants participating altogether. Some informants were interviewed twice and on many occasions interviews were conducted with couples. Interviews lasted between two to four hours. Nearly all the interviews were transcribed with occasional sections left out if the information was of a more statistical or technical nature. In addition, information was derived from informal discussions that were recorded in the field diary. Clarifications and additional information was collected after the field work period was over by telephone or through brief visits to Koppars.

Starting out

It was with partial trepidation that I left for my fieldwork wondering whether I would be able to convince farmers, at one of the busiest times of the year, to talk to me about their lives. How would they receive a woman from the city and would they even agree to speak to me? I, like most other anthropologists, had my initial doubts about being able to carry through the task I had set out to accomplish while writing up my research proposal. What was a relief to me was that I was not hanging around idle waiting to build rapport. Adapting myself to village and family life was made easier by my role as a horse girl, which rapidly became clear to the other villagers. I started out by speaking to the elderly people of the village to get a picture of the historical changes that had happened during the course of these villagers' life. As they were retired they had plenty of time to speak to me and were pleased to have company. It was also a good way to gather up courage and background facts and just become comfortable in my researcher-in-the-field role. In the beginning I felt listless and uncertain about getting any farmer to agree to speak to me because I was aware that they were very busy in the spring time. Because it was light long into the evening they would be out working on their fields sometimes until nine or ten pm. Once I started calling round to people it was surprisingly easy to get them to agree to an interview. I think it helped when I told them that I lived in Norrås on a farm. My credibility in terms of being a person who is genuinely interested in their plight became consolidated. Quite often people would initially state that they had nothing important to say and that they knew nothing. This is when I would put in my impassioned speech about the value and importance of the knowledge that everyone has of the everyday life that they are part of, that they are the ones who are the experts in and about their own lives. I stressed that my research was based on the knowledge of ordinary people and that society needs to know about this knowledge, needs to be educated about the way farmers live and work through real life stories about farming life today in Finland. I also clearly stated that one point of interest was to know about people's perceptions of health and well being, sometimes specifically mentioning the results of the research carried out by Markku Hyyppä and Juhani Mäki (Hyyppä & Mäki 1997; Hyyppä & Mäki 2000; Hyyppä 1990; Hyyppä 1995) if the person was a Swedish-speaker. On certain days when I was supposed to contact new people to interview I lacked motivation and felt insecure about the whole venture of my research. I knew it was important to present a good and convincing background story about why I wanted to interview them and what I wanted to know from them.

Focus on farmers

Farmers view themselves as belonging to one social category regardless of the size of the farm and they share the same values and practices. Informants were

collected using a snowball sampling method with additional attention placed on covering a range of production types common to the area and age groups. They were on average between the ages of 45–60 with the majority being between the ages of 50–55. The lack of younger informants was due to the fact that in most cases the older generation of farmers relinquish their farm to the younger generation only when they are past official retirement age, so basically there were not very many farmers of a younger age group. After retirement age you do not receive financial production support from the government, but you get a pension and can continue farming for as long as your health and strength holds out. Farmers belonging to this age group either had farms of average size and standard crops such as cereals, sugar beet or special crops such as potatoes or had exceptionally large farms with mainly cereal production. Only 17 out of 42 informants were active farmers whose main source of family income came from farming. Active farmers are divided into groups based on farm size in the table below:

NUMBER OF FARMS	SIZE OF FARMS
5	150–200 HECTARES
4	100–149 HECTARES
8	30–99 HECTARES

Farm size on the island has traditionally been large as far as Finnish standards go. There has been a flowering estate culture, as the area was once administered by the Swedish Crown. Since European Union membership farm size has expanded exponentially. Before membership a farm of 20 hectares was considered to be large enough to support a family. At present the average farm size on Koppars is 32 hectares, but those farmers who manage well and have a belief in the future of farming, as well as a belief in the continuation of their own farm, have farms that are around 150 hectares or more. These are farmers who either have inherited large farms or have land that is partially rented from a neighbouring farm and are considered financially sound in terms of income level. The farms in this study were generally larger than the Koppars average because most of them were located in the largest municipality of the island, Källsvik which has the largest farms on the island. During the ten year period between 1990 to 2000 the number of active farms on Koppars has been gradually decreasing. In 1990 there were 375 and by 2000 the number had dropped to 262 (Maa- ja metsätalousministeriö 2000).

The majority of informants whose farms were between 50–100 hectares were more inclined to fear a rupture of continuation of the family farm and had little or no belief in a positive development within farming in Finland in the

future. They realised that their income level was not attractive to the younger generation and thus did not, on average, encourage their children to take over the farm as a full-time occupation. The mode of production is also significant. On the larger farms (100–200 hectares) the most common form of production was cereals and sugar beet cultivation. The best quality of cereals in the country are produced on Koppars. On smaller farms the mode of production is tied to animal husbandry and farms may have some cereal production mixed with special crops like cultivation of potatoes, peas and strawberries. On farms involved in animal rearing (dairy cows and horses) part of the field land was used for hay production and cereals for animal feed and thus the need for a large amount of arable land is lower as feed can also be purchased from other farmers in the area. Farms involved in animal rearing were also in a more precarious position because they were aware that the only chance of survival was to modernise and expand the operation. On all farms, both large and small, it was the man only who worked full-time at farming and the wife was involved either in full-time or part-time off-farm employment. In a few cases farms were run by women, but they were an exception.

The study village

The study village, Norrås, is situated on a narrow peninsula on the northern tip of the island⁶ and it is a traditional row-village where the main farms are placed in a straight line. The barn buildings are situated behind the farm houses with the fields in front. Forest land surrounds the fields extending down to the coast on either side of the village. The structure of Norrås makes habitation much denser than is common in Finnish villages. Usually farms are scattered, with fields separating the individual farms and the distance to neighbours varies between a few hundred meters and several kilometers. There are few active farmers left in Norrås, basically one active full-time farmer cultivating 54 hectares of mainly cereals and sugar beets. Some farmers from other villages own or rent field land situated in the village. The remaining inhabitants are working in the service sector or are involved in agriculturally related sideline businesses such as tourism and so are involved in farming on a part-time basis. There used to be a village school, a post office, two shops and a library that have all gradually disappeared by the beginning of the 1990's. Villagers have to go to the municipal centre to get these central services. One of the main employers in Norrås is a rehabilitation centre for mental health patients.

The population of year round inhabitants in 2003 was 41. Of these around a quarter are Swedish speakers. In the summer the population more than doubles

⁶ The island measures around 60 km from its northern to its southern tip. The total population is around 7 462 (Tilastokeskus 2006).

due to summer cottage owners, many of whom are related to the villagers, but reside in the city. The population of the village has been steadily decreasing during the course of the last century. In the period 1931–40 there were a total of 224 inhabitants, 1941–50 it was down to 112 and then 90 for the period 1951–60 (Reference 8). When dairy production, sugar beet production and animal rearing held a central position within farming on Koppars (1920–1950), Norrås experienced its most expansive era. Even small-holders in Norrås would grow sugar beet because of the financial gain it provided until 1974 when the transportation system changed and the beets were picked up from individual farms instead of being picked up at the loading berth close to the municipal beach in Norrås. A research centre for sugar beet production was set up there in 1932–33.

Villagers recall that in the 1950's and 1960's there were two shops, one bank, a post office, a blacksmith, a tailor, a school and a dairy in the village. The position of the village used to be more central than today because the main loading point of the dairy product transportation route was 12 km to the north of the village. There was also a steam ship that would circle along the coast of Koppars on its route from Turku to Helsinki. There were ferry stops on both coasts of Norrås. In the 1930's there were 5 large farms in the village: two belonging to the Bergholm family, one to the Rosström, Björkqvist and Salin families respectively. However, the population of the village has been steadily decreasing during the course of the last century. The working class inhabitants of the village used to work for the large landowners on the fields and in the forests. Farmers in Norrås believe the village has been less hierarchical than villages where there are large estates. Most landowners have been relatively small in terms of ownership of cultivable and forest land. One farmer did own a substantial amount of beach front land with both a dairy and a sanatorium on the property. Many of the houses in the village belonged to *mäkitupalaisia* (small cotters) and were built on land owned by big landowners which was leased to the *mäkitupalainen* on a life long lease (100 years). This was a way to provide housing opportunities for people who moved into the village and worked for the landowners. Although farmers and the wealthy families of the village downplay the matter of class differences, they do exist. One informant of a non-farming background explained that there is a system of categorisation of people in Norrås based on (1) language; (2) landownership/material wealth; (3) getting your livelihood from something other than farming.

Events and other data

In addition to interviews, I participated in both routine events on the farm and specific events in the community such as attending village dances, planting trees, driving elk with the hunting party, weaving a rug, sewing sails,

picking potatoes, working as a volunteer selling tickets at an annual public event called the “Sea days”, attending Martta womens’ association meetings, attending theme days at the local open air museum, attending the campaign days of a local health organisation and events organised by the local Red Cross association, going fishing, assisting in the capture and ear marking of a calf of Scottish Highland breed, going to trotting races and horse shows, attending political meetings. I asked a number of villagers to draw maps of the village and when interviewing them about their past history I asked them to draw lifelines to help them organise and remember major life events. In addition I used quantitative socio-economic and epidemiological data collected by the National Health Institute, the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health and the National Cancer Registry and used village specific information from the municipal church records. Photographs were taken throughout the field work period.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

At the beginning of the analysis stage I listened to the interviews while walking in the forest or cycling on the country roads. This enabled me to consolidate my opinion about which themes arose most strongly in them and to list those. I was also able to identify where these themes were located in individuals’ interviews and to transcribe those parts. In most cases I ended up transcribing entire interviews so that I could compare how specific sections of interviews related to the entire interview. Transcribed interviews were then read through and a total of more than 30 different themes and sub-themes were identified for the purpose of transferring the interviews into the Atlas-ti data analysis programme. This helps the researcher organise and group the various themes and look at the relationship between different theme categories. As I had already gone through the material several times by just reading through the transcribed interviews in the end I chose not to code them again for the purpose of inputting them into the Atlas-ti programme, but instead opted for simple content analysis. I not only looked at the content of the data, but also started looking at its form. By using a narrative approach I was able to uncover how informants used language, in a figurative sense through the use of metaphors to convey particular meanings and experiences. Specifically in relation to information on cancer perceptions, I analysed the material in order to identify the metaphors used in talk about cancer. I explored the intent or function of the metaphors and the cultural context of them (Coffey & Atkinson 1996: 83–85).

TERMS

The term most commonly used by informants to denote their farm was *maatila* (literally land space) in Finnish and *gård* (literally yard) in Swedish. Farmers were in Swedish most often referred to as *bonde* (farmer), rather than *jordbrukare* (land cultivator) because, one informant explains, that *bonde* encompasses the idea of the farmer doing everything, both work on the fields and in the forests. In Finnish the term *maanviljelijä* (literally land cultivator) is most commonly used and *maajussi* (literally land man) as a joking term, which also has a slightly derogatory ring to it if used by “others”, individuals who are not farmers. The master and mistress of the farm are *isäntä* and *emäntä* in Finnish and *husbonde* and *husmor* in Swedish, although less used in everyday speech than the corresponding terms in Finnish. A farmer, Roy, told me that in the past there have been attempts to make *bonde* into a derogatory term, but this is no longer the case in the present day. The central organisation of Swedish-speaking agricultural producers initiated a campaign with the slogan “*Bonden behövs*”, meaning “We need the farmer”. It was a clear attempt to place the term into a positive frame of reference. The logo features a cosy looking farmer with a smiling face, a green visor cap tilted to one side on his head and a wheat stalk jutting out from between his teeth. The farmer is presented as a friend, a jolly fellow who produces our food.

ETHICS

The ethical standards outlined by the American Anthropological Association were used as a guide to conduct during the research process. An official letter outlining the general aims of the research signed by my tutor was shown to the informants before starting the interview. I also verbally explained the aims and stressed that the confidentiality of the informants would be protected. They were additionally given the option of not having the interview taped or to not be interviewed at all. Only three informants refused to have the interview taped. All personal names, including those of historical characters, animals and place names have been changed to protect the identity of the individuals who have participated in the study. I have also omitted the exact dates of diary entries to make it more difficult to identify people and places mentioned in the material. Some references used in the thesis have titles that contain place names or central institutions of the location of my fieldwork. According to the advice provided by the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics the references have been included in coded format alongwith the year of publication in the body of the text. A list of the corresponding references is available upon request

by special permission from the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics. This list has also been forwarded to the opponent of the thesis.

In spite of my best efforts to hide the identity of the informants it is, though, virtually impossible to render anonymous people who belong to the Swedish-speaking minority because “everyone knows everyone”. Identification is facilitated further by the fact that the field site is an island situated in a specific geographic location of the country. Because this particular feature is significant in relation to the empirical data I have chosen to keep this aspect known to the reader. It is interesting to note that had I conducted my research in a clinical setting I would have had to apply for a permit to collect data on patients, but when the research location is a village there is no board or higher authority in charge of ensuring how and what data about everyday life is collected. It points to a hierarchy in terms of what information is considered to be “worthy” of protection. The fact that an institution, like a hospital, finds it relevant to protect and control data on illness and disease illustrates the hegemonic power of medical data and the moral world in which these data are produced.

A FINN DOING FIELDWORK AMONG FINNS

Anthropology in a familiar place

A specific aim of the research project that this study forms part of was to conduct ethnographic research in the context of our own home country (Honkasalo, Utriainen and Leppo 2004), so called auto-anthropology, i.e. anthropology conducted in the intellectual context that produced it (Strathern 1987). We felt it is high time to engage in what has sometimes aptly been called the repatriation of anthropology. This is a process that began already in the 1960's with Levi-Strauss (1962) himself playing a fundamental role by starting to look at social practices and beliefs in a horizontal sense and later, in the 1970's “indigenous” anthropologists entered the arena of anthropological research together with a general reflexive turn in anthropology. Even Malinowski himself is known to have exclaimed that “an anthropology of one's own people is the most arduous, but also the most valuable achievement of a fieldworker” (Malinowski 1939: xix). It is not useful for the field of anthropology to pursue a continued reification of the differences between “us” and “others”, instead it may be more useful to focus on the differences within countries (see Honkasalo, Utriainen & Leppo 2004; Tiilikainen 2003; Hadolt 1998).

Doing anthropological research in one's own culture demands much more of the researcher than research conducted in a country other than one's own. It can be emotionally more straining because of the proximity of experiences recounted to the researcher and being able to identify more closely with

informants. In a comparative article on fieldwork “at home” (in Norway) Signe Howell (2001) outlines the disadvantages of “at home” anthropology. To uncover what the lives and values of others are like the anthropologist must have a sustained presence in the field and experience fieldwork through practice, not only communicated in dialogue with others. She is here referring to anthropological studies done in contexts where it has not been possible to: “be there” all the time. She lists problems related to “at home” anthropology as; the impossibility of living with a family and being part of their family life in Norway because people will not open up their homes in this way to strangers; the feeling of adventure disappears; the chosen research subject defines all interaction between the researcher and the informants; the difficulty in getting acquainted to “whole” people because you meet them only in a certain setting to ask certain questions (in her case about adoption); the data is more statements than actions; to compensate one’s understanding of the phenomenon one becomes dependent on knowledge from many other sources like the media, film and literature; and, finally, she questions whether it actually can be called anthropological research when one lives at home and the field is close to one’s home (Howell 2001: 22). Her experiences indicate that the question of whether anthropology “at home” is “real” anthropology is intimately linked to the subject and location of one’s research. Because I chose a village as my research site and a research question linked to the totality of lives in a local context I feel I did capture “whole contexts” and “whole people”.

In my case I feel that the way I entered the field and resided there was the best possible methodological solution to getting the information I wanted to collect and consequently I did not grapple with the problems she encountered. The world that I entered was vastly different from the one I was used to so for me it was an issue of entering a different world. I had been exposed to the foreign and exotic to have enough of a comparative platform to view my own culture from. I also believe that had I conducted research in for example Nicaragua, which was the initial geographic focus, I would not have experienced culture shock, but maybe a different sense of adventure. Distance, extreme difference, and suffering (alienation, culture shock) encountered in the field are not necessarily the most fruitful ways of making the anthropologist curious enough to ask the right types of questions and enough of them. In any case I agree with Messerschmidt (1981: 20) that: “Ultimately, theoretical considerations define what is interesting, not personal curiosity. In terms of the goals of science, the difference between the existentially familiar and unfamiliar is of little significance; hence, exoticism has no place in scientific ethnology”.

There are of course a number of practical problems that do arise but I wonder if they emerge from the issue of being in one’s own culture. I was, for example, not invited by my host family to attend family parties at their relatives’ house.

In this sense I was not a fully adopted family member, but nor was I invited to other parties such as major birthday parties of my informants. Maybe this has more to do with what Finnish culture is like, rather than not being a foreigner whom one feels obliged to take along to family events. It could be that to them I was too much of a stranger or then they assumed I was not interested in coming to the party of a person I did not know very well. How much of an ethnic insider was I actually? Many cases of anthropological research at home reveal that ethnic insiders are generally not as inside the culture as one would assume (Messerschmidt 1981: 25). They, just like “outsider” anthropologists, grapple with the issue of marginality, of always being marginal in relation to those we study.

Speaking two languages

I made a conscious effort to find a village that was located in a bi-lingual area of the island because I did not want the language spoken to be a dominant factor in the social setting. Although I come from a single language family background I have as an adult learned Finnish and have a Finnish-speaking partner who used to visit me in the field. The house I lived in was more predominantly Finnish-speaking because Arja’s mother tongue was Finnish and although Rainer also spoke Swedish and had a Swedish-speaking mother he spoke Finnish with Arja and Swedish with his Swedish-speaking relatives who lived in the village and with me. Switching between languages was not problematic and also in interviews with couples in households where they had different mother tongues I would speak the language that was the strongest and most dominant in the family. On a one-to-one basis I would use the mother tongue of the informant during both informal conversations and interviews. The issue of what language you speak does place a label on you and as there was a general perception among Finnish-speakers that Swedish-speakers consider themselves to be “better”, more “cultured” people than others it was important to speak the “right” language at the right time. In many cases people could not tell which language was my mother tongue and I took this as a good sign. It was an advantage to be seen as a bi-lingual person, because perhaps it gave me a more neutral status than if I had spoken only Swedish. It gave me access to all types of people and when it additionally became known that my partner was a Finnish-speaker maybe in their eyes, I became more like them, as mixed marriages (between the language groups) were rather common on Koppars.

A beginner among farmers

Some anthropologists have tried to learn about the professional field that they were studying or acquired specialised skills before entering the field (Wolf 1991;

Van Maanen 1991; Coffey 1993), but in my case this was not a viable option. It would have required me to have some basic training in farming and it would probably in any case have been difficult to find a farmer willing to take me on as a trainee. Having more insider knowledge about farming was not a necessity in terms of the type of picture of social life that I was trying to get. Although farmers were the main group of people I focused on, they were not the only people I interviewed, as mentioned above. So I was definitely a novice when it came to what it means to farm, to use farming technology and all the other specific tasks involved in the job. Of course, like most people I had a general idea what it was about from literature, newspapers, documentaries, and films, but this level of familiarity and knowledge of the issues definitely limited my usefulness in terms of being an agricultural worker to be reckoned with. I asked stupid questions and I asked specific questions about farming. On one occasion a informant exclaimed to me “You don’t know this at all! You have deficiencies! You are this typical city dweller who does not know anything about farming and hasn’t even grown up with this!” It was presented with a laugh, but, nonetheless, it was the truthful opinion of the informant. Opinions on city dwellers were divided into roughly two camps. Some farmers felt that city dwellers were for the most part far too removed from their rural roots to have any understanding of the countryside and rural living. Others felt that many urban people clearly were loyal to the plight of farmers and had a positive view of farmers and the vital input they were making to the economy of the country.

My beginner’s status also had to do with my lack of physical strength and coordination skills. Although I was there to work, Arja never demanded that I get up as early as they did and if I did oversleep she let me be. When we worked together she would repeatedly tell me to take a break, while she would continue working and she was after all a sixty year old woman compared to my young 33 years. I suggested to a number of farmers that I could come and help them out on their farm, but only one farmer, a dairy farmer, took me up on the offer. He eagerly told me about his work, made me muck cow dung, showed me how to milk by hand, to check the quality of the milk before attaching the milking machine and took me with him on the meadow to collect feed for the cows. I believe that the reluctance to use my labour input had to do with most farmers thinking I was not physically fit enough to do the work, but also that they would have to spend too much time instructing me what to do and they were busy people. I noticed, for example, while building fences with Arja, that I just lacked the bodily logic acquired through years of using tools, planning building projects and using specific techniques that reduce the amount of physical strength needed to do certain tasks. I was viewed as a typical city dweller because of my background and was perhaps equated with the cottage owners who would populate the village in the summers.

There was an implicit assumption that I had green values and leftist political opinions, individuals farmers tend to view as idealists who know nothing about their way of living. For the most part I tried to avoid getting into political discussions on what was shown on the television news or current affairs programmes. During my stay there was an incident of mink fodder being poisoned, subsequently killing tens of thousands of minks on mink farms in Ostrobothnia. Suspicion was immediately directed at animal rights activists who have in previous years released minks from farms, but in the end it turned out to be a ventilation problem with the central food storage silo from where mink farm owners bought their fodder. Rainer would loudly curse the meddling tactics of animal rights activists and defend the producers' right to a livelihood. I would at times try to explain the perspective of animal rights activists, but I was speaking to deaf ears and Arja disliked it when Rainer became agitated. There were other debates dealing with animal protection issues where environmentalist views of the need to protect flying squirrels or the wolf population came up against farmers' rights to their forests or to protecting their cattle from wolf attacks. This situation was further exasperated by the regulations of the Natura 2000 environmental protection programme that farmers felt was meddling with their rights to privately owned forest and land holdings in general.

DOING IT DIFFERENTLY

As in every research process there were things I could have done differently and better. One restriction that affected the collection of data was the fact that I did not have a driving license. Distances on Koppars are substantial and moving around with a small city moped is slow and precarious especially when driving along the main road among huge trucks and fast moving cars. Because most people had a car the bus services had been drastically reduced which meant that using the bus was not an option. As soon as the roads started getting icy (November) I left the field to return the next year in the spring. My field work periods were thus dictated by the seasons with me staying from April to November in the year 2002 and June to October in 2003. I spent the winter months between the two field work distancing myself from the field and analysing data. This meant I did not experience the dark winter months in the village and was, thus, never able to experience how social life changes during this time period when it is said that the villages seem darker and emptier than the rest of the year. There is the issue of an ethnographic bias of my material due to the fact that I lived in a family where suffering and financial difficulties were concretely present in the intimate sphere of everyday life. The particular family situation of conflict between Rainer and his brother also influenced the discussions in the household. Another oddity with my data is the skewed

gender aspect. I mostly interviewed men because they were the ones who mainly did the farming work, often assisted by a wife when she came home from work. In many cases I did interview couples which does change the dynamics of the interview situation as it was often the case that one person was a more dominant speaker. I would also have liked to have included more young farmers in the sample.



A day at the trotting races.

3. UNCERTAINTY AND SUFFERING IN ANTHROPOLOGY – A THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

In this thesis I describe the position of uncertainty and suffering in the human, lived experience of farmers and how it can be seen as a cultural struggle to reconstitute a positive sense of meaning and purpose in people's lives under conditions of present day life which create alienation and fragmentation. The impetus for my research was an assumption that the lives of farmers had been touched by substantial changes in recent years. Change occurring in the lifeworld is characterised by uncertainty regarding one's future, one's present position in life and the role of others in shaping one's life. My understanding of change is as both a positive, constructive force and a destructive, fragmenting aspect of life. One outcome of change is that it fragments core values and this in turn is an experience of adversity to farmers. Change, however, can also serve to strengthen and build on current values and be a force that directs one's action towards the future sustaining hope for positive outcomes. Whatever its nature, I posit that change leads to uncertainty, an almost constantly present state in which persons have a lack of assurance concerning what will happen in the future (Whyte 1997: 18–19). It points to the fragility that characterises life and is part of how we experience and deal with affliction, misfortune and suffering (Jackson 2005).

Uncertainty I understand as an existential condition of human life that causes and transforms our understanding of suffering. It contains the possibility for positive outcomes which makes it possible to understand also suffering as something that is both good and bad, bringing about particular kinds of responses that I have defined within the analytical framework of suffering: I call these two responses meaningful and fragmenting suffering. Suffering of the meaningful kind is “good” suffering because it is meaningful to farmers and it is something that emerges from within the community of farmers. It strengthens values and interaction between community members. Another aspect of suffering as a consequence of social change is the *fragmenting suffering*

that is imposed upon farmers by outsiders, agents that represent a bureaucratic or institutional system – in this case the EU. It threatens existing values and forces farmers to work in a manner that is morally unacceptable to them (Ådahl 2004). I believe that the notion of suffering should be employed more widely in the social sciences as a tool with which to understand the social condition of human life. My aim is thus to make this tool visible through the use of specific empirical examples arising from my fieldwork data.

Throughout the ages people have had a need to explain and alleviate suffering. One of the central questions of humankind is why God allows humans to suffer. A multitude of philosophical and religious traditions have sought to provide answers to this question. Suffering is commonly understood to be caused by evil, also called theodicy. In the broad sense theodicy refers to the legitimisation and justification of evil as something that extends beyond human experience. In its more specific sense it is one way to outline what suffering is and defend the goodness of the Christian God amidst evil and suffering. In this manner it also includes earlier explanations of the struggle between good and evil found in myths (Honkasalo & Utraiainen 2004: 15). The word *suffering/souffrance/soffrenza* describes it as a passion, where the cause of the suffering is unknown and where there is no reference to what or who brings it about. The kindred term *misery/misère/miserial* has the connotation of a “lack” of something. The Judeo-Christian explanation model of suffering has had a dominant position in thinking on suffering and has been one of the reasons why social scientists have not brought the term closer to individual lives, aspirations, broken dreams, ideas of moral worth and the social value one has amidst one’s peers.

When the concept of suffering is extended beyond the fields of theology and philosophy it can be applied as a methodological tool that helps us understand the nature of contemporary life, embedding it in the social processes of everyday life. It can take place in experiences of bereavement, loss and social isolation and it can be connected to feelings of anxiety, guilt, depression, distress, and humiliation. Wilkinson (2005: 3) finds that within the social sciences there has been a lack of focus on how individuals *experience* suffering and what it *does* to them. This is a vital part of the political process of making adversity a matter of public concern. A number of researchers within the fields of medical anthropology (Farmer 1992; Kleinman, Das & Lock 1997; Scheper-Hughes 1994; Whyte 1997) have taken on the role of furthering this political agenda. They have studied suffering as a *lived experience* and linked it with historically and contextually embedded issues of values, power and politics. Suffering to them is an idiom social actors employ to express distress. All these seek to understand suffering in relation to meaning-making and how it touches upon that which is “at stake” in individual lives, being closely linked to a moral experience. Suffering in these contexts reformulates itself as a number

of existential questions; Who am I and what am I worth to society? It also points to the fact that suffering should perhaps not be spoken of as a singular monolith, but instead be described through the plurality that characterises it and of how it is shaped by local, social contexts that are constantly shifting. Political, economic and social factors can change. Different social constructions of human conditions decide the image of the suffering self rather than the idea of a universal suffering self. It can be physical, economic, social, political, cultural and psychological in nature, all at the same time. Ethnography offers us a vital tool in the quest for making visible the ordinary afflictions and misfortunes people have in the course of their everyday lives. It lays bare how responses to distressful life situations are culturally and socially constructed, shared aspects of human life.

What I am interested in is the question of *how to deal with suffering* and what this ‘dealing with’ tells us about values and society, the meaning of our reality. In this sense suffering itself becomes an idiom through which to express how one views life and how one deals with difficult conjunctures in life, moments when individuals experience the fragility of life. At the same time suffering is expressed through idioms like metaphors used as social tools to make sense of reality. How are we to understand the way people deal with suffering and how is it connected to the notion of uncertainty? What are the positive, enabling attributes of states of distress, its creative force (Wilkinson 2005) and what are the fragmenting, and hindering aspects of it? In the following chapter I will trace these connections and further discuss the role of agency and practical action in understanding suffering.

BOURDIEU AND ORDINARY SUFFERING

In seeking to understand the nature of suffering and distressful life situations characterised by social change I have turned my attention to work conducted in anthropology on this matter. One of the few anthropologists who have discussed suffering is Pierre Bourdieu (1993). He departs from a dichotomising view of suffering by taking on the issue of differences in the scale of suffering. There seems to be an implicit assumption that talk of suffering is always about the “grand suffering” of large-scale trauma, political atrocity and natural catastrophes that cause overwhelming devastation. Much of the thinking on suffering in the philosophical and sociological tradition seems to be based on the legacy of the holocaust. Although there is a plethora of conditions of dire affliction like genocide, war and extreme poverty in the world, I turn my gaze to ordinary struggles in everyday contexts, something Pierre Bourdieu (1999) has termed “positional” or “small” suffering. If we take holocaust scale suffering as the reference point of what suffering is we conceal struggles and

distress of a more ordinary kind, and I find it makes it difficult to understand this “small suffering” in a category by itself, in its own right. If we constantly compare it to the “grand suffering” it will appear insignificant and unworthy of scholarly attention. While recognising the central position held by “grand suffering” and placing due weight on the fact that most of the discourse on suffering is precisely about this large scale type of phenomena, in this thesis, I want to depart from this path and proceed along a less travelled route to look at how people deal with difficult experiences in the context of ordinary, mundane life. Also this suffering is relevant and significant to our understanding of life in contemporary society and maybe precisely because it has not received due attention I want to integrate it in my analysis of life in the globalised context of rural villages in Finland.

In the book *Misère du Monde* (1993)⁷ Pierre Bourdieu together with a team of French sociologists, outlines the conditions of contemporary French society through interviews with a variety of individuals at the lower end of society like factory workers, unemployed workers, inhabitants of run-down housing estates, and youth of an immigrant background. These are individuals who in some way are “squeezed” by the circumstances of their lives. He describes suffering as a product of societal forces, a state caused by structural changes in society, but also a product of ordinary citizens’ experiences in the context of their everyday lives, something he terms “small suffering” (“*petit misère*”). The process of pigeonholing that characterises life in present day society forces people into particular spaces in the work place, in suburbs and in schools. These individuals residing in the enclosed spaces of society have a lack of access to alternative spaces to realise the self or to places of education. Compartmentalisation is something that has come with the consolidation of modernity where different spheres of life like art, science, and philosophy have been progressively separated from everyday life. At the same time the mechanisms of social control have broadened, taking over increasingly many areas of social life. We are surrounded by anonymous institutions, bastions of specialist knowledge that we have to trust and that control and rationalise everyday life (Giddens 1990; Featherstone 1992). People have a pained experience of the social world due to clashing interests, orientations and lifestyles. In a privileged world they occupy an inferior position and have no escape route. This “positional suffering” is just as real as the suffering experienced in the macrocosm, the “grand misère” of material poverty. Bourdieu (1999: 4, emphasis in the original) finds that:

“Using material poverty as the sole measure for suffering keeps us from seeing and understanding a whole side of suffering characteristic of a social

⁷ Translated into English in 1999 under the title *The Weight of the World. Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*.

order which, although it has undoubtedly reduced poverty overall (though less than often claimed) has also multiplied the social spaces (specialised fields and subfields) and set up conditions for an unprecedented development of all kinds of ordinary suffering (*la petite misère*)”

One of the main points made here is the relational character of suffering or misery – that it should be understood in relation to what one has expected of life and in relation to what others have. Naturally it is not only poverty that is the cause of grand suffering, but other forms of atrocity and exploitation such as war and oppression in its various guises. Individuals must have the possibilities to act and through this action bring about change so as to influence the social order. Bourdieu believes it is the structures of a neo-liberal economy which hinders them from being agents in their own lives. According to Bourdieu’s theory of practice the social order is produced through action. The action he is concerned with is one that is oriented towards practical functions. We come to know the world through the principle of the *habitus*, our ability to play the social game of life constituted through practical action (1980: 52–53).

The way humans relate to the social world is expressed in their bodies because, Bourdieu claims, the basics of culture are imprinted and encoded into the body, making the body the site for thinking and feeling born out of experience (1977b). This is based on the fact that the distinction between one’s own body and the “legitimate” body, in other words, the way the body should be according to the dominant standard, is an aspect of the diverse experience of one’s position in social space. Bourdieu argues that the core values of a culture become inscribed in small and seemingly insignificant details of decorum like gestures, dress, way of carrying ones body and verbal expression. The body remembers these principles of habitual behaviour and in this manner the social world becomes inscribed upon the body just like the body is in the social world – it impacts upon one’s ability to act and play the game of life (1990b: 190). This is tied to the notion of being, a striving to accumulate being (Bourdieu 2000) or of striking a balance between being an actor and being acted upon (Jackson 2005: 2), also linked to Bourdieu’s (1977a) notion of social practice, that people’s accounts of the social world are learned, constructed in and are actively part of everyday life. The construction of meaning, how we know the world derives from doing, from a deliberate accomplishment. It is through the idea of *habitus*, “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structured structures” (1990a: 53) that individual subjective worlds are linked to the cultural world, the world of social interaction – it is a form of “embodied history” (1990a: 56). Bourdieu, when outlining the concept of *habitus* makes a call to “return to practice”, stressing its historical, individual and collective dimensions. The *modus operandi* of the *habitus* is the

generation of common-sense behaviours, a kind of second nature. He calls it the “art of inventing” which enables individuals to produce an infinite number of practices that are reasonable, but relatively unpredictable (1990a: 55). Bourdieu talks of the logic of practice as being practical in the sense of organising thoughts, perceptions and actions through a few generative principles, based in action (Ibid: 86 & 92). Through practices sets of social relations condition the *habitus* and act as a kind of mediation between the outside, social world and the inside world of people’s bodies and minds. The answer to the question of being lies not in objectivist reduction of the function of rituals and myths, but in the investigation of experience through participant ethnography. This entails a project of understanding practical reason by describing the material bases that makes life uncertain and naming the collective experience of powerlessness (Ibid: 96–97).⁸

In order to understand the significance of Bourdieu’s research on suffering one must consider the societal context in which it is produced and the political commitment integrated into his work. The book “*Weight of the World*” (1999 [1993]) was written during a time when French society experienced political turmoil. In December 1995 a wave of strikes washed over the country preceded by other protests and strikes and a growing interest in radical ideas. (Wolfreys 2006 [2000]) Bourdieu prominently sided with public sector workers and when his book was published it immediately became a bestseller: “a byword for the ravages of the free market” and as such it re-legitimised a discourse of resistance (Ibid: 1). Bourdieu consciously factored in how global structures and economic policies and politics are affecting seemingly local lives in France – today the sources of suffering or adversity; war, genocide, natural disasters are in the last instance a product of economic power, struggle over resources and rampant consumption. The explicitly political agenda of his work made him a member of that rare breed of activist researchers.

⁸ One of the dilemmas Bourdieu grappled with in his work was distancing himself from the pre-deterministic, objectivist perspectives of the French structuralists. At the same time he was uncomfortable with the fuzzy subjectivism of existentialists like Sartre. He posited that the researcher needs to have an active presence in the world, seek to understand its urgencies and uncertainty. This would enable one to depart from the realism of structure and give space to the agent so as to understand how order is produced through action (Bourdieu 1977a: 72). He felt that phenomenology did not take account of the historical and cultural contexts under which self-consciousness and sociality is produced (Bourdieu 1990a). His experiences in Algeria made him disagree with the view on post-independence Algeria represented by central thinkers of his time like Franz Fanon (1969) who idealised the revolutionary role played by the sub-proletariat and peasantry. He, instead, felt the urban destitute poor were unable to transcend their situation and liberate themselves because they could not gain consciousness of the situation they were in (Bourdieu 2000).

MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON SUFFERING

In his work medical anthropologist Arthur Kleinman has made a connection between patients' lived experience of illness, the biomedical definition of disease and the socio-cultural, economical and political forces at work in society. Arthur Kleinman's work places society and politics at centre stage, where human suffering, be it through illness, political violence or just plain misery is a universal experience. It defies categorisation, being an issue both of the individual and of social structure, blurring the boundaries between social categories. He understands suffering as a social category that has the ability to combine disparate fields of human experience; the social, political and the interpersonal, thus bringing it out of the purely individual domain into society and the political arena. In the book "*Social Suffering*" (1997) Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret Lock introduced the concept of *social suffering*. Kleinman, Das and Lock turn the focus squarely to political and social implications, both professional and political processes that produce conditions of suffering. It functions as an umbrella concept that brings together conditions that are usually separated from each other; health, welfare, legal, moral and religious issues. By departing from a dichotomising view of suffering it becomes possible to understand human suffering as something that is both individual and collective, and as operating at both local and global levels (1997: x). It makes us question the connections between central aspects of life such as the private and public, individual and collective, spirit and body, sense and emotion.

Suffering as a lived experience expressed through illness complaints and illness perceptions should be understood as moral commentaries and political performances – it is through the body that the individual can have a dialogue with society. Cultural internalisation of political distress and violence is analysed by looking at the relationship between political economy, morbidity and mortality in order to delineate a cultural theory that lays bare how social and cultural processes, the social order is expressed in bodily complaints, something Kleinman terms *sociosomatics* (1986). To Arthur Kleinman (1988; 1992; 1995) the illness experience condenses the central structures of life – the *ability to act* and to *give meaning*, but it is also an inter-subjective medium used in social transactions in local moral worlds. Kleinman and Kleinman (1996) remind us that an ethical stance towards the world begins with the recognition of difference and the uncertainty that comes from building a space for moral engagement: "...the moral is not so much about fixed (and fixing) "categories" that order our lives as it is about the ambiguity and obliqueness of "experiences" that contribute to the disordered affairs of human undertakings. Not rational choices but embodied practices express the poetics of suffering" (ibid: 287).

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SUFFERING

What is problematic with Arthur Kleinman's approach is that although he recognises the significance of political structures in shaping people's illness perceptions he does not carry through his argument completely. He talks of suffering as being both a local and global matter, but does not explicitly include the issue of exploitation in his analysis nor does he provide a sufficiently thorough analysis of the political context of the lives of the patients he has included in his research. A significant part of suffering is brought about by the lack of access to basic medications, hindered by patenting laws and the power of pharmaceutical industries in the world arena, but also of lack of health services in countries burdened by external debt. Much of suffering in the contemporary world is, doubtless, a result of structural inequalities on a global level and the effects of a world order based on market principles. Even in his present research Kleinman still does not concretely factor in the inequalities inherent in the medical care system in the United States and the unequal access to health services – a central feature of the system – when he talks about what is at stake in moral worlds. Nor does he touch upon the dominant role held by multinational corporations in shaping the sector, many of which have head offices in his home country. Although Bourdieu refers to the significance of global economic structures and has a clear political agenda with his work he still, to a large extent, restricts his analysis to the political context of French society. The link to a global agenda of exploitation and power structures that very directly touch upon the lives of people everywhere is missing.

The political dimensions of the experience of illness and suffering have had further currency in medical anthropology in the works of Paul Farmer (1992) in his book *AIDS and the Geography of Blame* set in Haiti. His approach has been to look at the interplay between human agency and the powerful forces that constrain it such as poverty, inequality and political dislocations that extend to the global level using epidemiology, history and political economy to support the stories of the lived experience of Haitian villagers afflicted with AIDS. Farmer (1998: 227) suggests that: "To explore the relation between personal agency and supra-individual structures – once the central problematic of social theory – we need to link our ethnography to systemic analyses that are informed by history, political economy, and a critical epidemiology." The most significant contribution of his book is pointing out how the interpretation of illness requires a historical approach, and of how illness is constructed and responded to, also in contemporary society, in long-standing structures of meaning.

Another anthropologist who seeks to have her research bear witness to the experiences of people living under the impact of extreme social hardships and

political atrocity is Nancy Scheper-Hughes. In her book “*Death without weeping. The violence of everyday life in Brazil*” (1992) she focuses on the medicalisation of social and political oppression, on how the shared, collective experience of hunger is isolated and denied by being expressed in the medicalised terms of the *nervos* syndrome among shanty town dwellers in north-eastern Brazil. Cane cutters’ struggle against hunger and exploitation is expressed through idioms of nervousness and weakness. It thus becomes an individualised discourse on sickness which replaces the more radical discourse on hunger (1992: 169). In her analysis Scheper-Hughes sees the moral economy of the body as a microcosm of the moral economy of plantation society.

Vieda Skultans’ (1998) study on Latvians’ use of narratives of suffering as a way of making sense of their traumatic experience of Soviet rule connects the experience of people living under the impact of extreme social hardships with events of political atrocity. The diagnosis of neurasthenia was common in post-Soviet Latvia, but informants in Skultans’ study did not primarily see themselves as suffering from damaged nerves, but as being oppressed. This was why they resisted the political uses of medicine and psychiatry on lay ideas of illness. Nervous damage among her informants, Skultans (1998: 104) explains, is “a narrative metaphor which replaces the hope for meaning. It is synonymous with the inability to find meaning. The idea of disorder is closely linked to meaninglessness.” Although she draws some parallels between her own research and that of Nancy Scheper-Hughes she points out that the vital difference is that the process of medicalisation as a means of reinterpreting social and historical discontent has been different in Latvia than in Brazil. In Latvia illness narratives are very political, “However, oppression and violence are not reinterpreted as illness, but rather are held directly responsible for illness” (Skultans 1998: 20).

In a world where global connections are a rule rather than an exception it is imperative to include the role of political economy when interpreting seemingly local conditions⁹. The distress felt by farmers over changes in their working life has its roots not only in national policies and issues of national economy. It is no longer possible to, for example, to claim that the price of sugar beets is a Finnish issue only, because sugar bought off the supermarket shelf is rarely made in Finland any longer. Although sugar beet producers

⁹ The role of the global economy in shaping structural inequalities in society was apparent in the Masters level field study I conducted among female prostitutes in Managua, Nicaragua. The individual suffering of the women can be seen as a comment on the extensive structural changes that have taken place in the Nicaraguan society during the course of their lives and the deepening of an economic crisis originating in a long standing war between the US supported Contras and the left wing Sandinista army (Adahl 2000). Although their struggle is about staying alive in a profession wrought with dangers, the reason why they have had to work in prostitution, often as their last resort, is an issue of economy, and mainly global, political economy.

in Finland, whose livelihood is now threatened by free trade regulations¹⁰, are in the same precarious boat as sugar producers in Latin America, Asia and Africa, there is no move to strive together in a shared struggle against structural injustices. This may be due to the relative isolation of Finnish farmers. Finland has not been a colonial power and the conditions of countries far removed from Finland have not to any significant degree over a long time period reached the consciousness of Finnish farmers. Farmers express anger over the impotency they feel when faced with policies passed at the European Union level that directly influence their working conditions. I feel they should, instead be directing their frustration further up the ladder to the global level, to policy makers of the World Trade Organisation where the decisions are made in the last instance.

UNCERTAINTY IN MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

One could then assume that suffering brought about by an uncertain future could be linked to the discourse on risk that has been burgeoning in the social sciences and that features as an aspect in almost every sphere of contemporary life since the 1990's. Although the discussion on risk holds an important position, not least in medical anthropological research. I have wanted to go a step beyond this and instead look at the concepts of uncertainty and contingency. Recently a number of anthropological studies have questioned the predominant discourse on risk in the social sciences and society at large. These studies have investigated uncertainty in relation to the totality of life and how an engagement of indeterminacy can be understood as an arena where identity is constituted (Jackson 1989; Becker 1997; Whyte 1997; Bledsoe 2002; Malaby 2002 & 2003; Johnson-Hanks 2005; Honkasalo 2006 & 2007). A guiding line has been the idea that as social actors humans are compelled to deal with suffering and actively engage with it. These ethnographies of uncertainty present ambiguity and contingency as central aspects of people's lives where the knowledge about disease and suffering becomes a form of pragmatic attitude employed to deal with the misfortunes of life. These studies indicate that unpredictability cannot be made sense of only through a narrow system of belief or practice, but instead as a matter of how it is negotiated amidst competing frameworks of meaning and how it is tied to local interests of the actors involved. Unpredictability or contingency is something that

¹⁰ Recent negotiations in the World Trade Organisation have required the sugar market to be opened up for free competition through the removal of competition hindering subsidies extended to sugar producers in the EU and the rest of the industrialised nations. The sugar producing nations of the global South have opposed the unjust trade advantage that northern sugar producers have because of subsidy policies that make it economically possible to produce sugar in the global North.

actors engage with in their everyday life as an *enabling* aspect of contemporary social experience, leading to creative and varied actions to come to terms with the situation (see also Gutmann 1996: 254). It can also be understood as a bodily posture of openness to possibility through which people grapple with misfortunes in life, something Whyte (1997) has termed ‘subjunctivity’. It is way of constituting the self and constructing ones identity (Whyte 1997; Malaby 2002 & 2003).

Routinised states of uncertainty are a focal point of Marja-Liisa Honkasalo’s work (2006 & 2007) on illness experiences among North Karelians in Finland. She points to how the certainty of illness, in the form of heart disease, is seen as a unquestionable part of life in an area characterised by historical loss and rapid structural change that has led to political and social marginalisation of the area. Taking the emic view of suffering as her starting point she focuses on the minimal forms of acting produced by and within the social processes of life – acting that is an attempt to resist suffering and keep it at bay.¹¹ Her informants express their distress through the notion of life being “*ahas*”, tight which Honkasalo (2007) has interpreted as the opposite of the full, rich life, the way it was before when villages were still characterised by vivacity. The suffering and uncertainty of everyday life is encountered and made endurable through minimal agency, not as a means of changing it, but of maintaining a fragile stability so as not to lose one’s hold on life.

Caroline Bledsoe (2002) applies a pragmatic theoretical stance to the empirical case of reproductive strategies among Gambian women. In Gambia women view their reproductive career in a nonlinear fashion because of contingent life conditions that renders it impossible to plan out reproductive strategies in advance, parallel to biological aging. She talks of contingency in relation to containment and how it “implies a capacity to take action to check harmful repercussions of events, especially through cultivating social ties with those who can help in a crisis” (Ibid: 25). Johnson-Hanks’ (2005) research among Cameroonian women deals with how women discuss social timing of births instead of total numbers of births. Having children is not a product of an intentional act because there are many possible pathways to motherhood and one must be open to respond effectively to the contingent and surprising situations that life offers (2005: 376).

¹¹ Honkasalo frames her theoretical approach in the work of Italian anthropologist Ernesto de Martino and his theory of *crisis della presenza*, that proposes that human life under precarious conditions is threatened by a loss of a personal sense of presence. Individuals retain their place in the world through human agency directed towards the creation of new possibilities. It is an issue of *enduring* difficult conjunctures in life [my emphasis] (2006: 4).

AGENCY

What type of acting am I talking about when positing that farmers *act* in an uncertain world? I understand the agent as someone who acts through practical actions in the lifeworld (Bourdieu 2000). It is Bourdieu's theoretical contribution of combining structure with agency that has had the most prominent position in my own research. What is particular in his theory of practice is the location of agency and the fact that it is not directly observable in practices or in the *habitus*. It is filtered through the experience of subjectivity. For him agency is observed in practical action materialised through the body originating at a level which is neither conscious nor intentional (Bourdieu 1990a). We are agents because we are subjects, but our agent status is not seen in our practices or our *habitus*. The agent, as I interpret Bourdieu, is someone involved in practical action, but socialised through the norms and values set by society. In this sense action is linked to the existing social order.

Additionally I understand agency as a striving for meaning that is constituted in practical action in the context of the everyday. Meaning is always emerging from action when people are seen as active agents in the world, instead of as passively reproducing culture as a system that lies external to lived experience (Bruner 1986: 12). I understand agency also as an active *doing* directed at the hope of positive outcomes of actions undertaken (Whyte 1997). I am concerned with how agency is maintained and the experience of being incapacitated to act in a desired way, in other words, when a future envisioned is nipped in the bud by circumstance. One main characteristic of the everyday is routine and habit, action typical of everyday life. Although routine and repetitious in character, this action is not, however, entirely self-satisfying and predetermined (Jokinen 2005: 15). It also contains creativity and ingenuity – it is a way of experiencing the world, where habituality becomes the lived process of the everyday (Felski 2000). Marja-Liisa Honkasalo (2004) points out that an important dimension of the everyday is adding agency to the habituality of action. In her research she looks at how experience is culturally constructed in specific contexts and how we as individuals give meaning to experience. By adding agency it becomes possible to outline how social change is located in habituality. The human subject makes the everyday livable through these small acts and thus also builds in the element of transformation into these acts (Jokinen 2005: 29 & 31).

In the relationship between meaning and practice the body is seen as an active instrument through which to understand the world. Having agency is having the power to act with purpose and intention, as well as the capacity to fulfil this intention. I find it is important to recognise when actors have the power to act and when they are hindered from acting due to external

circumstances and how they, under conditions of restraint, devise alternative ways of being agents. Hastrup (1995) believes that the key to understanding the bodily locus of agency is to look at the role of motivation. She asks what moves agents to act? For her it is not only a matter of acting with intention, but to be driven by motivation, a form of symbolic capital that is an implicit framework for action, compared to the explicit rationalisations that intentions represent: “Agents, whether actors on stage or in life, must be seen as self-interpreting and reflexive humans, for whom motivation is governed as much by implicit moral evaluations as by disengaged minds” (Ibid: 97). The different events that we face in life make sense because of how they correspond to our own experience. Cultural notions are a product of individual creativity and much of this is shared cross-culturally (Bruner 1986: 22–23). The sedimentation of culture in our body means that the social order is taken for granted by us (Leder 1990: 31–32) and that we learn a culture through performing it – a process which implies change (Turner & Bruner 1986; Hastrup 1995).

How we understand practice in the lifeworld is tied to our role as researchers and the fact that we partake in the creation of meaning. Jackson, like Bourdieu warns us about the fallacy of objectivity because it brings about a semblance of order in the lives of others. He speaks for the importance of ethnography in bringing us “into direct dialogue with others, affording us opportunities to explore knowledge not as something that grasps inherent and hidden truths but as an intersubjective process of sharing experience, comparing notes, exchanging ideas, and finding a common ground” (1996: 8). Jackson’s approach bears resemblance to Bourdieu’s concept of reflexive sociology which acknowledges that the observer, the researcher, is not a neutral presence, but a social agent who through his or her presence impacts upon the social world studied. Bourdieu (1990) felt that the objectivist stand of the detached observer creates a false impression of reality as being static, rather than ambiguous and fluid. Moving from the outside, objective stance to being within our field of inquiry we at the same time move from using explanatory models of the lifeworld to the use of lived metaphors. Jackson (1996: 26) contends that one of the tasks of anthropology is to once again find experience as something located *within* relationships and *between* people (emphasis in original), that the matter of subjectivity is one of inter-subjectivity and experience as inter-experience. This world of between and within relationships is not a stable one, but more one of ambiguity and resistance, a struggle to grasp and maintain meaning.

Although there are already existing social structures there is also agency, based on shared values which have the capacity to change structure and create order or new structures through practical action. Farmers act in the common sense world with practical intentions, actions and functions and the agency they employ is intimately tied to acting and to ways of knowing. A pragmatic stance

to life is common currency in Finnish society. An individual's practical sense and the action that springs from it is valued and lauded.¹² It is not only the structures that are the primary reality because we act in the everyday through practical motivations linked to a striving for meaning. In my empirical material, farmers build on already existing values and norms that are central to their lives such as continuity and wholeness. At the same time the meaning of their social world emerges through practical action that strengthens these values. They work and maintain social bonds through social interaction. Learning happens not through a set of rules that can be abstracted from and learned separate from practice, but through informal, socially embedded knowledge that cannot be communicated apart from practice. In farming it is less a matter of formal schooling and internalisation of a stock of knowledge, and more a matter of achieving knowledge through active engagement with the environment, in the broadest sense of the term, using all of one's senses; sight, hearing, smell and touch. It has to do with specific moves, gestures and emotions. This knowledge is layered with history and social relations. The main stock of cultural knowledge is passed on from one generation to another through practice. In order to maintain continuity farmers learn to know about culture through their bodies, in the practices of work and of living and acting in an environment that contains the experiences of past generations. Learning becomes a site of transmission in the broader sense of the farming culture, of history and everyday experience.

SUFFERING AND CREATIVE AGENCY

Where there is suffering there is also action, Wilkinson claims (2005). He brings a constructive and productive perspective to the discourse on suffering. He, like Kleinman and Bourdieu sees suffering as a tool by which to investigate meanings in the lifeworld, but is primarily concerned with how it debates these meanings and prompts social actors, as agents, into action. He presents the vital question of whether suffering and uncertainty need to be viewed as a *problem* for humanity, something we should shy away from. And his answer is that we should use it as a resource, an *enabling* factor in support of agency. In line with Farmer (1992) he looks at the issue of "agency in suffering" and begins by asking what the experience of suffering actually *does* to people. Wilkinson contends that: "a vital part of 'the problem of suffering'

¹² Approaches to practice and practical action have been represented in anthropology and sociology by theorists such as Malinowski (see Leach 1970), Polanyi (1958) and, more recently, Bourdieu (1990), Marglin (1990), Ingold (1993a & 1993b), Giard (1998), Keller & Dixon Keller (1996), Mogensen (2005), Pálsson (1994), and Sutton (2001). These depart from a reductionist view of human action, emphasising instead the social nature of it as everyday activity and situated practice.

consists in a compulsive struggle to reconstitute positive meaning for self and society against the brute force of events whereby all matters of human value and dignity are made to appear violated and betrayed” (2005: 11, emphasis in original). He believes, like Bourdieu and Kleinman, that social science research can become a form of critical praxis through research conducted on social suffering. The two-sided nature of suffering, both as a senseless and wasteful phenomenon and as one that points to the human potential to rise above difficulty, is what makes it so vital to bring into political discourse and make sense of the senseless that happens in suffering. Wilkinson concludes that it is particularly the persistent struggle of individuals, as agents, to construct a positive meaning out of suffering that renders it significant. Rather than ponder ourselves silly on what suffering *does* to people we should take the more constructive stance of pondering what people *do* when faced with suffering (2005: 44–45).

Sociological action theory is saturated with the theory of rational action where all action is understood in relation to the idea or degree of inherent rationality.¹³ The German social theorist Hans Joas (1996) does not believe that a normative concept of action is the way out of this dilemma. Instead, the moral dimension of action should spring from empirical knowledge as proposed by pragmatists such as John Dewey (1922) and George Herbert Mead (1932, 1950, 1964) who felt that it did not suffice to describe a structure, system or institution. Of equal importance is to describe how these were used and how the development of ‘insider’s knowledge’ of particular social processes enabled individuals to act in a creative and voluntaristic way (Gardiner 2000: 4). Joas suggests that we regard creativity as an analytical dimension of all human action, but one that also is caught up in unexpected obstacles such as unattainable goals, and action that backfires. The advantage of a theory of creative action is that it has the capacity to create new actions to counter obstacles encountered in goal attainment. One important aspect of action that John Dewey has pointed to is the contrast between action in pursuit of goals that are set externally and the ideal of action replete with meaning. He finds it is important to make a distinction between the *goals* and the *results* of actions and criticises the possibility of action being carried out under self-imposed or external compulsion. The reason why people act must take into consideration the corporeality of human action because the body allows us to choose between various modes of perception and action and to switch from one

¹³ Joas (1996) explains that although Parsons (1937; 1951; 1970) sets out to criticise utilitarianism and the false applicability of the model of rational action he never rejects it out right. Additionally, his is a social theory of action that does not recognise how the philosophy of pragmatism contributes to opposing the model. He also fails to take into account the nature of social relations or social interactions and their altruistic intentions.

mode to another. Joas finds that when we depart from the teleological approach we come to realise that “it is not sufficient to consider human action as being *contingent* on the situation, but that it should also be recognised that the situation is *constitutive* of action” (1996: 160, emphasis in original). This brings in the vital concept of ‘situation’ as acting upon us as agents. He also stresses the importance of the body being subjectively present in action theory and how our experience of the body is interrelated with that of other bodies.

Whyte (1997), in her work on how the Nyole of Uganda deal with misfortune, concretely outlines how agency is located in suffering. She finds that: “Suffering is not necessarily a problem at all until it is too late to avoid it. Then the challenge is to deal with it. It is not a question of making affliction sufferable, but of engaging it in order to change it” (Ibid: 13). Coming to grips with misfortune as agents is geared towards bringing about a change in circumstances through a variety of means. Her work shows that because uncertainty or suffering is a complex matter, taking on a variety of forms, the means to deal with it also need to be varied. People have multiple strategies to deal with it and, thus, their mitigating actions are a form of creative agency. It is characterised by trial and a positive attitude. This Whyte calls acting in a subjunctive mode, of having a belief in something being possible or not possible, contingent in nature. She subscribes to an anthropology of practical reason, rather than an anthropology of culture that looks for patterns of communication and meaning. To her, cultural meaning is found in practical action and although she leans on the theoretical tradition of pragmatism she finds it insufficient to explain idioms used by actors. For this we need cultural analysis. This entails firstly understanding what is at stake in people’s lives. In other words, what they strive for and what resources they put to use to achieve this such as meaningful ideas and idioms.¹⁴ How individuals react to the chancy nature of life is a socially mediated and shared phenomenon. The explanatory idioms they use question what one’s position is in a local, social micro-cosmos.

MEANINGFUL AND FRAGMENTING SUFFERING

My own understanding of the role of suffering as a social tool with which to understand lived reality is through the issue of social change. Change to me can have both negative and positive consequences and similarly suffering has both a negative and positive side to it. Combining suffering with positive outcomes is, no doubt, hardly the primary connection that comes to mind. I have wanted to take on the challenge of investigating suffering as a central part of human

¹⁴ Whyte’s use of idioms is “as guides to action that are in common currency in the community (shared, like a dialect) that convey meaning and are understood like a vocabulary, and that constitute a situation in a particular way, as Foucault meant that discourse does” (1997: 23).

experience, one that brings with it both negative and positive outcomes. As Wilkinson (2005) points out, social science needs to take issue with suffering and use it as both a methodological and epistemological tool that can help us to understand what everyday life experiences mean, as a manner of understanding the world. Following Jackson (2005) I posit that life is characterised by fragility – uncertainty is present in all our undertakings because we can never know the exact outcome of our actions and our lives are controlled by various agents. When we are faced with change in life it leads to uncertainty, regardless of whether the outcomes of change are positive or negative. Change re-shuffles the card deck of life and it can either deal us a better or less advantageous hand than the one previously dealt. Uncertainty demands a response, mitigating or meaningful action.

Lived uncertainty brings about suffering that is two-fold; on the one hand *fragmenting suffering* and on the other hand *meaningful suffering*. The first type of suffering is caused by external factors, that which comes from the outside of the social world of farmers. Various agents such as inspectors, EU bureaucrats, politicians, fragment the social order of the farmers' lifeworld by forcing them to engage in senseless action that goes against the local logic of practice. It is an intrusion into the moral world of farmers because it forces them to produce in a "bad" way and it questions the knowledge basis of everyday actions that are part and parcel of the farming life. Being forced into a certain moral space of activity hinders the agency that produces "good" farming and thus also continuity. It threatens the basis of life and leads to further uncertainty about the future. *Meaningful suffering* emerges from the inside of the social group of farmers. It leads individuals to engage in practical action based in everyday experience like working according to "good" farming practice and producing a tidy landscape. It strengthens and builds on existing values. Both the action taken is imbued with meanings and at the same time it creates meaning. In the social world of farmers being engaged in practical action means that they keep on working on the land, maintaining their farm and in such a manner they fulfil the important legacy of ensuring the continuity of the family farm. Through creative agency farmers direct their actions towards a desired future of the survival of the farm. Through the action of working they act both as agents and interact with other agents such as their peers and their ancestors. At the same time they display and strengthen the central values of the farming life; being hard working, honest, modest and restrained. In this manner suffering, as an active verb, an active *doing* is both an answer to and a consequence of the situation in hand. Here I understand suffering and agency as being intertwined, two sides of the same coin. Even when it is an issue of giving up farming, of giving in to circumstance I strongly believe in the active component of being in the world through the experience of suffering, here as endurance, patience and hope,

survival, simply living through it. Even when individuals passively submit to a situation there is always a degree of active engagement with what is happening because situations act upon persons and in this manner demand a response. The very nature of human life is about agency although in some cases it can be very minimal. I believe that the central role of agency emerges precisely because it is set against the backdrop of suffering, of the idea that those things which are at stake in one's life are threatened.

HOW TO STUDY SUFFERING

Can the anthropologist, the outside observer ever really understand the suffering of others? On various occasions I have been asked what authority I have to claim I can know someone else's suffering. I do not claim this, nor has it ever been the purpose of my research and this thesis. We can never know someone else's suffering just as we can never know someone else's culture. The aim has been to use the concept of suffering as an analytical tool to make sense out of experience and to be a witness to people's suffering and what they do with this experience.

To Bourdieu (1999: 628–629) the ethnography of ordinary suffering is a social tool or technique, a liberating force that makes visible to sufferers the sources of their malaise as grounded in social causes, rather than individual failure. With his study on misery Bourdieu has wanted to draw attention to how social concerns have been largely left out of political debate. He believes that the role of politics is to discover the implicit, that which is hidden under layers of social discontent. The work of Arthur Kleinman, similarly, makes this methodological point. He believes that by illustrating and bringing to light the lived experience of suffering we can move it out of the clinic or hospital into the world of ordinary life. It enables us to connect personal and inter-subjective experience to issues of political violence and injustice. Suffering, in this manner, becomes a means by which to make sense of uncertainty. Once individuals become aware of their suffering and the social forces that lie behind it they also come to understand the nature of uncertainty that surrounds their lives. Awareness and understanding are the first steps that enable us to take mitigating action – *doing* something about suffering.

It is also largely a methodological issue of how suffering can be studied. Wilkinson (2005) explains that in many instances suffering escapes definition and articulation (see also Skultans 1998: 17). How to circumvent the study of a state of being that does not lend itself to explanation, clothed in silence and the impossibility of being concretely expressed by those afflicted by it? Here is where I believe that the ethnographic method becomes the only possible channel for making visible that which conceals itself. By embedding

suffering in a local and particular context it is possible to mirror how it emerges as a product of local values and ways of acting. Also, through the method of participant observation it becomes possible to discern that which cannot be made explicit through verbal means by studying actions and inter-subjective relations between people. Part of fieldwork is learning to *see* so that “they” become one of us. It requires detailed description of these unfamiliar people and re-description of what we are like (Rorty 1989: xvi quoted in Hastrup 1995: 5) The cross-culturally shared aspects of experience makes it possible for the anthropologist to acculturate herself to the events that informants have experienced and to gain anthropological knowledge via shared social experience (Hastrup & Hervik 1994). Much of this happens on the level of the body – that one acculturates one’s body to new patterns of appropriate behaviour, one incorporates culture through a variety of senses while in the field (Bruner 1986: 22–23).

Seeing suffering

My position as an anthropologist working while doing fieldwork facilitated an actual shift of identity, theoretically implied by participant observation. I internalised an experiential space with a rhythm of life different to what I was used to and experienced a different culture which I learned through bodily involvement. I not only worked with my own living environment – I literally consumed it by eating food produced in the immediate environment. I dressed in a manner that was similar to my informants and my body posture and manner of walking became more sensitised to gripping tools and other implements used in a rural environment. As I increasingly became viewed as a “horse girl” working on Arja and Rainer’s farm I became objectified and subjectified by those who observed me working in that environment. I became part of a shared, embodied history of place and part of the local culture – it became inscribed in me. What I came to learn as a result of living in close proximity with people affected by the “small sufferings” of everyday life was to understand their plight by sensing the total and complex texture of events, through sensory and mainly visual means.

In western philosophical thought the hegemony of mind over body has given the visual precedence over the other senses. According to this line of thought the act of observing things around us is equated with knowing something about social life. The rationalistic (Cartesian), diagrammatic view of society posits that knowledge can be mapped out, divided into orderly parts and transmitted from one head to another without the aid of experience. It favours cognitive and linguistic models of meaning above phenomenological ones. Okely (2001) posits that we gain a certain quality of knowledge if we *look at* a landscape

without including any of the other senses. This way of looking is connected to a distant gaze of surveillance and overview. A number of researchers have contested the rationalistic and *unfeeling* manner in which vision has been equated with knowledge (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Fabian 1983; Stoller 1989; Ingold 1993; Okely 2001) and have called for *seeing*¹⁵ linked to all the senses and to a bodily engagement with the world.

To understand the reality of others we have to let ourselves be penetrated with the mundane events of everyday life, those that people engage in intentionally in order for life to go on. Embodied practices create meaning because they are learned through something I call a process of *learning by doing*, of being shown how a certain task should be carried out. Anthropologist Tim Ingold talks about “*situated learning*” which is grounded in the context of participating in every day life and of an apprenticeship that comes from learning as an interactive process (Ingold 1993). When we perceive our environment we are simultaneously creating this environment through modes of practical activity in the world, the basics of life like growing food, building houses, working concretely with your living environment. Michael Jackson points out that the distinct uses of the body “mediate a personal realisation of social values, an immediate grasp of general precepts as sensible truths” (Jackson 1983: 337). If we master the body and the specific body techniques that ensure the continuity of life we have laid the base for the mastery of both social and intellectual skills. Essentially, the engaged *seeing* that Okely (2001) proposes we use as a tool in understanding local culture is about a *seeing by doing* and, in most cases, a *seeing by doing* together.

The radical empiricist approach (James 1976; Jackson 1989) that I subscribe to makes it possible for the ethnographer to understand knowledge in situated contexts and tie acting to a web of meanings, both in the present and past. I borrow from Okely (1994) the idea that it is through the sensory knowledge of lived experience that we can attempt to make some kind of intrusion into people’s consciousness. To interpret how suffering is seen in the landscape the ethnographer’s task needs to be one of engaged practice with people in a situated context. This awareness of place and practice should include all the senses; hearing, smell, touch and vision. By myself being involved in the banality of everyday practice (Bruner 1986: 7) I came to understand why an untidy landscape causes distress. Work left undone in a country where the “cult of work” (Apo 1996) has an important position is truly a breach against the social order, a moral statement about not being able to follow the cultural script of a hard working individual because of a lack of motivation, time, money

¹⁵ Grasseni (2004: 53) in her study of Italian cattle breeders talks of the notion of skilled vision, which she describes as a way of looking that implies “an active search for information from the environment, and is only obtained through apprenticeship and education of attention.”

or simply a paralysing sorrow over the impending end of a life's project. By working in the landscape with local people I came to understand the basis for seeing suffering in the landscape. I wanted to learn the local culture through the calluses in my hands that had been created by the practice of corporeal labour. I cleaned animal stalls, cared for the garden and maintained the yard, picked and sorted potatoes, built fencing, picked berries, made juices and jams, wove a traditional long pile rug, drove elk during the hunting season. All the time the landscape was around me signalling the changing of the seasons through the hues of the forests and fields; the smells of sugar beet and grains ripening on the fields, fertilisers spread on the crops; sounds of combi-harvesters humming, forestry machines grumbling, gunshots echoing in the forest. I ate the produce of the land in both every day and festive settings; potatoes picked straight from the field, a roast of moose meat, and pies made with blueberries and raspberries, syrup made from the shoots of fir trees. Through purposive action I, like farmers, came to know the problem of present day life, the reality of life among these farmers. I got to know the hidden miseries, the emotions, the worries and hopes which filled the air in Norrås but, could not always be heard in verbal expression.

Farming is very much about a visual tradition of learning by *seeing* and *doing*, skills based on a sensual knowledge of place, as well as a historical memory of the work previously conducted there. The wisdom passed on from one generation to the next is embodied in practice – it is an integral part of the *habitus*¹⁶ (Bourdieu 1990). Distinctions in this rural milieu are drawn on the basis of things *seen* in the landscape like the condition of your house, the growing capacity of your fields, the straightness of the furrows of the fields, the tidiness of your forest. This is also a way of acquiring knowledge. Learning how to see, or *read* nature is concretely linked to ensuring a good harvest and high productivity. You learn to judge the climatic conditions and to live according to the rhythm of nature. Nature is both something you control and co-operate with. When the landscape you maintain starts deteriorating your suffering becomes visualised to others, acting as a reminder of how fragile the balance between success and failure is. It is also a representation of how outside forces, like the market economy, are acting upon the land and controlling your chances of being engaged in “*good farming practice*”.

It is mainly this “small” and “routinised” suffering happening in the actions and conditions of ordinary life that is of relevance to my analysis. An awareness of the social and structural origins of the suffering farmers are facing helps them endure it and makes it *meaningful*. They have an implicit awareness of

¹⁶ Jackson (1996: 20) finds that Bourdieu's focus on the mundane quality of human strategising, agency and habits makes it comparable to the term “lifeworld”, borrowed from Schutz (1989: 1 quoted in Jackson 1996) and employed by Jackson.

their historical position in creating safety (food security) through production of food and of representing a way of life that has through the ages been stable and characterised by a strong sense of continuity. This is where their source of certainty lies and this is also projected into the future as a certainty that conditions will change – hopefully for the better. Due to the cyclical nature of work in farming there is an awareness of the long durations of historical time; that although hardship can be present in a certain historical time slot, it is a temporary condition and everything always changes, at some point – like the weather. In the mean time, farmers *act* to preserve continuity.

Metaphors and narratives

The use of metaphor within anthropology is a common practice and not least within research in medical anthropology. For anthropologists metaphors are used as a way of thinking about and interpreting textual data. We are interested in the function of the metaphor, the cultural context or the semantic mode in which it appears. One of the most important features of metaphor is how it is used and how it is understood as part of a total context of reality and the social consequences of the local usages of metaphorical imagery. Within anthropology metaphor used to be a precise, technical term as it was used by Levi-Strauss (1963 quoted in Hastrup 1995: 35), but, Hastrup feels that today it “has become a catchword for everything from allegory through fantasy and deceit” (1995: 35). The further expansion of the use of metaphor came with Lakoff and Johnson’s book “*Metaphors we Live by*” (1980) where the authors maintain that there can no longer be a sharp distinction between the literal and metaphorical because of the far reaching effect of metaphors in daily language use. In medical anthropology there has been a particular interest in how illness is metaphorically embodied, accounted for and communicated. It has been particularly important in the analysis of the gap in patient-physician communication or in understanding how identities are reconstituted after the crisis of illness. Becker (1994), for example, points out that because metaphors frame and structure meaning they play a significant role in individuals’ attempt to reconstitute a sense of self after a disruption. They both help individuals make sense of these disruptions and mediate efforts to create continuity (Ibid: 384). The impression of coherence is also tied to metaphors’ ability to bind together past and future, creating a means of “return to the whole” (Fernandez 1974 & 1986). Metaphorical statements reveal shared understandings and common vocabularies expressing specific values, collective identities, and shared knowledge. Simply put, “a metaphor is a device of representation through which new meaning is learned. [It] reduces two terms to their shared characteristics, enabling linguistic transference of one to the other”

(Coffey & Atkinson 1996: 85). Although there has been abundant reference to metaphors in connection to illness beliefs these deal with metaphors on a symbolic level. They focus mainly on interpretations rather than the ways in which metaphors situate themselves within the social context and practices of everyday life (See Becker 1994; Clatts & Mutchler 1989; Henry 1999; Martin 1990; Weiss 1997).

Metaphors are, however, not conceptual puzzles external to social life; they intervene, shape and produce action with and within the body. Kirmayer's (1992) use of metaphor is aimed at unmaking the subordination of the suffering body to philosophical and political ideals where ideas become divorced from agents and situations, leading to a de-contextualisation of knowledge and value and the de-valuing of the body as something disorderly. To really understand how meaning is made we need to take the route via the body because "the body represents a longing for community, for bodily connection and participation in a habitable world of substance and feeling" (Ibid: 324). He believes that metaphors are creative of meaning and not only in a linguistic sense, but, more importantly through the body, something he terms "enactive metaphors" that are made with gestures and action (Ibid: 333). Both types of metaphors – perceptual and enactive ones – are grounded in bodily experience. The meaning emerges in our capacity to use bodily experience to think with metaphorically.

The heart of the significance of metaphor lies in how they "embody the situational knowledge that constitutes culture" (Ibid: 339) by linking the micro-cosmos of the body to the macro-cosmos of the social world. Kirmayer finds that in order for us to understand the relationship between the three bodies, i.e. the individual, social and politic (Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1998) we need to understand "the processes that mediate the relationship between body, self and society; between bodily feeling and social symbolism – psychophysiology; between social symbolism and politics – rhetoric; and between body-politic and body-self – the dynamics of knowledge and power (Kirmayer 1992: 324)."¹⁷ Kirmayer's (1992: 325) notion of how metaphors are bodily and socially grounded is a critique of the "rational man position" within medical anthropology which assumes that there is a rational link and coherence between knowing and doing. His stance is that the situational character of belief points to the fact that action does not necessarily spring from belief because people act against their beliefs. The failure to recognise the primacy of the irrational has to do with the lack of attention to the embodiment of meaning (See also Ricouer 1978), of overlooking the simple fact that we

¹⁷ Here we see a similarity with Bourdieu's thoughts on the "thinking and feeling body" and of how the social world is inscribed upon the body (Bourdieu 1977b & 1990b).

think and act through our bodies and that bodies are irrational in their doings (Kirmayer 1992: 330).

My approach to discourse in this thesis is much the same as Kirmayer's, that is, not in terms of a linguistic model, but from a pragmatic point of view as "a culturally mediated human encounter in which active agents struggle to negotiate meaning with materials given to them by the cultural surround." (2000: 156) When analysing what metaphors mean we should look to how metaphors are at once about physical embodiment and about the world outside where they point to issues of social power (Kirmayer 1992 & 1993). A good story, that effectively relates something about the social world and the social actors found within it not only tells something, but also *does* something because words have the capacity to do things (Austin 1962). Stories give narrators a chance to outline what is significant in their lives and the power in narrating lies in how stories have the power to shape conduct because "they have something to say about what gives life meaning, what is inspiring in our lives, what is dangerous and what is worth taking risks for" (Mattingly and Garro 2000: 11).

In my empirical material, talk about cancer causation is a manner of talking about society through the fragmentation of the body because every individual can potentially get cancer. In this manner "concealed suffering" becomes visible. Cancer is also a threat to continuity and to one's sense of wholeness as a person. This threat is paralleled in the daily life worlds of farmers – the threat of broken continuity should one be forced to give up farming. Illness perceptions indicate how individuals structure reality, make sense of reality and of changes taking place in the life world. This is akin to the ideas of Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1994: 232) on how illness alters the life world of sufferers. She finds that illness can be seen as a cultural and bodily praxis that enables sufferers to re-position their selves in the world. I also understand it as an "event" in its most basic form where it is not only a matter of the biological manifestations of illness affecting the body, but also that the "event" is an object of social interpretation calling into question social relationships (Augé & Herzlich 1995: 5). Equally, I claim that just like illness, also illness perceptions, like talk of cancer prevalence, indicates a different existential mode of being and doing in the world. Cancer perceptions become a spring board through which to talk about difficult experiences and to express anxiety over what will happen in the future.

4. FARMING IN FINLAND

The day is drawing to an end and it is already getting dark outside. All the animals have been fed and the laundry collected from the clothes line in the garden because the weather forecast predicts showers in the night. The television is on in the kitchen and Rainer lies watching it on the kitchen bench, just half a meter from the screen. He will lie like this for a number of hours before retiring to bed around ten. Arja is making a pot of coffee and has already put a basket of bread, and some cheese, ham and butter on the table for the evening meal. It is like most evenings with the same routine of first watching *Emmerdale* (a soap opera on a farming community in Yorkshire), then a popular Finnish soap about people living in the same apartment building in a quite affluent area of Helsinki (*Salatut elämät – Secret Lives*) and a mini-series based on a feature film “*Hylätyt talot, autiot pihat*” (*Abandoned Houses, Deserted Yards*) on the flight of the Karelians during the summer of 1944. Arja remembers what it was like in her childhood and images from the programme bring to mind her own experiences. Her family is from Karelia and was, like hundreds of thousands of others, forced to leave their small farm due to the war. They moved from Karelia to a small community on the mainland near Koppars during the Winter War (1939–40) and then returned to Karelia in the beginning of the summer 1944¹⁸, started building a house there, but had to be evacuated again by the end of the summer the same year when the Soviet army started heavy bombing of the area. In one scene a mother throws herself on her children standing in the yard as the bomber planes approach. Arja says she remembers her mother doing the same and one particularly clear memory was of awaiting a transport train to take them to the south west when the train station was bombed. People were ordered to take shelter under the tables and chairs. Outside they hid under the trains and, Arja states in a matter-of-fact manner and with a slow, calm voice: “Those who did not make it to shelter were blown to bits. The window panes trembled, but only one shattered.”

¹⁸ The Continuation War took place between 1941 and 1944. There was an initial period of fierce fighting followed by a longer more peaceful period, and then again in the beginning of June 1944 the Soviet Union started a massive attack on the Finnish front at the Karelian Isthmus.

People were loaded into cattle cars and driven with their animals – cows and horses – to the station of a preordained destination. One of her cousins walked from Karelia to the south west by foot with a cow: "Its hard to walk fast with a cow. She would stop to milk it and feed it". The family moved around Finland to eleven different localities in search of industrial work during the ten year period between 1939 and 1949 and finally received a plot of land to build a so called rintamamiestalo, *front man house* (the drawings for the house were a standard format), in a town not far from the place they had settled previously. Her father was injured in the war and received a small war veteran's pension which the family lived on. Her mother sewed patch work blankets to supplement the family income and Arja started working in a factory to help the family financially at age 15, staying in the job for 20 years. It was with her earnings that electricity was installed in the house and the first television set bought. In spite of her father's disability (paralysis in both legs) he used to work the land and built their house dragging himself up on the roof, walking supported by the plough. The war experiences have in recent years become more visible and openly spoken about. This is witnessed in the many new books written and films made on the subject. On the 15th of September, 2003, fifty years have passed since the last war payments¹⁹ were made to the Soviet Union. Some researchers claim that the role of the trade contacts to the Soviet Union have been exaggerated – the Finnish steel and paper industry would have expanded and developed without the pressure to keep industrial production going in order to make the war payments. There is talk – once again – of the suffering of the Finnish people and that they became debt free as a result of their never ending *sisu*.

(Field diary, September 2002)

Peasants as a subject of study within anthropology have been investigated by scholars such as Clifford Geertz, Robert Redfield, Julian Steward, Sidney Mintz and Oscar Lewis. Peasants are rural cultivators that raise animals and crops and they distinguish themselves from farmers, in the sense of agricultural entrepreneurs who run farms primarily as a business enterprise. Some of the typical features of being a peasant is being an agricultural producer who controls the means of production (i.e. their own labour), furnishes themselves with a caloric minimum through subsistence farming and has a replacement fund for necessary investments and a ceremonial fund to pay for such things as marriages and funerals (Wolf 1966). In the context of Finland and the context

¹⁹ Because Finland sided with the Germans in the Continuation war, as a means of regaining land lost to the Russians, they had to pay war payments to the Soviet Union. According to a peace treaty signed in Paris 1947 between Finland and the U.S.S.R. 300 million gold dollars (amounting to an estimated \$570 million in 1952) was to be paid by Finland to the Soviet Union in reparations. The debt was paid off in goods 1947-52 (Jutikkala and Pirinen 2002 [1966]).

of my field work I feel it is more appropriate to use the term farmer, as this is a term that is used by local cultivators themselves. The type of farmers included in this study do not primarily belong to the category of entrepreneurs because their attitude towards the site of production, the farm, mirrors that of peasants who view their land holdings both as an economic unit and a home (Wolf 1966 & 1982). Peasants or rural communities have been the focus of research for anthropologists both in Europe and beyond. In The United Kingdom there has been a tradition of “returning home” to describe cultural difference within British society since the early 1980’s sparked by earlier work on village life (eg. Frankenberg 1957) and by a need to dispel the over-simplified view of the homogeneity of British culture caricatured and exploited by the media and politicians (Cohen 1982).

Peasant ideology within Finnish agriculture has old roots and even within political rhetoric reference is made to the idealised peasant, particularly in the post-Civil War period (Nousiainen 1971; Kirby 1979). Several decades later farmers were portrayed as the spearheads of Finnish independence against the threat of Soviet-inspired collectivism. This is somewhat ironic, as economic collectivism used to characterise Finnish farming practices since land ownership was strongly communal until the second half of the 18th century (Jones 1977). The enclosure movement that changed land ownership patterns and the sudden rise of the timber industry increased individualism, turning self-sufficient farms into small capitalist enterprises (Alapuro 1978). Ethnographic field work has been conducted on arctic milieus, Saami culture, villages and smaller communes in Finland (Lander 1977; Frölander-Ulf 1978; Roberts 1982; Abrahams 1991; Honkasalo 2003 & 2006). Additional sociological studies of rural Finland have received heightened attention since Finland joined the European Union in 1995, focusing on changing lifestyles of rural women (Sireni 2002; Härkki-Santala 2002; Högbakca 2003), the cultural and social meanings of stories collected from farmers after EU membership in 1997 (Nirkko & Vesala 2004), and cultural models shaping the lifestyle of farmers (Silvasti 2001). There has also been research conducted in the area of folklore studies (eg. Ahlbäck 1955 & 1983; Lönnqvist 1974 & 1978; Lönnqvist, Toivanen & Dahl 1980; Korhonen 1981, 1999 & 2004). These recent studies of farming in EU Finland have been important reference points in my own study, because they have consolidated the view that there is a struggle going on regardless of where in the country the farming is conducted and what type of farming one is involved in. Considerable differences exist within Finland in terms of farm size and the overall wellbeing of agriculture. In the southern and coastal areas of the country farming has been more lucrative, the soil is fertile, large stretches of open fields can be found and the climatic conditions are more favourable than in the northern and eastern areas of the country.

FARMING IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD

The years following the Winter and Continuation Wars (1944 and onwards) were a time of reconstruction, hope and enthusiasm over the common project of re-building the nation. The settlement and land reform activities of post-war rural Finland were extremely significant milestones in Finnish recent history. A tenth of the Finnish population had to be resettled on land either donated by the government or colonised from large land owners, which turned Finnish agriculture into a mode of livelihood primarily based on small holdings.²⁰ A total of 285 000 hectares of arable land was lost after the wars and around 250 000 out of a total displaced population of 450 000²¹ were farmers in need of farming land. Through special legislation, the *Maanhankintalaki* (the Land Acquisition Act), passed in 1945, 40% of land needed for settlers was appropriated from large land owners and a total of 100 000 new small holder farms were established – a process that continued into the 1960's (Kupiainen 1985: 95). Finland was the only OECD member state where small holding farming was practiced on a large scale (Alestalo 1980: 117). This detail of history is what sets Finland apart from other nations that participated in World War II. It was the only nation that vowed to provide all displaced families with new land parcels and actually carried through this promise. Social policy idealised the farmer and was aided by the dominant position of the Agrarian Party following the civil war and then carried on into the post-war period²² (Kirby 1979; Nousiainen 1971 quoted in Roberts 1989: 23). The production of Finnish food for the Finnish nation gained in importance after independence and grew further in the years following the Winter and Continuation War. The moral role of farmers was to feed the nation and to defend the land through this production (Alasuutari 1996: 59–61). It was a period of sacrifice and solidarity during which the whole nation worked together to build up the country and pay back the war debt. The spirit of sharing and helping was strong and everyday life was characterised by a frenzy of working – clearing land, getting timber for house construction from the forest and constructing dwellings using voluntary work inputs – so called *talkoo*

²⁰ Settlement activities have been practiced since the 1500's. After the civil war a law was passed to give crofters the right to buy the property they cultivated and a fund was set up to provide them with loans (Alestalo 1980: 117).

²¹ The number varies according to the source. Laitinen (1995: 52) states that there were 410 000 displaced people and out of them 230 000 persons had earned their livelihood by farming.

²² Following the First World War the food security dropped to 40% and there was hunger in Finland because cereals could not be imported. The government instituted a policy to encourage the development of new farming land, by clearing land and draining marshlands (Helsingin Sanomat 2000).

work. The idea of self-sufficiency was firmly rooted because there was a shortage of all types of goods, including building materials. The creation of vegetable gardens and planting of fruit trees and berry bushes was encouraged through the advice provided by numerous civic organisations.

The most common form of agriculture was dairy farming combined with forestry, the exception being southern Finland where cereals and sugar beet production was more predominant. Small-holdings consisted of both arable and forest land (Granberg 1992: 53–54). Forest ownership is an integral part of farming in Finland and is seen as an important form of investment, a kind of farm-based savings account to be used in leaner times for vital investments connected to the maintenance of the farm. Forestry activities shaped the structure of Finnish agriculture at a time when Finnish export in wood was a significant source of income for a government burdened with war payments. In the west and south of the country most forests are privately owned and many forest owners today live in the urban centres but retain country cottages.

The 1950's was also a time period characterised by major structural changes in farming and forestry due to mechanisation; use of fertilisers, pesticides and new, more effective species that increased yields; industrialisation, and; the construction of the welfare state which offered educational opportunities and service sector jobs. At this time over a third of the labour force worked within agriculture and forestry, a situation that the other Nordic countries experienced in 1930 (Ibid: 58). Prior to the Winter and Continuation wars Finland was a "peasant state" and the welfare state project made a late breakthrough from the 1940's onward as a result (Granberg 1999: 315). The effects of capitalism and global markets, as well as government policy aimed at quelling the worst effects of market forces, made farmers pawns in a political game beyond their immediate control. A shift in focus occurred in agricultural policy making since the 1950's and onwards. The policy climate moved from settlement activities to income policy. When the old peasant society dissolved a new dependence on governmental activities was created. The impact of agrarian interests encouraged the development of universal coverage of social insurance to include entrepreneurs and farmers who were not wage earners in the technical sense (Granberg 1999: 313).

One of the greatest changes in agriculture is that many heavy work tasks have become automated leading to drastic reduction in village populations. Between the years 1920–2000 the population in villages has reduced by more than half. In the 1950's it was mainly agricultural labourers who left the countryside to find jobs in the cities and in the 1960's the remainder of those labourers and farm house children who did not inherit the family farm left for work in the factories in Sweden. Many women and men left to educate themselves or to find employment. During this same time period and continuing into the

1970's the government started curtailing agricultural production, removing the heavy subsidising of small holdings, "packaging of fields"²³ and also integrating farmers into the national income structure.

The number of farms in Finland decreased by a third between the years 1964 and 1980 – the change in policy climate has been drastic and rapid. In a period of twenty years the welfare state went from supporting small holders to stringent regulatory measures to force them out of production and to expand the scale and production capacity of Finnish farms (Ibid: 57). The development of new forms of livelihood in the rural areas and specialisation of production has been characteristic from the 1980's onward as well as the tendency for farmers to turn to part-time farming and supplement their income through especially women's off-farm wage labour. As well, public sector jobs in the rural areas were created as a result of the growth of the welfare state (Ibid: 59). Rigorous policies to curb agricultural production were in continuous use in the 1990's, which weakened farmers' financial security and increased their sense of vulnerability. In the era preceding European Union membership income negotiations within agriculture were settled between the Finnish government and the national central organisations of agricultural producers. They decided about production prices, grant levels and marketing responsibilities. The Central Organisation of Agricultural and Forestry Producers would negotiate with the government on prices of milk, meat and cereals. Considerable focus was placed on the geographical location and size of the farm when deciding on grant sizes within the country (Vihinen 2004: 22).

When Finland joined the European Union in 1995 the price of agricultural products dropped on average by 40% and sometimes as much as 60%. The shift to the new system took place without there being a transitional phase to soften the effects of the change, although this had been promised to farmers in the pre-referendum period. Now all the prices of produce are decided in advance by the industry and the government decides on the size of the subsidies. Additionally, there are sanctions if you exceed the set annual quota per farm of eg. milk or sugar beet. For most farmers, though, only half of their income comes from agriculture (Rannikko 2000: 24–29). Decision making on the most central aspects of agricultural policy shifted to Brussels and the Finnish government can, in negotiating with the EU agricultural commissioner, make decisions that counter the aims of the national producers' organisations (Vihinen 2004: 22). Within the new system farmers are no longer compensated for their work input through the price of the product, but, rather through the number of hectares under cultivation or let to lie fallow to

²³ The law regarding the packaging of fields, introduced in 1969 included compensation paid to farmers if they "packaged" their field meaning not producing on it, planting forest on the land, or being forced to pay the government if field land was cleared from the forest (Korkiasaari 2000: 140).

protect the environment.²⁴ The marketing risk is now more clearly lodged with the farmer than with the government. As a larger part of the income comes from grants it requires more meticulousness in filling out required forms and initiative from farmers, as well as being subject to inspection by Brussels through satellite imaging and through on-farm inspections carried out by national level inspectors (Ibid: 24). Now that most of a typical farmer's income no longer comes from selling produce, and instead is financed through taxes, many farmers feel they no longer are paid for their productive work, but are dependent on social welfare (Rannikko 2000: 5).

What creates uncertainty for farmers is the fact that part of the national grant portion needs to be re-negotiated with the European Union every six years. The fluctuations of the market, which now affect farmers more than in the period before EU membership, and the distance to decision making are factors that further increase farmers' sense of vulnerability. They have still not forgotten the difficulties they endured during the years of economic depression that Finland experienced in the early 1990's (Ibid: 24–29). Farming is in a vicious cycle of subsidies from which it is hard to break out of. The cost of land is constantly rising, making it ever more difficult for young farmers to inherit farm properties. Increased use of fertilisers lead to a growing environmental problem and, with it, a growing need for subsidies and regulations to protect the environment (Granberg 1992: 61). With its peripheral location and high living costs, on a European scale, and harsh climatic conditions affecting the size of yields, it is impossible for Finland to compete with the cheap, mass produced agricultural products of South and Central Europe. And, then again, regardless of what is decided at the national and EU level, in the last instance the development of the grant level is dependent on decisions taken in the World Trade Organisation. Although trade barriers were removed from Finnish agricultural products at the time of joining the union there is now on-going negotiations about the removal of trade barriers on products produced within the European Union, the most recent case of conflict being the negotiations on sugar production. Developing nations have demanded that price subsidies on sugar be removed within the EU and a gradual reduction of sugar production in the union has been initiated. To Finnish sugar producers it means a death blow as their position vis á vis European sugar producers is already weak because yields are much lower than in countries located further south in the Union (Hufvudstadsbladet 2004).

What is important to remember is that the process of marginalisation and

²⁴The compensation system consist of many different types of grants; a national grant, the national component of the LFA grant (Less Favoured Nation) and a CAP grant (Common Agricultural Policy) for field production and animal rearing, environmental grant and compensation for environmental damage (Helsingin Sanomat 2006).

decimation of farms has been going on for many years in Finland, especially in the northern and eastern parts of the country where the packaging of fields meant the discontinuation of farms en masse in the 1970's. The south, by contrast, is in a much better position due to its climatic advantages and proximity to growth centres and the European continent. The situation that farmers are experiencing now in the southern parts of the country is in this sense not a new one – boom and bust periods have existed always within farming – but what is new is the locus of power to decide over the future of farming. Before it had to do with market forces and political instability such as war or crop failures, but now the ultimate decision makers are situated at a geographical and also cultural distance from Finland. It is this distance that is an additional source of worry to farmers because their possibilities to influence policy making are limited at best and non-existent at worst. The agricultural policy of the EU was created in the 1960's when there were six countries in the union – a situation very different than the one we have today. Farmers feel that decision makers who are far removed from the environment about which they make decisions cannot understand the concrete problems and working conditions surrounding farming in Finland, which differs both climatically, geographically and culturally from farming conducted in the large nations of the European continent like France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK. Although policy making in the EU is, in principle, created by all full-fledged member states together, it is in practice the largest and most powerful nations in the union that guide the direction of policy steps taken.

HISTORY OF FARMING ON KOPPARS

The house of Silja and Taneli lies tucked in the shade of tall pine trees and is surrounded by a small apple orchard. It is a typical front man house of the type that was built in the post-war years, with a kitchen and two large rooms on the bottom floor. A car is parked next to one of the trees and a large pile of chopped wood lies in the middle of the yard. Silja meets me at the door of the house and says: "I constantly tell my daughter to pile the wood into the woodshed. The autumn will be here soon and the logs have dried there in the yard the whole summer."

She shows me into the kitchen with an old, still intact, bread making, wood burning stove and traditional wood furniture – a table and some benches, and hand made wooden cabinets. A bucket of water stands on a counter near the cooker. There is no running water in the house. It has not been re-modelled since it was built by Taneli's parents in the early 1950's. Silja explains to me that right now all their money is spent on getting the pipe drainage done on their fields. The last fields have now

been completed and, she adds, that “all our savings have been used on it, but now it looks nice.” Taneli’s parents belonged to the land clearing generation and they left the drainage installing to their son. It will take Silja and Taneli many years to pay off the work, but it will increase the value of their land and since they now know their son will take over the farm they judge that the investment is a sound one.

“He won’t be a full-time farmer, though. Our property is too small for it. But he will be a moon light farmer, one of those that farms as a hobby, in his spare time. That’s why we haven’t made any improvements on the house since we moved in. When he takes over the house he will probably pull it down and build a new one. We have managed well in spite of it being so basic with the toilet and washing facilities in the out house. Whatever does not break you, hardens you, I always say.”

Taneli actively farms the land – mainly cereals – and Silja works for the municipality. They have 40 hectares of cultivable land and 40 of forest. Earlier it would have been considered an average or even large farm, but today they are struggling financially. It would be hard for them to make ends meet if Silja did not get income from another source than farming. Both Silja and Taneli have comments about the new regulations used in farming during the time of EU membership. To them it has meant a decrease of independence and a change in the way one cares for the land. Silja gazes out of the kitchen window over their fields where plastic piping is piled up waiting for the digger to come and install them underground:

“It makes no difference what you sow any more. You do not get any money from the fields. What’s the point of doing anything? It is a big thing for Finland that we go and do a thing like this [join the European Union]. You should get that salary there from the fields and not from a counter [in the welfare office]. The whole idea of it is lost! But it still has to be cared for according to good practice.”

Silja is aware of the long historical roots of the farm and after drinking a cup of coffee and eating one of her home made cinnamon buns she suggests we go for a walk. She takes me to a place of overwhelming beauty while narrating details about the landscape to me. The road meanders through a wooded section owned by the landed farmer of the area until the landscape suddenly opens up in front of us with its expanses of billowing copper coloured wheat and golden fields of barley. Forests line the fields and islands of groves and boulders lie randomly scattered among

the yellow mass of cereals. She points out to me which fields belong to them, the neighbours and an industrialist who buys up local property as an investment. Based on old surveyor's maps, given to her husband's parents when they purchased the farm, they know their fields are old, dating as far back as the 1700's. Silja appreciates the landscape of the southwest compared to that of Ostrobothnia, where she spent her childhood and youth, because of its variable, surprising nature and the openness, clarity and brightness it represent. During our walk we come across a farm which Silja says is not restful for the eye because it is untidy and communicates the owners' lack of motivation to keep the farm going and the property maintained. She refers to the barren sections of forest land we have passed where a neighbour, Roland has clear cut and then sold the property. When someone engages in radical felling of the forest the land is often sold straight away. Forests are a reserve bank and chopping them down is often a sign of financial distress. Roland's lack of motivation had been seen in the way he let his fields be overtaken by weeds and eventually he resigned himself to the fact that he was better off leasing out his fields than doing the farming himself. Another farm nearby communicated a similar message of defeat. Agricultural machines, metal scrap and rusty oil drums litter the yard and the roadside. The buildings are deteriorating and the fields are filled with weeds. The doors of the old barn are lopsided, bleached and cracked by weather and winds. Dozens of wild cats enjoy the rays of the evening sun by a field of lanky sunflowers.

(Field diary, August 2003)

The coastal areas of Finland were inhabited mainly by Swedish-speakers and they were involved in seafaring, commerce and barter trade through their contacts to the west, east and south. This also meant they were affected by a variety of new cultural influences. They practiced farming and animal husbandry which was sometimes combined with fishing and seal fishing (Ahlbäck 1985: 49). The regional differences within the country are significant, both geographically and climatically. Production practices differed within the country with shifting agriculture mainly practiced in the west and southwest, as compared to slash and burn techniques used in the eastern areas of the country. These in turn affected the rate of mechanisation within agriculture. The southern, south-western and western coastal areas are old field cultivation regions where the climatic conditions are advantageous and the fields were suitably large, even, and void of rocks which facilitated the use of agricultural machinery and also meant that individual farmers had more uniform fields in close proximity to each other. The cultivable land in the east and the north is, in contrast, rocky and barren. The landscape is in places hilly and field patches are small and scattered. The old estates and manor houses of the south and south

west have been forerunners practicing experimental farming and adapting innovations. They had both an entrepreneurial attitude and the resources necessary to carry out these experiments (Kupiainen 1985: 85–87). This was also the case on Koppars where a number of model farms were set up already in the 15th century when the area was administered by a Baron of the Swedish Crown. Much of the present day look of the landscape is a product of the end of the 17th century when the expansion of animal husbandry necessitated the development of meadow and grazing lands. The south-west is an area characterised by extensive farm lands and large arable tracts of land for each farm. It is dominated by lakes, rivers and coastal land surrounded by farmland, manor houses, tidy farmhouses and medieval churches. Patches of fertile, clay rich farmland are punctuated by islands of forests and boulders. The layout of villages differs in the country partially due to land reform activities carried out in the southern parts of the country between the 12th and 14th century. This resulted in houses being grouped together in a row or cluster surrounded by fields. In the east, fields and forest areas usually surrounded individual houses, which meant houses being were at a considerable distance from each other (Linkola 1985: 79–80).

Agriculture, seafaring, and the foundry industry have each shaped the specific characteristics of the island. Peasant seafaring (*bondeseglation*) was actively practiced since the beginning of the 1800's and experienced a period of expansion in 1850. Peasants always transported their goods to Stockholm and other ports in the west, but in the mid-1800's these ships were given permission to transport the goods of outsiders such as those of city dwellers. The boats became bigger and were built on the island with locals buying shares in them. By 1870 the golden age of peasant seafaring was over and by 1890 the last of the large ships were built on the island (Reference 4, 2000: 169). There were a number of other enterprising activities such as marble cutting, a limestone quarry, mining activities, a steel factory, glassworks, a fish curing industry, a biscuit factory, and a factory producing soft drinks. A blast furnace was built in 1686 in what today is Kullabruk and continued to expand and develop in the wake of technical innovations. By the year 1914 it was the largest factory of its kind in Finland employing 682 people. The industrial activities have continued into the present day with a rolling-mill and a wiredrawing machine with a workforce of 300 employees (Ibid: 170–181; Reference 3, 1999).

At the end of the 1600's around 70% of the population on Koppars were involved in agriculture. The majority of these individuals were labourers or servants and class differences were large. The same also applied to production methods with large estates using a variety of mechanical aides such as mowing machines, dairies, machine driven threshing mills, artificial fertilisers and subterranean drainage. The small farms of the crofters were burdened with

barren or dry fields cultivated with manual labour input. The most common crops were oat, rye and barley and smaller quantities of wheat – most of the wheat supply was imported from Russia. All farms had a potato field and on the larger farms there was sugar beet with around five farms engaging in experimental sugar beet production (Reference 10, 1995: 8–9).

By 1918 sugar beet production was practiced by both large land owners and small-holders. In many small households sugar beet was cultivated during some time period because it was profitable even if a farm had just a hectare of land. This was the year when the sugar factory in Salo started collecting beet from the archipelago areas. Sugar beet producers were paid in sugar which was considered an important and valued product (Reino, November 2002). The development of sugar beet production came to Finland in 1830 and through numerous experimental cultivation projects the quality and yield of sugar beet was improved. The commercial potential and interest in sugar beet production grew after the independence struggle when there was a severe lack of provisions. The government wanted to encourage the production of agricultural products thus guaranteeing the price on products such as sugar beet (Centralen för Sockerbetsforskning 2003).

The golden era of sugar beet production on Koppars ended in 1974 when the transporting route of the beet changed. Beet was picked up straight from the farms and driven to the sugar factory in Naantali, whereas they previously were taken to a collection point at one of the local harbours. This meant that small producers were often not included in the new transportation routes and had no way of getting their sugar beet to the factory. Informants tell me that the best period in farming was in the 1950's when farmers cultivated a lot of sugar beet and the sugar company paid well for them. In general when I asked my informants when they felt the village was most "alive" they mentioned the 1950's when local farms expanded and the mechanisation of farming was at its peak. People had not yet started moving to the cities and basic services like shops, schools, post offices, black smiths and tailors were available. Sugar beet is still one of the major crops produced on Koppars by farmers who have large tracts of field land. In the 1970's sugar beet cultivators would share machines, but as technology has improved and machines can do more within a shorter span of time farmers now no longer need to pool resources and work together in the same way as they did in the 1970's.

Dairy products that have also held a significant position in the local economy of Koppars.²⁵ There used to be several dairies on Koppars some of

²⁵ Finland was during the 1920's and 1930's a major exporter of butter and cheese and already in the 1200's the Swedish crown demanded taxes from the inhabitants of the south western coastal areas of Finland in the form of butter and cattle (Reference 1, 1993: 13). Cheese was exported from Finland to Sweden in the 1500's and it was also used as a form of tax payment (Sallinen-Gimpl 1985: 239).

which were set up already in the 15th century. German cheese making masters were brought to experimental farms to develop cheese production (Reference 1, 1993: 13). By the early 1960's most of the dairy farms on the island had been dismantled and for many villages the disappearance of the dairy was a hard blow.²⁶ Dairies were situated close to the sea where the steam boats would stop to transport dairy products off the island to the cities of Turku and Helsinki or were taken to Kullabruk by boat from where the products were transported to Sweden.

Most of the major technological changes in agriculture have happened from the 1950's onward; tractors and combine harvesters replaced horses and the car became a common mode of transport in most families. The labourious and resource intensive practice of putting in pipe drainage systems made farming with tractors much more effective because it provided the farmer with larger unbroken stretches of field land, thus increasing the growth capacity and value of the fields (Reference 10, 1995: 70). This task that was introduced into farming in 1915 was initially done by hand, but in the 1950's horses took over the task, to be in turn replaced by tractors and paid contractors to do the work. The land ownership patterns have also changed and historical events have divided up large farms – the most prominent event in recent history being that of the colonisation process, the land reform process that took place after the Winter and Continuation wars. Land owners were forced to give up land to settlers coming from the eastern parts of Finland who had been evacuated due to the war.²⁷ Another factor that has divided up farm properties is the inheritance legislation of the 1960's and 1970's which stated that all children should get an equal share of the inheritance. This caused capital flight from the rural areas to the cities. Now the legislation system of the past is being dismantled and one can no longer get your inheritance in advance. As late as 2003 the legislation stated that you had to sell your land to the inheritor once you retired and you had to give up everything at once. Now you can first rent out your land or sell it to an outsider or relinquish your property to the next generation before the official retirement age 65. Farmers receive a special pension for the transition period before receiving the regular pension once they retire (Maatalousyrittäjien eläkesäätiö – MELA 2006).

²⁶ A large portion of the war payments owed to the Soviet Union were paid in agricultural products, including butter. After the two wars, the war of independence and the Second World War the population survived due to domestic food production and following the war, food production was seen as an act of national pride.

²⁷ The *Maanhankintalaki* stated that in municipalities with a Swedish speaking minority settler activities should not change the majority position of the language. The settler law also included farmers with very small landholdings, who were unable to acquire more land where they lived, and who were not internal refugees from the Karelian region. (06.05.2006, <http://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maanhankintalaki>)

FARMING TODAY ON KOPPARS

One afternoon in the cosy farm house kitchen Arja and Rainer explain how they started with dairy farming. Rainer's destiny was to grow up to be a farmer and to run the family farm. His life was characterised by hard manual labour from an early age and endless days of work on the family's farm. In the 1980's he moved to his own farm and took up dairy farming until 1997. When Arja moved to the village she decided they should have a cow to provide them with milk. One cow eventually grew into 10 cows through breeding. With the onset of EU membership everything changed. Dairy farmers were told they needed to modernise and expand their farms in order to survive in dairy farming. It was no longer profitable to produce milk. At some point the government also decided to reduce the fat percentage in the milk. This meant dairy farmers had to either sell or slaughter their cows and buy new cows bred to make less fat milk, breed cows that produced this milk or then receive less for the milk they provided. In the long run they knew they would have to get the cows that produced milk with the right fat content. There were also a lot of costs for cows that fell ill. Cows had to be earmarked and if a cow lost its earmark a new one was to be ordered from Brussels. The EU regulations also demanded that manure be kept in sealed containers. To build one requires a big investment and loans to carry out the construction work. They felt that at their age they could not longer take a large loan. Also, the price of milk fell. To survive they would have needed more cows and more acres of land to cultivate. In the end they would have had to start financing milk production through income from elsewhere and that just went to the point of absurdity, so they got rid of the cows.

After these events Rainer's older brother, Martin came back to the village from Helsinki and settled in the ancestral home. He soon began a process of contesting the will after their father's inheritance. A bitter inheritance conflict over the family farm and forest land unfolded. It left Rainer struggling with a substantial debt due to the enormous costs spent on employing a skilful lawyer to help him defend his rights to the land. They do now talk to each other when they meet on the village roads where Martin walks to rehabilitate himself after a stroke suffered a few years back. The irony of it is that Rainer is the heavy smoker, but his brother suffered the stroke. Some locals state that misfortune strikes those who want too much. Villagers and other locals are aware that Rainer worked the family farm for years without a proper salary and most people are of the opinion that it is Rainer who is the thwarted brother, the victim. Rainer sold his land to the son of his neighbour and best friend Antti. He was particular about selling the land to someone he knew

would care for it well and produce on it actively. The farm has not been in his family for many generations. Rainer's grandfather sold his farm in a village some 10 km away because he wanted more land and found a new farm property in Norrås. This was a common practice used when farmers needed to expand their property on Koppars.

Rainer then tells me how he made the final decision to call the slaughter truck to take his animals away:

“The cows had the habit of always escaping during major holidays like midsummer, Christmas, Easter. It never failed. It was Midsummer that day when they broke through the fence four times. We were at a party near the village and Reino (the neighbour) called to say that the cows had broken through the fence again. I jumped in my car and drove straight to the pasture and through the fencing because I was so frustrated by their stubborn behaviour. With the horn of my Saab wailing I whizzed around the field rounding them up. Once I had them safely contained in the barn I went to call the slaughter house to book a truck to come and pick them up the following week.”

We all laugh at his story imagining him driving around like a madman with neighbours peering out of their windows to check what the bedlam was about. At the same time we know it had in no way been an easy decision for him to make. Arja says that when you work with animals you become emotionally attached to them. The loss of the cows is so enormous that she can barely talk about it without it bringing tears to her eyes:

“Your whole life is so entwined with the rhythm of the cows and everything around you is so geared towards caring for their well being because they are your source of income. You need to be intimately acquainted with each individual cow so you can in time detect if she is falling ill or eating incorrectly so her milk production goes down.”

They had started out with such enthusiasm, reading about all the new developments in the field and then one day it is just all gone. Some cows had been reared into adults on the farm. Arja had watched them grow and had been filled with satisfaction when they turned out to be cows that produced plenty of milk. In the beginning of their dairy farming career it was still common for salesmen to come around with bulls for sale. It was one of the central social events of the agricultural year for Arja and Rainer. The salesman would spend the whole day with them, display the bull, market its features, eat lunch with them and then a deal would be struck. Later when artificial insemination was taken into use this social

aspect of the work disappeared and Arja regrets it, because it always brings new life to the everyday when an outsider comes to the farm.

When I walk around the farm I detect remnants of the cows' existence scattered throughout the house and other farm buildings. In a lonely corner of the barn a TV monitor amasses dust. It was used to check on the progress of cows in labour. During those nights Arja would wake every hour to trudge off to the barn to see how the cow was doing. In the barn attic there are rows of metal fence parts used in building stalls in the barn and in the house the odd object adorned with a cow can be found. An old aluminium milk jug has been given a new task as a flowerpot in the garden in the summer. When I am about to visit a dairy farm on the other side of the island Arja asks me whether I could bring her some "cows milk", meaning non-pasturised milk taken straight from the milk tank in the barn. Milk bought in the shop does not taste the same at all, she explains. Rainer still drinks several litres of full cream milk a day and spreads thick layers of butter on his bread. Having been accustomed to working hard every day from early morning until late at night it is difficult for them to adapt to a life of idleness. After the cows left Rainer could finally dedicate his time to training trotting horses, a hobby he has had a passion for since boyhood and, I believe, a vital anchoring point in a life otherwise characterised by uncertainty and financial difficulty. Arja keeps herself busy caring for an array of small farm house animals that people have left in her care because they know that she can never refuse to receive a homeless animal. The stable is now full of horses, ponies, sheep, a pig, hens and rabbits and she runs a small business. Children from schools and day care centres come to spend time with the animals, go pony riding or have a ride in a horse drawn carriage.

Arja constantly busies herself with some work around the house, barn or garden. She will never outgrow the pride that drives farmhouse women of her generation to keep everything spick and span, tidied and clean in case some visitors drop by. She bakes bread and cinnamon buns, picks berries and mushrooms, does the gardening, knits during the long winter nights or reads books she has borrowed from the library in the municipal centre. She prepares two proper meals every day and serves afternoon coffee. She still lives according to the motto that if you work hard you have to eat well to keep up your strength. Farmers involved in animal rearing are very stationary people and with all the new animals on the farm people know they are still bound to their home. The house of Arja and Rainer is a social centre of sorts and visitors drop by to have a cup of coffee and hear the latest news from the village. The flow of visitors and neighbours is a saving grace because the house does not seem quite as empty as it would otherwise and having many guests raises your spirits at a time when more and more farms become silenced as they are deemed

too small to survive in the present system of agricultural production. It is no secret that EU membership has been a hard blow to farmers also in the south west although cultivation conditions are some of the best in the country.

(Field dairy, September 2002)

NEW MASTERS

Keijo, like most farmers, has strong opinions about the way in which farmers were fooled into voting in favour of European Union membership and although he now manages quite well with his farming he has not forgotten the way politicians and especially the agrarian party let farmers down in the pre-referendum and also post-referendum period:

”I was so strongly opposed to membership. It was such a devastating thing for me when we joined the EU, something I opposed more than anything. [– –] Basically it was deception. [– –] First there was a lot of manipulation which worked with the whole population. The population was turned EU-friendly, but it was not enough to get the needed votes. To the rural population they promised a transition support package. [– –] Part of the rural population was then fooled into voting for the EU. The following government was immediately ready to cancel the support package. That which had been promised was removed. Such deception was enacted that if a similar thing had been imposed upon any other group of citizens then the shirt would have been thrown off [they would have put up a fight].²⁸ Many of the rural folk became bitter. They had their fists clenched and were silent and turned inward in that situation because the deception was so raw. It was the worst kind of deceit and at the same time we became the subject of mockery.”

(Keijo, September 2003)

The practice of being scape-goated was something that many informants felt was prominent during the time period before the referendum on EU membership and which, to some extent, has continued into the present day. At the time of the referendum the Social Democrat Party blamed farmers for everything, claiming that they were the worst group for the society to maintain and that their use of pesticides and fertilisers contaminates the environment.

²⁸ The *Maanhankintalaki* stated that in municipalities with a Swedish speaking minority settler activities should not change the majority position of the language. The settler law also included farmers with very small landholdings, who were unable to acquire more land where they lived, and who were not internal refugees from the Karelian region. (06.05.2006, <http://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maanhankintalaki>)

The Centre Party, which used to be the party of the farmers, the voice of the countryside, let farmers down both in the pre-referendum period and the time succeeding it when referendum promises should have been redeemed.

Farmers complain about the many prejudices that still exist regarding them as a professional group. This perception is mainly based on what they read in the newspapers, attitudes of their city dwelling relatives, and policy decisions regarding agriculture, affecting the income level of farmers that, they feel, communicates a messages of depreciation of the profession of farming. Non-farmer informants have commented on how local farmers have a conservative outlook on life, meaning they have a strong belief in the value of private property, wealth staying in the family and expanding, and having sound family values, frowning upon such issues as divorce and common law marriages.

What could be the possible reasons behind these proclaimed negative attitudes? One explanation is that many Finns have only recently moved from the rural areas to the cities (starting from the 1950's onward), but still retain some links to their agrarian roots. Others have lost this link and have become fully integrated into the urban lifestyle, being maybe second or third generation city dwellers. Many of those who have followed the migration wave to the growth centres regularly visit relatives or have a cottage in a rural area. Some interviewed farmers said that the general population blame them for algae poisoning in the seas and lakes, or for receiving a free income from the government and for the increase in food prices. The fact that some farmers have four wheel drive cars strengthens the image of them as individuals who squander wealth on unnecessary luxury, as it is understood by city dwellers and non-farmers. Some informants mention that city people have an increasingly distant relationship to nature. They do not understand the link to nature and they believe nature is something that you can mess around with, that you can control. Taking life in its stride, and living according to the rhythm of nature is a natural stance towards life for a farmer. You have to cooperate with nature, also controlling it while simultaneously being aware of the specific conditions that it operates under. This is something that could also be interpreted as backwardness by individuals who are not familiar with what it is like living in the countryside and taking responsibility for the wellbeing of the land. In recent years a more positive picture of farmers has evolved as a result of various scandals tied to the quality and safety of food coming from other EU countries. The mad cow disease and the bird influenza are cases that illustrate the dangers of industrial farming where high yields and lack of individual control of animals increases. Although some scepticism remains regarding the notion of farmers living on grants, consumers do show solidarity by purchasing domestically produced food.

Being let down by the political system was a form of deception so raw that it silenced a whole professional group. Farming in Finland has always been one of

the basic industries of the countryside as it has been elsewhere in the world and now a rupture has taken place in this vital social arena. Prior to membership the strongest voice of dissent was that of the farmers, but once Finland entered the union protesting has been scant. There have been some visible public protest events that have mobilised producers from all over the country. One such event was the protesting by farmers outside of the national parliament in Helsinki in 1999.²⁹ Instead of concretely expressing worry or anxiety, farmers would, most often, cloak their sense of uncertainty in terms of it being the EU that is making their life difficult. They have also been able to concretely experience the effects of these new regulations in the number of fellow farmers who have closed shop, gone into retirement or rented out their fields to a neighbour with better chances of survival. In the municipalities on Koppars the number of farms has decreased by 25–35% since 1995 (MELA 2004).

What or who then is the European Union? How is one to understand the personification of an abstract term that lacks a face and a body? When framers talk of the EU they mean people who are the human extension of a bureaucracy – those that come and inspect, and those politicians who betrayed them at the time of the referendum, and those people who do not understand the practical realities of being a farmer and doing farming. Sometimes it can also be extended to include city dwellers and people perceived as being “against farmers” – who would like to dismantle farming because they feel it is too expensive and inefficient to be carried out in Finland. The lack of protest also boils down to the fact that farmers feel they no longer are a political force to take reckon with, and what can farmers threaten legislators with? They cannot protest because they have nothing to threaten with and there is no point going on strike. All the products they produce are available in other European countries and can easily be imported. Going on strike would probably be a greater advantage to those who are in support of a dismantling of Finnish agriculture altogether. Some farmers have tried to affect policy decisions by being actively involved in producers’ organisations, but say that channel of influence has been exhausted since European Union membership. Producers’ organisations have become watered down because it is no longer important how much you produce.

The power of institutions often lies in their lack of subjectivity and the vastness of the body of undefined individuals together creating decisions that significantly impact the lives of other individuals. One can only

²⁹ Farmers were protesting against the negotiations to be held between the Finnish government and the European Commission on the distribution of the national grant and the fact that Southern Finland was not given Less Favoured Area (LFA) status which meant a decrease in income for farmers in southern Finland, the lack of a transition period to prevent drastic cuts in income as the income basis changed from being product based to becoming hectare based, and constant changes in the regulations and grant amounts.

launch complaints and concerns to a representative of this system. It is these representatives that become the concrete face of the Union and the actions that they implement. In real life on Koppars the European Union is represented by inspectors and advisors responsible for implementing the directives. In most cases inspectors are appointed by the district level *TE-keskus*, the Labour and Livelihood Centre. At the same time the influence of the Union is also felt in the actions of individuals in one's near environment that are influenced by regulations and directives created by the system. In the case of agricultural and environmental advisors they may well be local people who come to check conditions on farms if complaints have been lodged by neighbours regarding the state of a farm. One example of this could be a farm that has not yet built a septic tank for the dung pile and a neighbour contacting the environmental advisor to express concern about dung and urine seeping into the ground water.

A NEW WAY OF WORKING

The new system has brought with it changes in the manner of working that are at logger heads with old routines and ways of farming. Alterations that have made farming cumbersome, that all informants refer to, are the bureaucratic procedures that have become part of farming since 1995. This means that farmers are required to do office work, rather than spend all their time on the fields, in the forest and in the barn. The nature of farming has always been such that it has required farmers to be multi-skilled because of the diverse tasks involved in running a farm. They need to be technicians, veterinarians, biologists, economists and now the latest required role is that of the bureaucrat. The thing that makes it all the more difficult is that farmers cannot understand what the sense is in providing bureaucrats with such detailed information. Being overloaded with paperwork takes time away from doing hands-on farming. And, additionally, it is not the act of recording alone that is cumbersome, but it is also getting the information right on the grant application form. If you make a mistake they will delay paying you your grant. The logic behind many of the regulations seems counterproductive to farmers and they are seen as a typical product of theorists rather than pragmatists in the field of farming. The ideology of entrepreneurship is steadily entering the system and with it the idea of "rational farming" with larger units and farms run as joint ventures. Requesting farmers to increase productivity in a climate of dropping income in farming is by small holders seen as a senseless way of relating to farming. When farming is conducted in small units it may lead to the farmer paying to produce:

“You never would have believed it. When we joined the EU we received a small booklet. Productivity had to go up. You don’t need to worry...No, we still manage here. In the cultivation itself there is no sense left. It’s calculated that if you produce 5000 kg wheat then it’s more economical to produce 2000. You are left more cash in hand from it. Like this there is no sense in cultivation.”

(Matti, November 2002)

This ideology of rational, entrepreneurial farming that is actively supported by all levels of decision makers and advisors is meant to make it easy for farmers. It implies cultivating the most suitable crops for the type of land you have; cutting costs by not buying equipment, but, instead using entrepreneurs; having large, unbroken fields; producing a smaller variety of products; having fields that lie close to each other; cooperating with someone else if you want to specialise; changing crop type in time when you notice it is becoming less profitable; and diversifying your income base by developing sideline businesses like processing of agricultural products or tourism. Monica talks about this new entrepreneurial model of farming, stressing that those who manage the best today in farming are entrepreneurs. The advisory services are geared towards this trend because this is a simple part of the whole agricultural sector. The system is easier to grasp if it is rationalised into an economic model. Survival in the present system of farming requires farmers to make huge investments to modernise and expand their facilities.

Twenty years ago a twenty hectare farm was large enough to support a family. Now you need 50–100 hectares of cultivable land, depending on what you cultivate, and if it is not possible to expand your farm size you have to specialise. Today the price of land is very high – around 10 000 euro per hectare and still increasing because there is a demand for land on Koppars and practically no land to buy. Many local farmers state it is difficult to expand and to compete with businessmen buying up land as an investment. Farmers say they primarily opt to sell their land to another farmer, but naturally, for many, the price received is the major incentive to sell to the highest bidder. This is further exasperated by the fact that the price of produce is too low to cover the rising costs of land so young people do not want to buy land. Some farmers opt to fell their forests to cover investment costs and some are in the lucky position that they can still run their farm on old investments using available machinery and having enough land to make ends meet. If a family cannot make the necessary investments there is yet another option and that is renting out your fields as a way of keeping the farm in the family. Another problem related to the expansion of farm size is that when the farm expands you have more work and need bigger machines. Farmers near retirement age are in many cases not

willing to make the enormous investments required to modernise and expand their farm. A gap is growing between those farmers who are willing and able to take the risks and make the necessary investments and those whose farms are deemed to be too small and out-dated to survive in the present situation. Monica talks about these “new”, business-minded farmers, but also about the tenaciousness of older values attached to farming:

“They [the “new” farmers] are no longer so emotionally tied to farming. They think in a more rational manner and do not have the same bonds that people of the older generation have. [–] Everyone is modern and follows the trend of the times so they do not dare say that ‘hey, there is also this’. That is why it is so dominant this rational business thinking. And that is why I believe it is so difficult to give up these farms and develop them because those other values are still there.”

(Monica, November 2002)

The system is also characterised by short-term thinking which does not fit well into the farming frame of mind. Most planning is done by individual farmers years in advance. Antero and Sari, in their fifties, who own a large farm (a total of 198 hectares) are irritated by this manner of thinking found within the EU system and the fact that the age old “farming sense” and the sense of honour of farmers is not respected:

“You cannot accept everything. It is too short-term [the thinking and acting]. It would not need to be so petty. Finnish rural sense is plentiful and they should trust us. It’s as if we were criminals if we make mistakes. Farmers have for hundreds of years cared fairly well for it [the land/cultivation]. Increasing the use of fertilisers and other things was the only way of getting income. At that time we imagined that it was the best way to get as much as possible from the fields. We have not used too much fertiliser.”

(Antero & Sari, July 2002)

Changes in farming cannot be initiated in an instant. It is a self-contained eco-system that functions according to a production calendar with a different time schedule than that used by decision makers and bureaucrats. These actions, based on a long span of time, patience and trust that your own knowledge will carry you are then juxtaposed against the short-term thinking of a large bureaucratic institution, the European Union. Here we see two separate worlds at loggerheads with each other. The incompatibility of the systems causes stresses and strains particularly for the farmers who feel they are completely powerless when coming up against a faceless bureaucracy and it increases the

element of uncertainty in their lives. Financial insecurity is one of the most often mentioned sources of worry that farmers have (Vihinen 2004; Silvasti 2001).

The various environmental grants and regulations of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) make it possible for farmers to let their fields lie fallow in order to protect the environment. One environmental regulation requires farmers to use protective rows at the edge of fields to catch the pesticide and fertiliser run-off from the fields to act as a kind of filtering system. They are also required to keep phosphorous levels low which decreases productivity. These new practices also cause weeds to spread from the pesticide free protective rows to the fields. Many farmers feel that the rules restrict farming productivity substantially and that they are based on a perception of productivity that is at odds with farmers' concept of how to care for the land through active farming. Insult is added to injury when farmers are required to attend training courses in order to receive these environmental grants and they feel it indicates a lack of respect and lack of recognition of the knowledge they have of the environment.

One of the issues that farmers have protested about the most is the Natura 2000 environmental protection programme.³⁰ It appropriates land from local landowners in selected areas of the country as a means of protecting the environment, particular ecosystems, or rare animal and plant species. On Koppars the appropriation decisions of the Natura 2000 programme were, according to local land owners, not communicated to them in time and there was no public discussion on the issue. Many of those required to give of their land took to revenge actions, drastic measures by cutting down their forests. Some locals on the "hitlist" decided to destroy what they had built up. It was their only way of protesting against a system they felt was unjust.³¹ Local people also question how long the appropriated land will remain as protected areas or what the government will actually do with the areas. They suspect that before long the project will be abandoned and it will require a huge effort to make the land productive again. Farmers' attitude towards and knowledge of nature differs from that of various experts such as those interested in protecting nature, who see it as a site of leisure, something to be enjoyed (Milton 2002: 57). To most

³⁰ Natura 2000 is the environmental programme of the European Union whose main goal is to create the European ecological network (of special areas of conservation), and to integrate nature protection requirements into other EU policies such as agriculture, regional development and transport. It includes policies to prevent the destruction of natural habitats and landscapes (European Commission 2004).

³¹ The Natura 2000 network in Finland was criticised for a lack of transparency in the preparation stage. In the southwest of Finland the conflict between private landowners and the Government of Finland was the most visible because of the large percentage of private land in the area and the intensity of land use for cultivation. Also arable land was demanded by Natura. Landowners that did complain against the appropriation decisions feared that Natura would compromise agricultural activities in an already hardening competitive climate within agriculture (Oksanen 2003).

farmers on Koppars the fields and forests are part of the general idea of nature, not one of admiration and a certain degree of distance based on not wanting to disturb nature. They give nature subjectivity because they generate knowledge with and from it. It is precisely this active cooperation and dependency on nature that guides their attitude towards it.

A general problem with the present way of working is that a larger portion of a typical farmer's income comes from subsidies than what was the case with the old system. This makes them dependent on the system in a different way than before and it substantially affects one's motivation to work. Carelessness and a gradual abandonment of caring for one's land and doing a good job are entering the system. The freedom to be one's own master is now gone and farmers feel they are totally regulated in this new system. Rikard, talks about the loss of this freedom because of increased control and the demands of compliance:

“What has driven us even more into the ground has been since EU membership. Now we no longer are independent. We are totally dependent on our subsidies. Half of my income comes through subsidies. It is not motivating to produce any more. The ones who are effective and try to produce more and of better quality do not gain anything from it. You often just have higher costs. We are reaching a limit where so called pseudo-farming is entering the system. One is not as exact any more, people are careless and do not invest an input in the same way [as before] [– –] Many farmers make their cultivation plans based on what they get subsidies for and not on what they can produce of high quality. That is what makes it less interesting to be a farmer today. [– –] Dependence on a subsidy is not motivating. [– –] You have to accept the system if you want to be a farmer. If you don't accept it you have to stop immediately. There are no choices. [– –] We are members of the EU and totally dependent on them. It is Brussels that governs us.”

(Rikard, November 2002)

When the knowledge that farmers have is neither respected, nor recognised and a bureaucrat comes and dictates when you should harvest and sow, what you should produce and how you should produce, it makes you lose your motivation for the work. The spark of excitement that comes from being an independent inventor is completely stifled when you have to follow strict regulations as to how to work (see also Vihinen 2004). But they are undeniably caught in a moral dilemma; they do not want to be dependent on a system beyond their control, but cannot survive on the income they make in farming, sometimes not even with the aid of subsidies.

Inspection of farms

During many conversations on the present system of compensation for and control of their work farmers use the words “senseless” and “absurd”. The idea of senselessness is linked to the broad context of a loss of freedom that has come about as farming becomes increasingly business oriented and dictated from afar by people morally and geographically distanced from the reality of farming in Finland. People express bitterness and frustration over being observed from the sky by satellites recording the layout of their farms or being subjected to on-farm inspections so as to find farmers that “cheat” the system.³² It has substantially changed the way ones work is viewed and it is one of the biggest blows to farmers’ professional pride. Inspections penetrate the sanctity of the home as a site of work and honour. Before European Union membership inspections were rarely carried out on individual farms.³³ Rikard equates the present system of inspections with the control systems used on state farms of the Soviet Union:

“We are constantly watched, we constantly have to write what we are doing all the time and there are lots of regulations. I find that we somehow have the same system you had in Russia before. [*How does it feel to be watched all the time?*] It feels unpleasant. You find it is strange that you can’t work freely and care for your farm in the best possible way without constantly submitting reports on what you are doing.”

(Rikard, November 2002)

The restriction of freedom is represented in the mention of “the same system you had in Russia before”, reflecting the fear of a kind of “total control” that takes over several areas of life, not only work. It echoes the age old Finnish fear of being conquered, a small nation being taken over by Russia and, equally, the fear of communism (see also Abrahams 1991: 143). Built into the system is a practice which contradicts farmers’ moral perception of “good farming practice” and according to which the goal of inspections is to find ‘guilty’ farmers. There is a general European average regarding how many “cheaters” are identified and

³² Informants tell me that according to the European Union statistical average, 5% of farmers misreport the number of hectares they have under cultivation, or the number of livestock they have. They mention stories of Italian farmers moving sheep over the mountains, across the border to get subsidies in two countries. A study on on-farm inspections showed that 70% of the 3000 farmers that participated in the evaluation felt that the subsidy system was difficult to deal with and half of the respondents felt that the arrival of the authorities to the farm was intrusive, awkward and psychologically stressful (Peltola 2001).

³³ In the year 2004 around 4300 farms were inspected. The inspectors will call the farmer two days before the inspection so they can have all the necessary documents at hand once the inspectors arrive (Landsbygdens Folk 2004).

if this same average is not reached on the part of Finland national inspectors are blamed for doing their job poorly and in many cases the number of farms to be inspected is increased. Inspectors are – thus – under pressure to make the inspection statistics in Finland match those of the other EU member states.

No compensation is offered to the farmer although the miscalculation is made by the inspection system. The property may be re-inspected after which money is released to the farmer. What farmers complain about is that the system never has to admit that it has made a mistake and while it is being cleared up the inspected farmer cannot do anything about the situation. The same atmosphere of distrust characterises the way in which hectare amounts, that form the basis for the amount of grant money that individual farmers apply for, are calculated. The European Union uses aerial photography to assess the amount of hectares that are under cultivation, but the technology has a flaw because it overlooks the parts of the field land that is in shadow. If measurement is contested a laser measuring procedure of the land is carried out instead of inspectors just trusting that farmers' own measuring techniques are reliable. Maija and Lasse, who own a large farm of around 100 hectares of arable land explain to me why farmers find farm inspections and the filling out of grant application to be burdensome:

Lasse: "It depends a bit on the grant type, but its about five or ten percent of farms that are inspected. [– –] If you have a farm that has done some kind of mistake a year ago then you are blacklisted. Then you are inspected, inspected, inspected." [– –]

Maija: "The Finnish morale is so high."

Lasse: "Extremely few [farmers] really try to act irresponsibly. Mistakes happen because this system is so complicated."

(Maija & Lasse, June 2002)

The problem with the control system is that it does not make a differentiation between those producers who have misreported with intent and those who have done it by mistake. Honesty is a deeply ingrained virtue in Finnish society and being indirectly accused of cheating is experienced as an insult. The system does not recognise that maybe Finnish farmers are more conscientious than farmers elsewhere in Europe. Monica stresses the difference in culture between EU member states as a strong argument against judging all farmers according to the same mould:

"There has come this threat from the EU that inspections have to be increased, that you haven't inspected these farms well because you have

not found [enough] malpractice when in Italy and Greece they found loads. The culture is totally different. It is honourable there that you get away with lots of cheating and here it is just the opposite.”

(Monica, November 2002)

The issue of honesty and lack of trust also emerges in the use of criminality metaphors by those informants who have had their farms inspected. Monica, for example, explains that she was inspected and even when she had miscalculated the number of hectares under cultivation to the advantage of the EU they labelled her a criminal. She says she was punished for not having everything in her application 100% right – they withheld paying the grant to her. Matti uses the metaphor of probation when explaining how they were treated when they made a mistake calculating the hectare amount of the farm:

“We farmers are labelled as criminals until otherwise proven. That’s what it’s like now. [– –] You feel like shit, so something is not quite right. Inspections are increasing and in Finland we are very honest and do not cheat, but within EU you have to reach 5% of cheating farmers. Inspectors have not been permitted in the house and have been forced to fill out their papers on the hood of the car.”

(Monica, November 2002)

“It’s like being on probation. Being guarded from the sky, the satellites and then the inspections, but they don’t cause any problems.”

(Matti, November 2002)

The value of being truthful is a particular cultural value in Finland and being dishonest can lead to various sanctions (see Abrahams 1992). Monica’s reference to inspectors filling out their papers “on the hood of the car” illustrates how farmers have wanted to create a distance between themselves and the inspectors and how they have wanted to markedly show that they do not extend the typical gesture of farm house hospitality – inviting a guest in for coffee and sandwiches – to the inspectors. No one is allowed on a farmer’s fields without permission, but inspectors will enter the farm without the farmer’s permission and they dictate the time of inspections. A call is made two days in advance of the inspection and if the farmer is unable to be present at this time they may go ahead with the inspection although the owner of the farm is absent. Some inspectors have behaved badly, shouting and using bad language and not letting the farmer explain why they have done certain things with their cultivations.

It is little wonder that Finnish farmers are concerned about their future and embittered over the control regimes they have been placed under and the lack of political leverage they feel they have in influencing the outcome of EU level

negotiations. Farmers feel that the government, including the agrarian party, has betrayed them by supporting European Union membership, nor do they defend farmers' right to produce in a morally acceptable way. One cannot judge the outcomes of negotiations between the government of Finland and the EU commission, nor how long the decided upon regulations will apply.



A rowing competition in traditional church boats during the Sea Days event.

5. PEOPLE OF KOPPARS

Piia, a 50 year old municipal worker who grew up in a small-holder family in the municipality of Lappholm tells me that the island of Koppars is a special place with “high energies”. She believes that it has to do with its archipelago nature and the central role of seafaring in the lives of island dwellers:

“Of course the nature here is barren and beautiful. There are a lot of boulders and this sea shore is one thing the city dwellers value. They are majestic – many of these places when you go touring around. [– –] When there were still sail boats in use they transported marble to Sweden to the royal palace. There are pillars made from Östvik marble. Wooden goods were transported to Stockholm. There has been a lot of transporting when you think of the types of boats used at that time. As a landlubber I really respect that they have been able to achieve such a thing. They have been entrepreneurial people. This has been a very wealthy place and kind of maybe because of seafaring and at least the way history has been described in a local novel, they have come here all the way from Ostrobothnia by foot in search of food. It was when there was years of crop failure and everything had been lost and people really lived in scarcity then they came towards the coast because this was known as a rich parish. Seen from the perspective of today I would not call this a rich parish, but a country community. At that time it was different.”

(Piia, August 2002)

The particular geographic features of Koppars make it diverge from the traditional view of the archipelago areas of the country where islands tend to be rather small.³⁴ The island covers a total area of 766 square kilometres divided into the three municipalities Källsvik, Hallonvik and Lappholm. It might not, at first glance, even appear to be an island at all due to its proximity to the

³⁴ Living conditions in the outer archipelago are harsher and mainly dependent on fishing. Island inhabitants in the archipelago are more isolated than on Koppars and are more dependent on each other for favours, cooperation and survival, and on the forces of nature (Lettingen 2004).

mainland. It is also easily accessible by car, being connected to the mainland by bridges in two locations as well as a ferry connection in the northern tip. The total population is 7 462 (Tilastokeskus 2006)³⁵ with Källsvik being the largest municipality and the one with the most predominantly agricultural character³⁶, although the majority of the municipality's inhabitants are involved in service and municipal sector jobs rather than farming. The majority language in all municipalities is Swedish with Lappholm having the largest percentage of Swedish-speakers (90%), Källsvik and Hallonvik following with 77% in both (Reference 5, 2006; Reference 7, 2006; Reference 6, 2006).

FOREFATHERS AND LOCAL HEROES

People on Koppars are aware of the deep cultural roots of the island and the remarkable historical characters that have shaped the way the island is viewed today by both outsiders and locals themselves. The old cultural traditions of Koppars its manor house culture, combined with archipelago nature is the manner in which the island is presented to the outside world. The island has earned a reputation outside its geographical borders through the educated elite and the successful gentleman farmers of the area. A person whose work influenced the present day nature of the island is a wise and learned baron who was the Imperial Chancellor of Koppars from 1583 to 1654. His family owned the municipality of Källsvik from 1614 to 1680 and during this time period he set up the first school in the area in 1649. He also played a central role in developing the entrepreneurial activities of the island, taking the initiative to set up small scale industries and model farms.

One of the most famous historical characters on the island is the entrepreneur, businessman and patron of the arts Anton Augustsson. Already as a young boy he displayed his entrepreneurial skills by earning money opening gates for carriages on the road and selling berries and shoelaces at the local market. He wanted to become a parish clerk like his brother, but his father would not allow him. He also wanted to become a teacher, but failed the entry exam so he moved to Turku to attend businesscollege there. He worked as a clerk for a while and then received financial aid to get further business training and training in printing techniques in Germany. Upon his return to Finland he established his own printing press. He was a skilful businessman and soon owned several large farms and valuable real estate in the centre of Helsinki. He was a member of parliament in the 1920's and established the main Swedish-speaking newspaper of the country. At one point in time he was one of the

³⁵ Population per municipality: Källsvik 3 293, Hallonvik 3 365, Lappholm 804.

³⁶ 20% of the population are involved in farming (Reference 9, 2001).

richest men in Finland. As he had no children all his wealth went into a foundation for the arts. Local people recall how he would provide small loans to local entrepreneurs who wanted to expand their business. (Marjatta, July 2003.)

In the year 1900 a central educator, Per Alfred Andersson, established one of the biggest and oldest open-air folklore museums of the country, Lundagård and a primary school on the island. He came from a humble peasant background and had a special interest in collecting artefacts connected to farming culture. He had foresight and started collecting farm implements and interesting local objects already as a school boy. He mobilised support for his life's project from the local elite with the help of an educated woman, Eulalia Burman, who wrote childrens' books, novels and newspaper articles and ran the school with him. He was a hard working, disciplined man, who embodied the core values of peasant life also in his role as educator and collector. Eulalia Burman used her genteel skills to attract wealthy intellectuals to the poetry and literature soireès she held in her home. Her life consisted of late nights and late morning while he arose at the crack of dawn to pour over his books. The background and lifestyle of these two educators is actively communicated to the generations of school children who visit Lundagård either with the school or with their parents and grandparents. Pride in local roots and local history is made visible during the special theme days organised around significant cultural events at the museum. The history of agriculture also has a central role in this constellation. People are reminded of the toil and tribulations of generations past through demonstrations of ploughing with horses, vegetable patches of herbs and vegetables commonly grown in local gardens in the 19th century, wool dying and skills practiced by blacksmiths. Demonstrations of these activities remind people of a historical continuity and of the value of bodily skills, handicrafts and labour. It concretely relays the message that history is in the land, that it resides in the memories of people who lived before the era of mechanisation. The museum functions mainly through the voluntary work input of museum workers who are retired locals or young students. Their common interest lies in a desire to know their roots and to understand what the life of their ancestors was like.

FARMERS, WORKERS AND SAILORS

The majority of the population in all three municipalities are involved in service sector jobs in either the municipal or private sector. Many of these people come from a farming background, but as farms have been taken over by only one sibling in the family, the others have had to find employment elsewhere. In Hallonvik, and in the industrial centre in particular, people work for the iron foundry factory, and usually they do not come from a farming background.

Unemployment has increased since the late 1990's because the factory has significantly decreased its capacity. Most of the younger generation of people choose to move out of the community in search of education and employment in the cities of southern Finland. This is true also of the other communities, although some people will move back to the island when they have a family and manage to find a job in one of the nearby cities. When I asked informants to tell me if there were any differences between the three municipalities on the island they all described differences based on both size and nature of livelihoods practiced there. These aspects have also been strengthened due to historical developments that have taken place in terms of production. I am told by an informant, a woman of a non-farming background who moved to the island 30 years ago that on Koppars you have the aristocracy of farmers. They have at an early stage been educated in the agricultural sciences as there were educational facilities nearby, both on the island and in the nearby town of Turku. She talks of there being "clans"; – wealthy families of farmers who had an important position in the society twenty to thirty years ago. Some of these families see themselves as being better than everyone else. The image all three municipalities want to present of themselves is that they are places offering good facilities and a safe living environment with housing, services and leisure activities, as well as a reasonable distance to growth centres and places of employment. Their goal is to attract families to move to the area to counteract a lopsided demographic pyramid where the largest section of the population are aging individuals.

The municipality where the study was mainly conducted, Källsvik, is the largest municipality of the island and the one that is most strongly characterised by farming. The municipal centre of Källsvik is situated in the centre of the island and is a junction for the main roads leading off the island. A number of central institutions are found there, including a new, extensive sports park, the largest church, an open air museum, several banks, an agricultural polytechnic school, schools, the library, the office of the local paper, a health centre and several shops. In Källsvik values are more traditional than in the other municipalities (apart from the farmers living in Hallonvik). Non-farmer informants have commented on how local farmers have a conservative outlook on life, meaning they have a strong belief in the value of private property, wealth staying in the family and expanding, and having sound family values, frowning upon such issues as divorce and common law marriages. On the municipal level Källsvik is presented as a safe and pleasant place to live, which has all the advantages of the archipelago environment, but none of its disadvantages because it is easily accessible by car. The old traditions and history of the place are stressed in unison with the good services and recreational facilities that the island offers in terms of sports and culture. During the course of my fieldwork in 2002 and 2003 a project funded by the Finnish government and the EU was

launched to set up a large recreational facility in the municipal centre. It is part of another EU funded project aimed at creating a positive living environment in the rural areas. The municipality wants to attract young professionals with children to the area. To ensure that there is sufficient housing near these services a housing project was initiated in the municipal centre in 2003 where the municipality aims to build a cultural and commercial centre in the municipal centre (Hufvudstadsbladet 2004). The homepage of the municipality clearly promotes a strong belief in the future: "On Koppars our belief in the future is strong. With good educational opportunities, investing in the youth, leisure activities and an active housing policy we guarantee that you will feel at home in the municipality of Källsvik" (Reference 5, 2006).

Hallonvik municipality is mainly dominated by the industrial centre of Kullabruk where most of the jobs of the municipality are found. A foundry industry employs around 300 people and in addition there are jobs in the service sector. The remaining areas of the municipality are characterised by farming. There are two municipal centres in Hallonvik – the present one and an older one that is smaller and no longer the official administrative centre. A deep rift exists between these two municipal centres with farmers using the old municipal centre as their social meeting point and workers being connected to Kullabruk where the new municipal centre lies. Factory workers are seen as a social category apart from the other islanders because they are workers, 'reds', in other words communists or socialists. The factories have also contributed to making Hallonvik more bi-lingual than other municipalities on Koppars because it has attracted workers from elsewhere in Finland, many of whom are Finnish-speakers. An informant who has worked in the factory and lives in Kullabruk explains that this rift is based on the fact that industrial centres have a specific culture and workers have a different outlook on life. To farmers private ownership is central, but workers were totally dependent on housing from the factory and the standard of living in the factory housing complexes used to be quite low. It was only in the 1960's that new housing complexes were built with running water inside the dwellings. Workers were accustomed to the factory owning everything. Union membership used to be visible through the types of shops people used in the industrial centre. One shop was frequented by Swedish speakers (conservatives) and another one by the politically left wing sympathisers. In the summer Kullabruk is a popular stop over for boating people and a jazz festival, famous on a national level, is organised there every summer. The municipality advertises itself as a place characterised by bi-linguality (Finnish and Swedish) and great natural beauty and that it also seeks to develop its economy and create more jobs.

In the smallest municipality, Lappholm, some farming was practiced, mostly small holder farming, and a substantial number of people, 13% of the

population, are involved in sea faring professions such as working on the ferries trafficking between Finland and Sweden. Lappholm's history is to a great degree characterised by seafaring, practiced by small-holders and agricultural labourers through peasant seafaring practices. As sailors they have seen the world and they are said to be more spirited than the inhabitants of the other municipalities. They have been forced to make rapid decisions living near the sea. They have thus been disconnected from the pure farming culture and from a sense of absolute permanency and rootedness to the place of their home. The port mentality and archipelago influences in Lappholm make people more open to new ideas, influences and people, and they have more contacts with people from other places. They came into early contact with innovations and modern products and food habits, like the practice of eating tomatoes.³⁷ For example, the use of televisions and telephones arrived much earlier to Lappholm than Källsvik. It is quite common for people from Lappholm to have family in Sweden, partially because as Swedish-speakers they did not have language problems on arrival. These were relatives who joined the migration wave in the 1960's and 1970's in search of jobs in the factories in Sweden. It is a small community with a strong sense of togetherness and *talkoo* spirit, partially because it is the most predominantly Swedish-speaking municipality on the island, with 90% Swedish-speakers within the population many of whom are involved in associations and organisations. Lappholm inhabitants say that the slogan used for their municipality is "the sun never sets in Lappholm". The welcoming attitude and sense of inclusion expressed by the local inhabitants towards new community members has been a significant pull-factor attracting musicians, artists and artisans who have wanted to move to the countryside. Lappholm is also certified as an emission free municipality which consciously strives to support initiatives and projects aimed at improving and maintaining the environment. One such project, funded by the EU, is the use of Scottish Highland cows to clear the coastal land of reeds.

Several informants talked about the difference in openness between Källsvik inhabitants and the inhabitants of other municipalities and even other areas of the country, such as Ostrobothnia. Ralf, whose family background is partially in Källsvik and partially in Lappholm, explains it in the following way:

"We up here in Källsvik we are much more closed and somehow such that we observe, have a hard time getting in touch with people. Whereas in Lappholm those who have been out to sea they are much jollier, hi di

³⁷ In the Ostrobothnia region in predominantly Swedish-speaking areas farmers were cultivating tomatoes already in the 1930's which was 20 years before it was done in Finnish-speaking areas. Also other innovations, like new types of fishing implements, came earlier to this region because of contacts with Sweden (Lindqvist 2001a).

ho! You are on first name basis immediately. We are much more talkative. [– –] Many times I have said that they [people from Lappholm] are more international, have been and that is still in them. They have all been out in the world. [– –] There was a different spirit [among them]. They talked about other things. There wasn't as much village gossip.”

(Ralf & Ulla, June 2003)

The industrial centre of Kullabruk used to be a red flag to the farming families in all the three municipalities because of the strong representation of left wing and socialist parties. There used to be big class differences on the island, but the antipathy between the ‘reds’ and the ‘whites’, the land owning class, changed after the war. Then everyone fought together for a common cause – the re-building of the country. Elderly informants remember how their parents prohibited them from attending dances in the industrial centre. If boys from the land owning classes showed up at dances fights would break out with the factory boys and knives were used. This animosity partially has its roots in the civil war³⁸ when the red army gathered forces in Kullabruk and marched towards Källsvik municipality. The red army sought out landowners, raided their houses and destroyed their food reserves, while also trying to recruit agricultural labourers from the farms into the red army. Many farmers fled into the forests and stayed in hiding for weeks so that the reds would not find them and possibly even kill them.

LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES

One central feature of Koppars is that it is a predominantly Swedish-speaking area of the country. What is particular is that in all three municipalities Finnish-speakers have a minority status, although Finnish is, nationally, the majority language. In the context of Finland the category of “Swedish-speaker” is surrounded by a concept of difference, based not only on language, but also on an idea of Swedish-speakers having a different culture. Common stereotypes about the Swedish speaking Finns³⁹ present them as less depressive, happier and more positively inclined towards life than Finnish speakers. Swedish-

³⁸ The Civil War in Finland lasted for five months between January to May in 1918 and was fought between the “Reds” (*punaïset*), i.e. the Social Democrats together with the Communists and the “Whites” (*valkoïset*), i.e. forces commanded by the Conservative Senate (Wikipedia 03.04.2006: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finnish_Civil_War).

³⁹ Today around 6 % of the total population (300 000 inhabitants) speak Swedish as their mother tongue. Swedish is an official language, stipulated in the constitutional legislation, at both the national and at the local level in areas where more than 10% of the population consists of Swedish-speakers. They are integrated into Finnish culture, but also form a distinct cultural group (Finland – a cultural encyclopedia 1997).

speaking Finns are also often referred to as being “privileged people” (bättre folk).⁴⁰ (Allardt 1977) The fact that they are seen as more refined and better off than other Finns is a common stereotype which has remained unchanged for decades. These conceptions are not only based on personal experiences or hearsay, but are also reinforced by images and messages portrayed by the mass media. On an official level, among Swedish-speaking Finns one wants to stress the heterogeneity of the group. (Lindqvist 2001b.) To some degree it is also a self-ascribed status – Swedish speakers believe in this image, although they simultaneously contest and resist it. Some informants, when asked about it, state that they are less melancholy and depressed because they have a positive outlook on life. Health wise this ‘fullness of life’ is supported by medical statistics that show a much lower incidence of cardiovascular disease as one moves from the eastern border areas westward in the country (Koskinen 1994). Swedish speakers have a symbolic belonging with the Swedish cultural sphere and many cultural symbols, that serve to strengthen the group identity of Swedish-speaking Finns, are taken from the western neighbour. Seafaring in the coastal villages has meant that particularly active contacts were maintained with Sweden. Most Swedish-speakers in Finland, and especially the population of Ostrobothnia, regularly watch Swedish TV, read Swedish magazines and books and listen to Swedish radio (Lindqvist 2001d). The influence of Sweden is also seen in the building style and the development of gardens. A particular gardening tradition was brought over to Finland from Sweden during the period of Swedish colonisation. During the 1800’s the agricultural societies actively worked to support gardening especially among farmers by facilitating the purchase of fruit tree and berry bush saplings (Nordisk familjebok 1920: 143). In the Ostrobothnia region the difference between houses in the Swedish-speaking areas and the Finnish-speaking areas was noticeable because the Swedish-speakers painted their houses⁴¹ much earlier than the Finnish-speakers and they used gingerbread designs to decorate the buildings. Similarly, the furniture was more colourful and decorative than among the Finnish-speakers. The use of decorative techniques is believed to be connected to a desire to visibly display ones well-being (Lindqvist 2001a: 198).

⁴⁰ In a study on attitudes towards Swedish-speakers as experienced by Finnish-speakers between the years 1900-1950, Swedish-speakers were described as being wealthy, proud, self-complacent and superior, but also kind, diligent, well-behaved, happier, more extroverted and talkative than the rest of the population (Lindqvist 2001a).

⁴¹ A cultural movement initiated the decorating of farm houses both externally and internally in the 1920’s, educational institutions, youth associations and the Martha womens’ organisation all encouraged rural populations to improve the decorative quality of the home. The influence of this movement reached the more marginal areas of the country much later in the 1900’s (Korhonen 1999: 139 & 141).

How did belonging to different language groups impact on social relations on Koppars? Based on discussions with a number of informants there seems to be a general perception that the Swedish language carries with it a label of upper class in the local area and it is to a large degree a class issue. The majority of those who speak Swedish belong to the upper social classes. They are more educated, on average, and it is said that the language group has older cultural roots. Swedish-speakers are the posh, “better” people, and the others are the peasants and the labourers, those called “people living in smaller houses” (*pikkutalolaisii*), a perspective supported by both Swedish and Finnish-speakers. The majority of Finnish speakers come from a small holder background. They are descendants of agricultural labourers that bought small plots of land and established family farms that were self-sufficient in the beginning of the 1900’s or belong to a settler background of those refugees who were given land in the area after the Winter and Continuation wars. Another group of Finnish-speakers are labourers who work either in the iron foundry in Kullabruk or other industries both on Koppars and the mainland. Many local Finnish-speakers may have originally had Swedish family names, but their grandfathers have during the language movement of the 1930’s⁴² changed their names to Finnish ones.

Segregation on the basis of language affiliation takes place already in childhood. A Swedish-speaking child who socialises with Finnish-speaking children may be excluded from his own group. Memories of Finnish speakers from the post war period illustrate that they felt there was a language-based discrimination enacted by the Swedish speakers towards the Finnish speakers. Solidarity based on language was visible in informal rationing practices. When goods were scarce, such as fabrics, local Swedish speaking shopkeepers would keep the best quality products for the Swedish-speakers. Finnish-speakers who were children in the 1950’s and 1940’s have negative experiences of discrimination based on language. Matti, a 60 year old farmer who grew up in Källsvik (where the language ratio of Swedish to Finnish-speakers is 77% to 23%), tells me that:

“I remember as a boy when I went with a friend to buy plums from the neighbours. There was a lack of plums and there were two elderly women in the neighbouring village. Well, the neighbour’s boy bought I don’t know how many kilos and then I answered of course in Finnish. ‘O, it’s a Finn.’ They didn’t sell to me. The neighbour’s boy maybe needed more [plums] than me. The same thing was in the shop if there was some kind

⁴² A campaign to change Swedish surnames into Finnish ones was initiated 1906 when around 25 000 people changed their name. The drive towards building up “genuine Finnishness” culminated in language struggles between Finnish and Swedish speakers within the university milieu in the 1930’s (Lindqvist 2001c).

of queue they [Swedish-speakers] cut the queue. There was that type of thing at that time, but not any longer. (*When was this?*) In the fifties. [– –]Finnish speakers weren't even really humans there. They would say something like 'that one', 'it'. If there were bills left unpaid. I remember a few times answering in Swedish. They clearly all blushed there."

(Matti, November 2002)

I hear several other stories of discrimination that consolidates the minority's view of the majority as a group that has an attitude of superiority in relation to others. One woman, who worked as a cook in the village school, remembers how the standard of the Finnish village school was lower than in village schools for Swedish-speakers. In 1957 the children still ate their school lunches with spoons from enamel bowls. There was no sink in the school – only a basin that all the children washed their hands in. When she started working in the school in the municipal centre the Swedish-speakers would eat first and when she came to wipe the tables she was told that it was not necessary to do so because it was only the Finnish-speakers who would come to eat after them. In the 1960's it was still common that you did not get service in the Finnish language in the shops. It has become easier for the Finnish-speakers on the island, but when it comes to getting a job, not being able to speak Swedish is still a barrier to getting employed. Some informants do stress that on the person-to-person level the relations were and are good.

The position of the Swedish language on the island is concretised in the arena of local politics. In all three municipalities the Swedish National Party is the majority party, which means they have a dominant position in taking decisions about what happens in the municipality. Finnish-speaking informants who have at some point been members of the municipal board say that all the issues taken up at the meeting have already been decided in advance through personal networks. Meetings are also tedious because they are held in both languages. A wealthy landowner who lives on Koppars has established a local section of an organisation called "The Swedish moderates". They feel the Swedish National Party does not represent the Swedish language question well enough and through advocacy work want to draw attention to issues pertaining to the Swedish language and how it is upheld on a local level. They write letters to the editor of local papers and hold meetings to discuss how the position of the Swedish language can be strengthened.

When asked about language relations most Swedish speaking informants claimed that there were few conflicts and they felt that functional bi-lingualism was a central feature on the island and one they were proud of. This was also true of Finnish speaking informants who were bi-lingual. However, perspectives differ regarding the relations between the language groups depending on whom

you speak to. Swedish-speakers, on average, know Finnish⁴³ and use it when speaking to a person they know is a Finnish-speaker. Many Finnish-speaking informants who had no complaints regarding language discrimination said that they speak Swedish in their job and although they are not fluent, they are always met with a positive attitude from their Swedish-speaking colleagues. They believe that learning Swedish boils down to having a positive attitude and regretted that some Finnish-speaking parents would tell their children that they did not need to learn Swedish because Finnish is the official language and they did not see there was any point to learning Swedish even in a location where a large part of the population speaks Swedish. Marika, a 40 year old Finnish-speaking municipal worker offers the following explanation regarding why bilingualism is not encouraged:

“Finnish speakers up-hold the class society idea because they belong to the lowest cast being a language minority. They lack self-esteem and feel that they are oppressed. They raise their children to become narrow-minded and teach them negative attitudes towards the use of the Swedish language. Economic differences cause negative attitudes. The Swedish speakers have shown that they are more adaptable and softer in their attitudes because they try to facilitate by turning to Finnish in a conversation if needed.”

(Marika, November 2002)

Having a natural and personal contact to someone from the other language group may remove the oppositional character in social interactions. Christian, a Swedish-speaking resident of Lappholm, aged 40, believes that good inter language group relations is a result of seafaring and of the existence of an external Finnish-speaking labour force (see also Reference 2, 1995) in the local area. The same applies to Kullabruk where people socialise more easily between the two language groups and inter-marriage is common. Being In touch with Finnish labourers and summer cottage dwellers who contribute to the economic growth of the community may decrease animosity between the two language groups:

“And there was the lime industry and then there was the stone quarry and the church was built by Finnish labour and they were called stone Finns and there has always been Finns. I think we have got away with it easily because then the city dwellers came who brought wealth. They were Finns. So, I would say there are no language conflicts. Most people try to learn Finnish.”

(Christian, July 2002)

⁴³ People of the older generation who are today between 65-90 do not necessarily speak very fluent Finnish, especially if they come from Lappholm where the language ration today is 90% Swedish-speakers to 10% Finnish-speakers. They have had few opportunities to speak Finnish, nor had the need to do so.

Is there then a difference in culture between the two language groups? Most people recognised that there is a difference in culture. Swedish-speakers more extensively than the Finnish-speakers organise so called “table parties” to mark major birthdays (most commonly when you turn 50 or 60) or then as a social activity of an association. They will have one hundred guests or more, depending on how wide their social circle is and how large their extended family is. A three course buffet style meal will be served and an orchestra playing dancing music entertains the guests. At these table parties Swedish-speakers tend to sit together at the same table and they have their own drinking songs that the Finns do not sing. Piia, a 35 year old Finnish-speaking nurse finds that the Swedish-speakers want to bring forth their own culture and their language and are good at doing this:

“The Swedish speakers on Koppars are better at partying. They know how to do it. They have the custom that when they are at a party they have this positive attitude. They know how to take it in that way. It’s different with the Finnish speakers. The Finnish speakers on Koppars are a bit stiff.”
(Piia, Augusti 2002)

Arto, a 35 year old industrial worker, whose mother is from a Swedish-speaking background, says of Swedish-speakers that they have more social contact with each other because they need the togetherness as a minority. He remembers from his childhood that they would have evening gatherings to play a card game called *kanasta* and have drinks and singing get-togethers. They like to listen to happy, romantic music that, he feels, is too polished and clean like the music that the Swedish dance band orchestra *Vikingarna* plays. They are discreet about things, not straight talking and they have the perception that you should be friendly and nice. Upholding a façade is very important and being fine is a way of being closed. Everyone has their own worries and they are not shared. The happiness they display is superficial and instead of talking openly about things they arrange parties and live behind a veil of happiness that conceals tragedy and worries. Arto summarises these cultural differences by saying that the Finnish culture compared to the Swedish culture is like Sibelius vs. Lasse Berghagen and deep forests vs. open landscapes and the sea. Christian offers his explanation of the proclaimed happiness of Swedish-speakers:

“I think it is something we want to believe that we are so very good at, we Swedish speakers. Because one is a little better if everything is positive. [*Why do you have to be better?*] Well, no, but it is that way. You do not have to, but it is like that. I think that the reason why people believe we are more positive is, if we compare with the Swedes, the way they are.

They greet people. When you come to the shop they greet you and they 'duar'[use the informal form of you]. And we have something of it. Half from them and half from the Finns. They do not at all have the same thing. They are more withdrawn. Then the fact that we are half Swedes, that we have it in our genes, so it is clear that people get the perception that we are positive. Its just the way of being. I have a hard time believing that we Swedish speakers are so much more positive than the Finns. If you really think of the state of mind you have suicides among the Swedish speakers just like among the Finns. And you have Swedish speakers who are depressed just like you do with the Finns.”

(Christian, July 2002)

My perspective is that it is not in the language itself that the issue of difference lies. Language is but one factor that sets coastal inhabitants apart from Finns whose roots are in other parts of the country. There is a fine line between explaining difference based on aspects of belonging to a social category and stereotyping of people. Talking about the “Swedish-speaking culture” is problematic particularly when it is used as a blanket concept to explain, for example, differences in health and well-being. Research that indicates that Swedish speakers are healthier and fare better than the rest of the population should prompt us to investigate what this “different culture” means. Based on the empirical example of Koppars I would not venture to claim that language is the factor that sets Swedish-speakers apart from Finnish-speakers. It is, rather, differences in history, welfare level and the natural environment itself. The proximity to the sea as an open border to the world, with contacts, ideas and wealth coming to the coastal areas, combined with advantageous conditions for agriculture, has guaranteed economic success and encouraged far-sightedness of the inhabitants of the south western coastal areas. Economic and class differences have decided which individuals have been successful regardless of their language affiliation, although in most cases wealth, in the past, has been lodged in Swedish-speaking families. My speculation is that it is an issue of place deciding group belonging, rather than primarily language that acts as a marker of difference.

Locals and others

Silja moved to the island in her youth to work as a maid in one of the large estates. In the beginning, right after she got married to Taneli they lived together in his parents house and later moved into a rented house in the municipal centre. Taneli would drive from the centre to the farm every day to do the farming with his parents. As someone who has moved from the northern coastal area of Ostrobothnia to Koppars, Silja is able to make a difference between islanders and “others” and she is aware of the difficulties

involved with fitting in. After more than 20 years of residence on the island she is still not seen as a local. When I ask her what the differences are between coastal inhabitants of the south and the north she says,

“[Up north] they are more direct. They at least are more straightforward. Here they don’t talk. Here you don’t talk and do not visit. In a way they don’t easily come and get acquainted with you. [– –] You have to be active. Yes. You don’t get to know these locals. [– –] Here you can’t give of yourself. They may think something [bad] of you. [– –] These [people] have to present and uphold a façade above everything else. [– –] They find that they are better people somehow. Others need not come and get involved. They deal with everything within their own group.”

She has experienced discrimination and has always somehow been a social outsider. She was raised by a single mother who worked as bricklayer on various constructions sites. She had several stepsiblings and during some years of her childhood there was a stepfather whom they escaped from because he was violent and often drunk. They were poor and sometimes had nearly nothing to eat. She was a victim of school harassment and developed a chronic migraine from the stress of being teased. In the end she had to move to another school. The struggle for rights and recognition continued in her work at the municipality. Constant cut backs and demands for greater efficiency increased work-loads and decreased the time available for each work task - Her working hours were decreased, as was her salary, and she had to fight to keep her job as a cleaner. She cycles between the different municipal buildings she has to clean and many times works overtime to manage to complete all the work tasks. Although she suffers from migraine and pain in her hip that sometimes makes it difficult for her to walk, she refuses to apply for sick leave, “I am not one of those collecting sick leave. [– –] I don’t want to beg and I’m not a sick leave collector.” When she gets home from work she helps Taneli on the farm. All of their three children are away at university studying or working. She is proud of how well they have managed and contentedly states that “the wealth of the poor is ambitious children”.

(Field diary, July 2003)

There are a number of people that fall outside of the category of “local inhabitant” on Koppars and the category itself is defined by those who count themselves as “locals”, although some individuals sometimes opt for the self definition of “local inhabitant”. These outsiders may be people from the other municipalities on the island, summer/week-end dwellers, city dwellers, those who have moved to the island many years ago to marry a local person, Swedish-

speakers vs. Finnish-speakers and other Finns. Being accepted into the category of “local inhabitant” is not an easy process if you are an “outsider”. Some of my informants were people who had moved to the area in their youth either through marriage, as settlers, in search of work or through family connections (parent marries a local person or your family has a country cottage in the area) and they clearly lamented the fact that you never actually become accepted as locals even after several decades of residence on the island. Two such major groups of outsiders are settlers from Karelia and summer cottage dwellers. The settlers or descendants of settlers make up a small proportion of the population. They have their own association which is mostly a social gathering where the older generation discuss memories of their villages of birth and Karelian traditions.⁴⁴ They have also organised bus trips to Karelia so that their children and grandchildren can become acquainted with the area their ancestors come from. Many Karelians who came as settlers married each other or were already married at the time of the evacuation. The first generation of Karelians say they will never consider themselves locals of Koppars, but their children have achieved the status of local inhabitant, and have also ascribed this status to themselves. The older generation of Karelians, who came to Koppars as settlers, say that on average they were treated well by the local population. They were provided with cottages to live in, neighbours came by offering them fruit tree and berry bush saplings for their gardens and they were given employment on large local farms.

The practice of cottage owning and the development of the practice of having a summer cottage as a leisure home became common on a wider scale only in the end of the 1950’s and the 1960’s. The island is an attractive place to own a leisure home because of its beautiful coast line and the archipelago nature. Before that, in the beginning of the 20th century, city dwellers only had a few weeks of annual leave and they would spend their holidays frequenting one of the numerous guest houses on the island. The availability of land along the coast lines for city dwellers to purchase was partially related to the mechanisation of agriculture and the dismantling of dairy production on the island. When farmers no longer needed grazing grounds, which often were land areas by the sea, they sold the property to city dwellers. A rising standard of living among city dwellers enabled them to purchase land to build a leisure home. Income acquired from the selling of this coastal land was invested by farmers in the expansion and development of farming. They also financed the education and living costs of children who had moved to the cities to study. Relatives of farmers would also

⁴⁴ Karelian culture is represented by the national epos of Finland, Kalevala, based on stories and incantations collected by a physician, Elias Lönnroth while he was working in the Karelian region. The influence of Kalevala on Finnish art and literature gave birth to an ideology named Karelianism. The Kalevala is seen as a means to create an explanation of the origins of the Finnish people. Part of the cultural heritage are particular dishes, songs and an special architectural style which differs distinctly from that of south western Finland (Juminkeko 2006).

build cottages on the sea front or inherit smaller cottages located in the villages that had previously been used as retirement cottages of the older generation or had been used as dwellings by agricultural labourers. Cottages are kept in the family so that city dwelling children and grandchildren have a place to stay when they visit their relatives during the summer holidays.

The concept of locality or of being a local seems to be consolidated through being born on the island. Several other factors influence the manner in which people label themselves or those representing their particular social category such as livelihood, wealth level, language, and place of residence. People can belong to several different categories simultaneously and in certain social situations a particular category belonging will come to the fore. One overriding category that encompasses all the people living on Koppars is that of being an island inhabitant. Being accepted into the group of locals has partially to do with a different approach to sociality. A number of women informants who have moved to the island as adults from northern coastal areas of Ostrobothnia, also a predominantly Swedish-speaking area say that when they moved to the area they noticed that people in the south west are more reserved, taciturn, narrow-minded and proud. In the south west people do not talk and do not visit their neighbours. They talk in a round about way about things and they do not discuss their problems with others like they do in Ostrobothnia. Talking about your problems is interpreted as a form of vanity. Above all, in the south west it is imperative to keep up a façade, and education and titles are valued. These informants believe it has to do with the old Swedish roots of people on Koppars. It is not considered proper to clearly declaim and honestly put your foot down like the Ostrobothnians do. The islanders will not cooperate with each other easily and are reluctant to accept anything new, resisting as long as possible when something new is introduced – they do not want to make themselves look foolish should a joint venture fail. The old, proud traditions oblige them to manage on their own. In Ostrobothnia, by contrast, people are less reserved, spontaneous and straight forward in their manner. Mary, a 65 year old woman, who as a child moved as a settler from Ostrobothnia to Koppars, explains why she thinks people are different up north:

“They are free of titles and boundaries, are more egalitarian in their way of thinking. Ostrobothnians have always lived in poor circumstances. There are no large estates and farms there. We are independent. We are self-confident. We have courage. We have not worked under anyone else, as serfs. We are enterprising. Independent people. [– –] There has never been anything large and showy. On the contrary, we have been small-scale and independent people! It gives you a certain security.”

(Mary, August 2003)

The fact that the south west has never belonged to the famine struck area⁴⁵ of Finland has, no doubt, had a significant influence on how local people view the need to cooperate and share resources, both material and social. The poverty and strong religious values⁴⁶ of the area give it a different character than in the south west. For many poor peasants the only way out of poverty was to seek a better life elsewhere – many Ostrobothnians migrated to The United States in the beginning of the 1800's. The struggle for survival necessitated a spirit of solidarity and helping in a much different way than in the south where people were better off.

Farmers are firmly rooted people who are bound to the place of their home and work. They cannot and do not travel as often as city dwellers or people with less binding jobs, so perhaps for this reason they are less likely to accept ideas and individuals that come from the outside of their immediate social sphere. Some farmers do lead a more mobile life by being active in producers' organisations, making visits to other areas of the country, attending conferences and seminars and taking regular holidays during the winters, and visiting relatives in Sweden. Those farmers that choose to retire at 65 or even earlier may spend their leisure time travelling and seeing the world when they finally have the freedom to leave the farm as they wish. They, in general, have a more open attitude with regard to ideas and people coming from elsewhere. Guardedness towards the unfamiliar and reluctance to accept "outsiders" into the category of local is by no means a feature particular to Koppars (see eg. Holmila 2000). Belonging and a feeling of local distinctiveness, an indigenous perception of locality is what is at stake here, I believe. This is a standpoint that Cohen (1982: 2) has outlined in relation to issues of locality of rural Britain, stating that: "How people express and experience difference from others lies at the heart of their awareness of their culture". It is place (location) and how it has been constructed historically and through social relations that informs how the nature and process of social organisation is constructed. Taking into account the centrality of land and the emotional connection that farmers have to the land, to the place of their work, would it not be more plausible to assume that it is location that is predominant in marking cultural difference? The meaning of being a Koppars inhabitant is also constructed through language, but can this be taken as a dominant factor? Although there is talk of differences between language groups and between the perceived differences in culture between the groups it seems too simple to write off belonging as a product of people

⁴⁵ Between 1866-1868 Ostrobothnia, North Karelia, Häme and Satakunta experienced famine due to widespread crop failure. As much as 20% of the population died (Wikipedia 2006).

⁴⁶ Biblicism and Laestadianism are revivalist movements that had a foothold in Ostrobothnia. Particularly Laestadianism was practiced mainly in the northern parts of the country, spreading to some extent also to the coastal areas of northern Ostrobothnia (Pietikäinen 1984: 158-161).

speaking different languages. When they perceive of themselves in relation to others I would guess that it is the fact of living on Koppars and being a farmer that is their primary focus and not primarily that of being a Finnish-speaking or Swedish-speaking farmer.



A typical farmhouse kitchen.

6. CONTINUITY AND WHOLENESS

A large chartered bus is stationed outside Monica's barn, now serving as a shop and a café-restaurant. A group of elderly people pour out of the bus and file in through the back door of the barn. It was originally built in the 1600's and its active use was abandoned years ago when Monica's father Teodor gave up dairy farming. It was converted into a restaurant a number of years ago. Inside awaits a large buffet table loaded with traditional foods; home made herring dishes, smoked and salted salmon, home made bread, delicate new potatoes, slices of pot roast and lettuce from the organic garden. The substantial lunch will be followed by coffee and home made berry pies, cinnamon buns and biscuits. In the mornings I see Monica's mother Lilly emerge from her house, a red barn-like structure situated diagonally across from the barn restaurant, carrying trays of baked goods and jars of herring. She does a lot of the traditional cooking that Monica entices her guests with. Also Monica's husband and son help out – hers is a true family business. The front yard of the barn opens up onto a lush garden, with a small gazebo and well-stocked greenhouse. In the summer the aromas are wonderful, from all the flowers and newly watered salad greens, lavender and an assortment of herbs. Bees buzz around the rich nectar pickings and birds inhabit the gnarled apple trees. There are summer exhibitions in the garden and people come there to buy organic produce, gifts in the trendy little gift shop or just enjoy a cup of coffee in the pleasant surroundings. The family farmhouse lies immediately adjacent to the barn – a beautiful white wooden structure with stained glass windows. A majestic tree sits squarely to the side of the house. It is clear that this is a building which has been cared for with love and commitment, built to last for centuries, filled with beautiful old furniture and art.

Monica's father was a successful, entrepreneurial farmer. He was the first in the village to have the latest technological inventions, worked as an agricultural advisor and held many honorary positions as chairman in various organisations such as the local chapter of the producers' organisation. He wasn't home much, and when his heart started acting

up in his 50's Lilly wished he would travel less and rest more. Eventually he died of heart failure and the running of the farm was taken over by the foreman. Although Teodor had never prepared one of his daughter's to take over his mantle, Monica as the oldest of three girls felt that the only right thing for her to do was to leave her job as a graphic artist in the city and take over the running of the farm. Daughters of farmers were still, in Monica's generation, usually expected to fulfil this obligation by marrying a farmer who would do the farming. She decided to get some basic training first, but felt she did not learn much at agricultural school. During the period of practical work required for her degree she received support from a farmer in the neighbourhood who acted as a kind of mentor for her. She worked on his farm and he later helped her when she started farming herself. She was able to discuss all her problems with him and she believes his open attitude towards mentorship was tied to the fact that he had worked in another profession and lived in the city, as well as in Sweden before he returned home to the island to work on the family farm. After his sudden and tragic death (leukaemia) she has not been able to find similar support from other farmers in the area and she does not have a lot of active contact with them. She says she always feels like the odd one out because she is one of the few women on the island running a farm and, additionally, she is an organic farmer, which many, more conventional farmers cannot understand because organic farming requires more work input and gives you lower yields.

To Monica farming is a creative process where you give of yourself to, in turn, receive from the land. Working with nature, she finds, is also about an emotional connection to a way of life, rather than to a physical place in itself. When I ask her what the land means to her she clearly indicates that the land contains an element of positive sacrifice:

“One sees how the fields start to billow.[– –] You grow attached to this locality and place, the knowledge of this field or that, which you cannot get through theory alone, adds to this feeling. Being a farmer is creative work and creative work is rewarding. And then you have the possibility of renewing yourself every year and you try to improve from one year to the next, although you cannot control the weather very much. In the end it guides our best intentions. [– –] You always have to gamble, although that is what makes it interesting; that it is not so straight forward because it is a matter of good or bad luck.”

To simply take over the farmhouse and sell the land was not an option for her. Just relinquishing the land would mean that the idea of the home, the farm, the land would no longer be intact:

“It would feel so terrible to come here and we would have it [the farm house] as some kind of summer house. It is your home. The land should belong with it, that unity where all the elements belong. It would not be *that* unity any longer. One would in some way be a traitor, *petturi* [although a Swedish-speaker she here uses the Finnish word for traitor]. That the honest agricultural work would be dismantled and then just kind of take the fun bit [laughter]. Kind of this blood sweat and tears [she uses the English words] type of unity. In some way I just could not. It would be horrible.”

More than it being just family property it is an issue of it being a legacy, an almost holy unity that should be passed on as land that is actively farmed and work that is continuously carried out in the footsteps of her ancestors. The emotional attachment that Monica talks about displays the complexities and ambiguities inherent in farming as a way of life and of the family farm as a place of belonging and returning. A lasting image I have of Monica is how she is constantly working, building, improving, diversifying not only physical places, but also social bonds. She organises monthly meetings of the village action committee, a yearly midsummer party for the villagers and sits on the board of the local museum committee. The well-stocked library in her house bears witness to the fact that she is extraordinarily interested in history and seeks to build an understanding of how the farm is situated in the flow of local happenings, both past and present. Her husband Erik works in the city, but takes time off during the peak of the harvesting season when the restaurant business also is booming so he can hop onto the tractor and head out into the ripening fields of wheat while Monica ships yet another bus load of tourists off into the lingering summer afternoon.

(Field diary, August 2002)

CONTINUITY

Working on a farm is not work in the same sense as analysing the stock market in a bank, teaching in a primary school or making pipes in a steel factory. It is much more than the nine-to-five routine, where there is usually a clear demarcation between what is home and what is work. On a farm these boundaries are blurred – you are always at work and always at home. It is a way of life and one that extends beyond your own history back to your ancestors and forward to your heirs. One of my informants, Benita, a 60 year old woman of a non-farming background who has lived among farmers all her adult life, summarised the key idea of what is central in farming life on Koppars like this:

“You have a whole line of ancestors behind you who keep an eye on you and ensure that you care for your farm in such a way that you don’t bring disgrace upon your family.[– –] There is an emotional connection. It isn’t just any farm but a family farm that has been in the family since the 1600’s.”

(Benita, September 2003)

Monica talks about keeping the farm intact, of it being a unity. The metaphor of unity signals the idea of bringing people together or being together, of a space being filled by human relations and actions that keep it all together. In many contexts the idea of totality or unity emerges, a holistic perspective on life and the everyday actions that give it meaning. What does this idea of unity mean concretely in the daily life of a farmer and what values emerge in talk about home and work?

Keep on working

During the course of my interviews with farmers and also by myself initially approaching the field by doing manual labour on a farm I came to understand the centrality of working with your body in the local farming communities on Koppars. Through one’s work one is placed on a social stage and the outcome of one’s work is scrutinised by other members of the community. The outcome of physical work in farming is visible and in many cases results are discernible immediately. This is one feature of the work often referred to, that it provides immediate results and, thus, satisfaction. Work is also described as challenging and creative, dependent on specific conditions and requiring particular solutions in order to produce the desired results (see also Abrahams 1991: 172).

The success of a farmer is to a large extent dependent on his or her ability to work hard enough, plan well enough and combine multiple work tasks. Farmers consider that it is a source of wealth to get to do independent work. The approach to work as a central aspect of being a farmer is something one is socialised into in early childhood. In Finnish society there is a social emphasis on the concept of work and one gains respect in the eyes of others by working hard. In the agrarian culture children started working already at the age of 4–5 and by the time they were in their early teens they were expected to master the basic skills required of men and women within that culture (Apo 1996). Most of my informants were of the opinion that in Finland people are very honest and conscientious, and have a high work morale. When Finns migrated to Sweden in the 1960’s and 1970’s they were attractive workers because they were known to have this high work morale and to be conscientious workers who prided themselves on doing a job well.

On numerous occasions and in a variety of contexts informants talk about the value of manual labour. Keijo and Antti talk about how this attitude towards work has been inculcated in them from an early age:

“[My mother’s] concept of human worth was pretty much based on how much work a person did. It has been this way in agrarian society. It is that old; for generations and it is inherited from one generation to the next. A person’s worth came pretty much from how hard working you were and so on.”

(Keijo, September 2003)

“You had to do a lot of work at home. Really a lot. Father and mother also. My father used to make me get up to work in the mornings [– –] Father was quite extreme, tough and old-fashioned. If you had been at the dance and come home a bit late he put you to work at seven on Saturday. He teased you.[– –] We also did manual work and I am of the opinion that it develops a person. Never in such a way that you would have to do the heaviest jobs. I believe that it develops a child if it learns already as a child what this work is like [laughter]. To live, to get a standard of living for yourself. I don’t see it as something negative in hindsight. There were definitely tears when you had to do the types of jobs children don’t like doing. For example thinning was like poison to me. But no, it had to be done. There was no other option than to do it with tears in my eyes. [– –] I put my own children to work.”

(Antti, May 2002)

Typical work tasks of children on Koppars was participating in hay making and thinning out sugar beets, which, most often, was a job that even children were paid for. It was a back-breaking task and informants remember how daunting it felt to stand at the end of what seemed to be an endlessly long row of sugar beets that you had to work yourself through. Informants generally saw working on the farm in their childhood as something natural and they considered it a value they wanted to pass on to their own children. Working hard was intimately tied to a moral concept of being a good individual. It moulded your self-image. For example, still among farmers who today are close to 60, a daughter in-law was often expected to prove her worth by showing she could manage to do farm work, especially if she was not from a farming background. Only then would the parents dare sign over the property to their son when they retired. Inheritance, thus, became dependent on a spouse’s capacity to work (See also Härkki-Santala 2000).

Doing manual labour is something one becomes physically dependent on and which provides one with a feeling of physical wellbeing and satisfaction.

Although Keijo calls physical labour “torturing yourself” he means that it is a positive and productive form of “torture” because it puts you in a good mood and it gives you a sense of achievement. Tiring yourself out physically also acts as a kind of rest for your mind because while working with your body you do not need to think analytically. Your actions are guided by pragmatic considerations, a kind of logic of practice. Working hard is a form of competition with yourself that pushes you to strive harder. Seeing your accomplishment is the prize for your endurance, your *sisu*:

“It is an incredibly good feeling when you are really exhausted from doing something or then you go out into the forest and torture yourself in such a way that you are rather exhausted and go to sleep when you are damned tired, tired from work. [– –] When I have done something I have always done it in such a way that I have not saved myself. [– –] Physical torture is only healthy. Manual labour is also good for your mental health. You get a lot of satisfaction when you do something and succeed in doing that job. You accomplish something and see what you have achieved and completed it and come out of it a winner.”

(Keijo, September 2003)

A characteristic, intimately connected to being a hard-working individual, is being successful in your work. It has to do with having influence over your work and seeing that your work produces good results, which means that you get your crops to grow well and you have the capacity to evaluate risks and deal with these. One should work in such a way that the moral value of this “goodness” is visible, as well as the positive sacrifice of struggle. The competitive spirit among farmers is something many of my informants referred to and there was mention of how farmers competed over being the one to have the first tractor, truck or car in the village. These material symbols of success are considered important aspects of family history to mention. Competition is also about timing your work inputs – daring to harvest or sow early, taking a risk. Some felt it was good to compete over being the first out on the fields in the spring, others thought it was foolhardy. If you sow your fields too early and they are hit by frost it reduces your yields. Monica talks about this spirit of competition as a positive feature, as a part of farming and the enthusiasm farmers have when a new harvest is to be collected or planted:

“When the neighbour is on the field [in the spring] it awakens you, ‘wait a minute!’ Now I cannot stay put any longer! Now I have to go because the neighbour is already there. [– –] Before it seems it was even harder [the competition]. If your neighbour is on his field you need to hurry.”

(Monica, November 2002)

Being out on the fields at the same time is about togetherness and about giving individual risk-taking a collective expression in visibly being out there together and spurring each other on to take on the major task of preparing your fields for sowing.

The dinner dances, called 'table parties' in the colloquial language, that Swedish-speakers like to organise are what one informant Lisa, a fifty year old woman of a farming background, sees as a form of social competition. Table parties are organised either as a general social activity, but more commonly to celebrate a major birthday like turning fifty or sixty. Lisa finds that people have a strong need to control their living environment and ensure that everything is all right. At the same time there is social control enacted by your peers; other farmers, neighbours and relatives. To her it all boils down to pride, a need to succeed which is visible in the competition that takes place between people.

Skills passed on

Although most farmers in the south west are educated as either agronomists or agrologists⁴⁷, much of the knowledge they base their farming practices on is of a practical nature. Informants when asked about where they learned about farming primarily state it was from their parents and, most notably, their fathers and grandfathers.⁴⁸ Children simply learn by following what their parents do and because farmers do not have a clear-cut working day like parents employed in office jobs, children tend to hang around their parents also while they are working. This act of just being present is a form of intensive interaction with their future profession. Working the land consists of a web of relations, both horizontal and vertical. Bonds of vertical kinship are consolidated in the process of learning the land, how to cultivate it, how it behaves in different seasons because the older generation teaches these things to the younger generations. Much of the practical work of farming does not tally with what you read in books – it is more a matter of trying things out through trial and error and of combining knowledge on the suitability of crops for the type of land you have; knowing when to sow and harvest; engaging in preventive practices to minimise the spread of weeds and plant pests;

⁴⁷ On the island of Koppars an agricultural school was established in 1906. Most local, Swedish-speaking farmers have received their basic education in agriculture from there and some have attended continued education at an agricultural college in the town of Turku.

⁴⁸ The reason why farming knowledge is obtained primarily from male relatives of the older generation is tied to the type of farming practiced. Traditionally dairy farming involved more input from women in actual farm related tasks, mainly milking and caring for the cows. It is hardly practised any more on Koppars because most farms are involved in cereal production involving work on the fields, which is traditionally seen mainly as a job for a man. Some women do now do field work on farms with cereal production, but they are still a minority and usually younger women.

and predicting what types of crops are most likely to fetch a high price on the market. In short, it is a complicated web of chance taking, resource use, investment and pure luck.

Knowledge is even more valuable if it has continuity also in a geographical sense. Farming the same fields over many generations consolidates and broadens knowledge tied to a specific micro-environment. Learning to work the land to the best of your abilities requires you to acquire this micro-knowledge, a minimalist, but detailed field of information connected to the particular geographic location of your fields – it makes knowledge into a truly localised resource. Even the climatic conditions vary and can be quite different in a new location. It can take years for a farmer to learn to know his land and it is a process in which knowledge is constantly gained and refined while practicing farming throughout the years of your farming career. Every year you are faced with a new trial. It is the unpredictability of the outcome that makes the work interesting and challenging. Daring to take challenges and trying out new things is an important part of the learning process within farming. Matti and Paula who have farmed the same land for thirty years say that your land has an “honour value”. All your fields are unique and you need to truly know how the fields behave in order to get a good yield:

“We have done this [potato cultivation] for thirty years. At first it was small scale. You harvested with a hoe and like this. But every year you learn something new. It’s never quite ready. That’s what’s interesting, that you are never quite fully learned. It can be some small aspect that is different. You compete with yourself. If you succeed with something that’s what’s fun.[- -] You need to have these challenges.”

(Paula, September 2003)

On many occasions I hear farmers use the term “reading” when talking about observing the weather, their fields and forests. Farmers have interpreted the weather for hundreds of years, having their own recording systems and passing on these observations from generation to generation.⁴⁹ It points to how the knowledge acquired through practice and experience is feeling-based, a kind of sensory literacy:

“It is living knowledge exchanged between two people and also with nature. It is like with the weather, one constantly looks at clouds and moods and the like. [- -] You learn to feel these kinds of mystical things. You don’t really know what it is. The weather is important to

⁴⁹ There has been a book written on these farmers’ observations, *Bondepraktikan*, the “farmers manual”, already in the 15th century.

you so that you can predict the future. City folk and others do not follow [the weather]. They do not have this *feeling* for the weather.”
(Monica, November 2002)

It is knowledge of long duration because it is based on long-term thinking, planning for cultivation work to be executed in a few years time or planning for the coming generations, like planting a forest that will be felled in 10 to 20 years time.

Deciding your future

The idea of independence is deeply engrained in the local farming ideology. With independence I mean the ideal of managing on your own, taking care of yourself and being your own master. This means having the freedom to produce what you want and to plan your time in a way that is most advantageous for the production of high yields while also taking the weather conditions into account. Many informants said that the biggest advantage of farming as a profession is its freedom, an idea that has been carried down through history:

“ [– –] Farmers belonged to one of the three guilds. Peasants have always been free peasants. They have been [part of society] for ages. One thousand years ago they were the pillars of society. Most of those who are farmers today have roots in farming stretching far back in history, which you do not think of. There is a certain kind of pride in being an independent farmer. And it is passed on from generation to generation.”
(Monica, November 2002)

Due to this ethos of the self-sufficient and free farmer it is not uncommon for farmers to feel that they do not want to be dependent on the state, like the unemployed or social welfare receivers in the cities. Keijo, stresses the importance of self-sufficiency, but, at the same time an acceptance of the fact that not everyone is as independent and strong as he is:

“I believe that here in the countryside there is generally this thing that it is important to manage on your own as far as it is possible. It is some kind of indicator. But my attitude is not to look down upon those in a weaker position. There are for example handicapped and ill people and those who are otherwise in such a situation that they need help from society. [– –] I don't want to take anything from society that I could get, but don't need. I have never [done this]. Even though I have been ill I haven't [travelled] by taxi, or ambulance, or anything else. I got there on my own.”
(Keijo, September 2003)

When Keijo talks about managing on your own as being some kind of indicator I am assuming that he means that it is an indicator of survival and success. Here also seems to emerge an idea of balance, that if he receives help from society he will be indebted to society which in turn may encroach on his independence.

Staying on the land

Continuity of presence on the land and caring for it through the generations is a farming ethos that bears global applicability. On the island of Koppars permanence does not necessarily need to be a sustained geographic presence, but presence in the sense of a continuity of farming knowledge passed down through the generations and an emotional commitment to the land as a provider, in both a concrete and symbolic sense. Farmers have their roots firmly planted in the soil of their work and this gives meaning and value to the land.

The proximity of generations (you live in the same house or as neighbours) increases expectations of carrying on the family legacy; to fulfil something your parents have done. Monica talks of this obligation to continue, something she has concretely been faced with in her life. This sense of obligation is something more than just an ideology, it is an embodied practice, something one grows into since childhood:

“It is some kind of obligation. No, I don’t know if it is an obligation. It is something that develops within you. It is something that has always been there. That it should [continue] from generation to generation. That one follows up what the previous ones have done and so on. It is natural that it is like this. One does not see it as an obligation. It is a feeling one has got inside of oneself that it should be this way: I don’t know what it is. It has been fed into me in some way. [– –] People have talked about it since [I] was born although [I] haven’t understood it. It has become dormant [in your body] this thing.”

(Monica, November 2002)

The embodied nature of this obligation comes clearly to the fore when she talks of it being “fed into her”. The emotional connection to the land does not necessarily come through lengthy ownership of the land, but through the work done on the land. It was normal that farmers expanded their farms by buying and moving to a larger farm. This emotional bond also has a physical dimension, bodily felt because so many emotions are tied to the work on the land and to an awareness of how this work has produced something productive, lasting and life giving. It is a source of strength and inspiration, something almost sacred (see also Tiina Silvasti 2001: 273). Antti, a 55 year old small

holder who has lived and worked his whole life on the family farm talks about his feelings for the land:

“There are many factors, many better aspects when you have a family farm [continue on the family farm]. And then there is also the love. [*In what way?*] In such a way that even though this is not a family farm of many, many generations (sukutila) my father has done a lot to improve it; built and developed. So one is then obliged to do the work if you get into it, to care for it. [– –] It would be difficult for me to sell this place to a stranger. It is a big threshold. If I think that I would go into retirement and sell it to someone else than my children it would be difficult.”

(Antti, May 2002)

A feeling for or emotional attachment to the land is tied to having knowledge about the land – knowledge generates emotion. In turn, emotions are devices to help us learn about what the world is like – they encourage discovery and further learning (Milton 2002: 58–59). It also has to do with being attentive to changes in the environment and how this relates to changes in oneself, something referred to as “relational epistemology”. The focus on what the environment *does*, rather than what it *is* makes the environment have a kind of personification (Bird-David 1999; Ingold 1999).

At the time of my field work a farming family in the neighbouring village decided to sell their farm. It had been in the family for nine generations and the event acted as a concrete indication of what was becoming a growing trend on the island. When the children are not interested in taking over the family farm and also the parents realise it is too small to support a family they find it is better to sell it off. This family preferred to move out of the village, instead of just selling their fields and staying in the house itself. If you no longer have any farm work to do it is pointless to stay on the farm and mentally and emotionally it is more burdensome when you see someone else cultivating your land. In many cases the unwillingness to give up the profession, to actually carry out the transfer and relinquish your farm to the younger generation is difficult. Many farmers, if their physical health permits it, will continue farming well beyond the official retirement age.

WHOLENESS

On a scorching day in July Matti was busy working in the grain silo alone, as usual. He cannot possibly afford to hire someone to help him out and at the busiest time of the year it is difficult to find helping hands. The summer had been exceptionally hot that year and then, quite suddenly, he

just collapsed while shovelling wheat down the chute. He had slowly and painstakingly lowered himself down the ladder, crawled over the yard and into the shade of a storage building. He remained there panting in pain until he had the strength to drag himself into his house. When his wife Paula returned from her job he would not permit her to call the doctor or take him to the health centre. He did not want to go to the doctor and be put into intensive care followed by sick leave during the busiest time of the year. He had to get his harvest off the fields and there was a threat of rain. While recounting his story he even complained that he did not do “proper work” and that he could only do half of what he would do normally. Paula comments with a tone of concern in her voice that he was in great pain, but he managed because he has *sisu* – stamina and perseverance. Paula says he could easily be put on sick pension because most people with a heart in the state his is in would not work any more, but Matti resists being defined as unfit to work. It was only when he went to the doctor for a medical check-up, required for his driving license, that scarring on his heart was discovered and the doctor could conclude that Matti had at some time had a heart attack. Avoiding medical care unless and until it is unbearable to work is a necessity. There is no choice but to go on working and besides, Matti adds:

“This type of man can become expensive for society. You can get all sorts of ailments if they are investigated, thoroughly investigated. Well, so the heart attack came. I went through it. The x-rays were taken. If there was anything wrong he [the doctor] would call. He gave me blood pressure medicine.”

With the help of medication Matti has been able to continue working. His resistance to actually investigate what is wrong with him is tied to an overall ideology that he has regarding ill health. Matti believes that men should not be overly concerned about their health because worrying about your health makes you sick. He believes that a body, to be strong, needs to be filled with sausages and beer, although he knows it is bad for his cholesterol. He talks of a neighbour who regularly went for health check-ups and jogged in secret in the dark. He suffered a sudden death – cerebral haemorrhage. The neighbour’s brother who smoked, drank alcohol regularly and in substantial quantities, ate “fat” food and “drank coffee like out of a faucet” lived until well over the age of 70. So, he concludes, what’s the point of being overly concerned about your body. Strength and endurance come from doing farming and that is exercise enough. I sense that there is this perception that exercising and visibly displaying a concern for one’s health is seen as unsuitable behaviour for a man. The main thing is to keep body and mind in balance, keep yourself

satisfied. "Like sneaking sausages out of the fridge at night. Matti loves his sausages!", Paula says.

Matti excuses himself and goes out on the porch to smoke a cigar and I know that he has many a time sat there pondering over his farm and over the fact that none of his sons will take over the farm, a matter of some discussion and conflict in the family. At the same time he knows it is pointless to insist because he also knows that his farm, like so many others that are too small to survive in the coming years, is basically already in "terminal care". No matter how strong his body is it will never mend the broken heart he will get from being forced to give up his life's work – the farm.

(Field diary, September 2003)

As producers of food, farmers link food, land and body into a unity characterised by an idea of wholeness. Leading a good life can be summarised as eating pure, Finnish food to nurture the body so it will be strong and able to do hard manual labour; living in a harmonious and un-polluted living environment close to nature; having the freedom to work well; having an intact and orderly home and a balance in the family; being a persevering, fair, honest and dependable person. A whole person consists of these basic elements. They are the ingredients of a simple, stable and hardy life. Wholeness is also about maintaining the strength of the land, nurturing it and keeping it tidy. Just like a farmer's body needs to be strong to get the work done, also land needs to be strengthened by giving it nutrients and draining it of excess water, balancing it out, so it has a uniform growth capacity. Spreading lime and fertilisers; harrowing in the fall after harvesting; and building subterranean drainage pipes is part of this improvement process. Land that is whole, intact is land that is kept active through the process of working with it and preventing nature from encroaching on it.

Good food

Because farmers find that they live in a clean environment, they also feel that the food they produce in this environment is clean. As a farmer you consume the land by eating the products that come from the land: vegetables, cereals, moose meat, berries, mushrooms. A proper meal consists of red meat, potatoes, rye bread, butter, and milk, usually still cooked by the woman in the house (see also the findings of Lupton (2000) on meal habits of rural Australians and Murcott (1982) on South Wales). In the countryside the idea of self-sufficiency in terms of food is still, to some degree, alive. Those who grew up during the war and post-war period were taught about food management. Families used to preserve food themselves like canning meat and vegetables and salting fish.

People had kitchen gardens with vegetables, berry bushes and fruit trees and they would get meat through hunting. In addition they would collect wild berries, mushrooms and other resources from the forest. Later on in the 1960's the use of pesticides became common in agriculture and also in kitchen gardens. It was first in the 1970's that the health hazards of the substances became clear, but very few people locally question the safety of pesticides or are interested in it, mostly because they are not very aware of discussions regarding the health effects of pesticides and fertilisers and, after all, these substances are vital tools in their work.

During the interviews informants were told of the "eastern excess in mortality" and of recent studies that show that Swedish-speakers lead longer healthier lives than Finns living elsewhere in the country. When asked what they thought was the key to good health and how they maintained their health they spoke, among other things, of a healthier diet. This meant a diet with less fat and salt and more vegetables and fish. Wholesome, good food was also considered to be food that was "pure" or "clean" which was food that was produced close to your home, in Finland. Mostly women informants mentioned that food that has travelled long distances is not good, nor is food containing artificial preservatives and other chemicals. Manufactured and functional food is also dubious because it has been tampered with so much. During the time of my fieldwork Swedish scientists discovered that food fried at high temperatures contains acrylamide, a carcinogen. This sparked discussions about the dangers of eating food that has been handled industrially and about the issue of how difficult it is for the consumer to trace what has been done to the food. Bigger food contamination scandals like BSE in the year 2000 were to some extent still fresh in people's memory. Consumer trust in the safety of domestically produced agricultural products is good and the situation has improved in the last ten-year period (Piiroinen, Mäkelä & Niva 2004: 27).

The idea of good food is ambiguous because many people I spoke to felt that the basic fare of rural homes, food rich in pork fat, cream, butter and full cream milk was wholesome food, although in most health campaigns people are told to reduce cholesterol and avoid food with a high animal fat content. This type of substantial, strong food is needed to maintain a body involved in physical labour. Erika, a widowed farmer who raises pigs, finds that cooking your food at home is what maintains good health, as well as the use of basic food products like butter, pork meat and potatoes:

"I don't think the food is so important (in causing ill health). Butter is cleaner than margarine. One does a lot of physical labour and we do not eat processed food. Mentally farmers are not having an easy time. One works alone. One thinks a lot. It gets heavy. It is thanks to the fact that we

make our food ourselves [that we are healthier than in the east]. In that way we avoid additives, artificial colouring and emulsifiers. Butter and pork fat are clean and so is potato.”

(Erika, July 2002)

Western Finland was not directly affected by health campaigns, promoting a diet containing less of the 'harmful' animal fats, which were implemented in North Karelia from the early 1970's onwards (Puska et al. 1995). Organisations like the Martha Federation have been involved in nutritional education campaigns, one of their main projects being the so-called 'Martha Lands'. A large portion of the educational efforts of the federation in the post war years was directed at the development of vegetable patches in family gardens. Another influencing factor on Koppars is the Housekeeping School, established in 1906, where many local women have been educated and where women have been taught the skills of producing good home cooking. Today a number of organisations like the Heart Association, the Diabetes Association and Folkhälsan (an organisation for the promotion of health of the Swedish-speaking population) are encouraging people to favour a lean diet rich in polyunsaturated “good” nutritional fats, vegetables, fruits and fish.

Strong bodies

The production of food is dependent on a farmer having a strong and well-nourished body that can withstand the physical effort it takes to do manual labour daily. Maintaining health is about being able to work, caring for the tool of your labour, your body, and eating wholesome, home grown food. Having control over your body is particularly important to men because their body is the tool of their labour. What is seen as being the key to keeping your body strong and healthy is being active through physical labour, getting sufficient sleep and, for women informants, an awareness of your body and the changes happening in it. A farmer has a moral and social responsibility to remain healthy – to participate in and contribute actively to the family and the community. A good physical condition as an adult is built already in childhood, older informants believe. In the 1950's children used to walk or ski to school and spare time was spent outside playing. Men's perceptions of the strong body are linked to ideas of Finnish masculinity where the issues of autonomy, honour and fear of dependency are central (Siltala 1994; Honkasalo 2006). This “ethos of survival” (Kortteinen 1997) paints a picture of the Finnish man as a solitary character, expected to face diversities in life alone and come out at the end of it a survivor or die honourably “with his boots on” while working. The survival of a “good man” is, thus, dependent on his readiness to sacrifice his health.

A local, fifty year old health educator, Greta, tells me that it is not acceptable for people to be weak. One should be stoic and objective, have a matter-of-fact manner. In her grandmother's generation you were not allowed to demand anything. You just had to accept everything and be strong. The young generation today know how to demand and those born in the 1940's and later understand the importance of caring for oneself. Another health professional, Lisa, says that a stoic manner is a general feature of society as is the avoidance of showing extreme feelings like being too angry. Marjatta, now retired from work in the health sector, talks about the need to be strong and with this she means not needing to ask anyone for help. This is how she describes herself throughout the years of her husband's chronic illness and his numerous suicide attempts. The lack of emotionality as a general feature of Finnish society is a core value. There are clearly defined ideas regarding when and where emotions can be displayed (Roberts 1982).

Part of the ethos of the strong, labouring farmer also made him a heavy smoker. Smoking provided breaks in the work routine and strengthened social bonds between labourers. It was also tied to the idea of subsistence particularly during the post war years. Rationing of consumer goods, including tobacco, lasted throughout the years 1939–1955 (Utrio 1994). Farmers used to grow their own tobacco and would devise methods of improving its taste and quality. Smoking was a habit inherited through male relatives or people working and living in close proximity such as agricultural labourers on the farms. An awareness, in the present day, of the dangers of heavy smoking are evident in people's reproaching commentaries on farmers who smoke a few packets of 'Nortti'⁵⁰ a day. The present generation of farmers (men aged thirty to fifty) have been socialised into having a more healthy diet and the hazardous health aspects of smoking are communicated by the health care system, through advertising, the media and by the influence of women; mothers and partners aware of a healthy lifestyle. Effective health campaigning on the hazards of smoking became visible in the area first in the 1970's and in the year 2000 a health campaign called "The man in the year 2000" was initiated by Folkhälsan, a nation wide health organisation of the Swedish-speaking population. It offered local men, aged 30 to 65 the opportunity to undergo basic health tests such as measuring cholesterol levels, EKG and a short interview on living habits. If they were found to have too high levels of cholesterol or their EKG showed irregularities they were sent to have further tests and follow-up conducted.

A belief that arose from the interviews was that the wellbeing of the body is dependent on your state of mind and some informants mentioned that positive

⁵⁰ A popular brand of very strong cigarettes is North State. In colloquial language it has been shortened to 'Nortti'.

thoughts produce good health. Many spoke of the importance of keeping a balance between body and mind. Worry, such as stress over not having enough money to cover the costs of living, can, for example disrupt the balance in the body and cause you to become physically ill. This idea also included having a balanced relationship with nature and society. It can entail a degree of maturity as a person, meaning that one knows oneself and is a stable person by living a steady life. A rejection of materialism and a belief that it causes stress in individuals was particularly common among the older generation of informants. These people had grown up during the war years and the post war years when there was material scarcity. They had been taught the value of frugality and had been accustomed to being content with fewer material possessions. A positive frame of mind is supported by having an active social life and many social contacts. When you are bound by your work to your home it is important that your leisure activities take you away from home into a social environment where you can meet other people. It is good to be suitably active, speak openly, be spontaneous and have a general sense of satisfaction in your life.

Minimalistic, mundane pleasures

Ideas surrounding what constitutes a good life are related to very quotidian, minimal aspects of life like leading a regular life with enough sleep; eating good, nutritious food; being mobile; having work to keep you busy; having good friends and good relations within the family as well as being surrounded by your family. The good life is often equated with good health. These ideas about what a good life is are intimately linked to regularity, orderliness in social relations, finding the middle way, avoiding excesses, acting with a kind of positive frugality. Also here informants mentioned the value of physical work, and “working yourself into a fatigue” because it gives you a concrete sense of accomplishment.

Taking pleasure in the minimalist aspects of everyday experience is something two women informants used to describe what gives them satisfaction in life. Monica stresses that happiness does not come from having a lot of money:

“It is the small things in life that make us happy. It is something very minimal.
[– –] It is some kind of togetherness and love of those close to you.”

(Monica, November 2002)

Fulfilling yourself is a matter of putting your own personal resources to use, engaging in creative, hands-on work that makes you physically tired. She also mentions that engaging in physical work is a way to work through frustrations in life. She goes out in her garden and works away her fury. Erika, who has had the sole responsibility for her farm for the past eleven years, simply states that

the valuable things in life are found in your immediate environment, within the intimate circle of your home, in the field right outside your window:

“I think if I could die with my fields around me and that I get to keep everything [I would be happy]. So it does mean a lot. [– –] That you treasure the moment and live every day. That one really treasures every day. For example with the children, to value every moment you have with them when they are young. With Roger [her husband] it was as if we grew into one person. It was as if half of me died when he died. Happiness in life does not need to be big things, clothes and things. It can be when I go into the barn and when I hear how the grasshoppers sing when I am swimming. I do not want to think in the nursing home that my life was about washing the windows every second week.”

(Erika, July 2002)

For many informants it seems that contentment arises from the way of life in farming, from the tranquillity and regularity it offers although it also is a source of frustration because it binds you to a place and to regulations that have wrested farmers of their sense of freedom.

A PLACE CALLED HOME

Antti's farm is located in a village that lies to the north of Norrås, on the side of a hill that spills into the sea. The property was bought by his father in the 1930's, with additional field land rented in Norrås in the 1950's which was eventually purchased from the owners in the beginning of the 1980's. He took over the farm at the age of twenty after the sudden death of his father. Soon after that he married his childhood friend from Norrås. They raised three children in the house and his eldest son will be taking over the farm when Antti retires. The farm is now technically too small (30 hectares farm land, 35 hectares forest land) to survive economically in 'EU Finland', but the family receives sideline income from the salaried work of his wife. The central significance of the home for Antti is about permanency and a love for the land. It is a constant reminder of the work his parents put into the home, also pushing the next generation to do the same. He feels responsibility towards continuing and respecting this legacy. It is a tranquil place where he can be his own master. To Antti the concept of home is to a large degree embedded in the land:

“My birth home means a lot. This is a very tranquil place. Nobody comes here. You can be your own master. I am such a land lover and a lover of tranquillity. Although the house no longer is the way it was in my childhood [it was remodelled in 1976], but there is still a feeling of love

that you have towards your home when you have a home. Many people in their fifties have had several homes, but I have only had this one. It is the legacy of my father and mother. It should be respected and nurtured. My mother, sisters and brothers come to see their home place. It would feel funny if this was not here. For me [the feeling] is in the land. This house is connected to it. It is part of this place. Land cannot be exchanged. It can be worked on, but you can change your house. If your house burns down you can build a new one, but land can never be replaced even though it is an earthly matter.”

(Antti, May 2002)

In the countryside the home is the nave of social and work life. The farmers I interviewed see the home in terms of a totality, an unbroken whole or wholeness consisting of the buildings, garden, fields and forests of a farm. The permanency of vertical kinship, of a line of continuation gives the home a sense of completeness. It becomes a unit that includes the totality of life, human relations, love, attachment, loyalty, and the living environment itself. It is rooted in the relationship between people, those who live in the home and a concern with providing them with an environment that furthers a positive development and personal growth. Many of my informants, when asked about the meaning of the home, answer that it is simply “all this around us” or “everything”, “the content of life”. It is a container of work, life, future, memories, knowledge and presence. Attitudes towards the home indicate that it is seen as a kind of “total social fact” (Mauss 1990) or similar to the definition used by Simmel, “an aspect of life and at the same time a special way of forming, reflecting and interrelating the totality of life” (1984: 93–94; see also Skultans 1998: 33). The concept of the home is central to the understanding of human experience. Homes are places of safety and belonging. Mary Douglas calls the home an “embryonic community” (1991: 289). In her definition the home brings space under control giving life inside the home physical orientation, a type of ‘direction of existence’ (Ibid: 290). It can protect us from a feeling of fragmentation (Gullestad 1993) and it strengthens the social order (Douglas 1966). In a rural context the meaning of the home is different from in the city (Silvasti 2001: 272) and in a diasporic context a home in the countryside gains new meanings as a place of returning (Honkasalo 2004). To farmers the home is both a place to live, to live out social relations and a place of work.⁵¹ The boundary between the private and the public is drawn symbolically rather than physically. The idea of wholeness and unity is located in the physical arrangements of the home, in what it contains and what significance objects of the home have. Through these objects people create the experience of the whole person and of a unified family (Gullestad 1993).

⁵¹ This has been confirmed by other recent studies conducted on Finnish farmers (e.g. Silvasti 2001: 272).

Neat is good

Sometimes it felt as though it was constant, the preening of the environment. One neighbour used to cut her hedge and prune the apple trees at two am in the morning. She said she did not need to sleep very much, but why be out there in the garden with shears in hand landscaping your hedge in the middle of the night? There seemed to be peak activity periods during the year like the spring and the summer. The flowerbeds needed to be weeded, the lawn mowed, the dung pile landscaped, rugs washed, fences painted. It was endless this list of tasks and I was pulled into the frenzy of activity. Neatness was important because all these guests would arrive in the village and one did not want to be ashamed of being the one who has the messy garden or a hedge that straggles in all directions. In Norrås village, as I would imagine in most villages on Koppars, people are concerned about the neatness of fields, buildings, gardens, everything that is a visible representation of the farm and, thus, by extension, the farmer him or herself. Farmers also check the neatness of the neighbour's field to see if there are any "hare's trails" which indicates that he has not adjusted his sowing machine properly and misjudged the size of the field so he is left with an un-sowed furrow. Neatness is also about a cooperative relationship with nature, working with it to mould the natural environment into something that is pleasing to the eye. A beautiful field to a farmer means one void of weeds with grain stalks that are healthy and even. Neatness is also about pride and the unwritten law of not accepting failure.⁵²

By analogy, concern about untidiness is about that of objects being out of place, like machines and debris littering the yard, rather than being contained within the barn; fields that are not chalked or forests that are not thinned out and cleared of falling branches and felled trees. An untidy field is noticed by neighbours and local farmers passing by. The landscape becomes a showcase of success and hard labour and one can say that the visibility of success is epitomised in the look of a field or a forest. Whether land is tidy or untidy used to be dependent on how actively a farmer nurtured his land, how regularly he removed weeds either manually or chemically. The land or the landscape can also play the role of representing intimacy and permanency as Skultans (1998: 149) explains of Latvia: "The landscape lends a permanence to the way of life and the human activities infuse the landscape with a reassuring intimacy." The new regulations that have come with the advent of the European Union restrict the use of pesticides for environmental reasons, which prohibits farmers from controlling the weeds on their fields. These regulations place them in a bad light, making them look careless and indifferent. The moral imperative

⁵² Research shows that Swedish-speakers have been perceived by Finnish-speakers as being conscientious people who cared for their living environment well which made their homes and gardens look neat (Lindqvist 2001a: 193).

of keeping the land clean is controlled by a decision making body far removed from the moral world of farming in Finland. One informant, Paula, says that the despair over the possible end to your life's work, the threat of continuity breaking can be seen in the landscape in the fact that houses, fields and forests are not maintained. It makes farmers disinterested in maintaining the farm and the buildings and it also signals to your environment that you have given up – it signals failure to maintain the good life.

A safe haven

Many mention that the home is a place to rest and re-charge your energy and where you have the freedom to be by yourself and do what you like. Concealment and isolation is relevant in an environment where people live close to each other and protecting your privacy is difficult. When you work outside and in the immediate vicinity of your home it is like being on a stage. You are under constant public scrutiny if you happen to live in a village which is not already very de-populated or inhabited by people who all work away from the village. The home represents safety, respite from the controlling social eye and a place to simply rest a physically strained body:

“It is a pleasant place where you can be as you like. It is a calm place where you can be by yourself, where you can take it easy. Then it is like that that there are not very strong boundaries when you work at home compared to if you would be away for work. [– –] It is everything here.”
(Björn, July 2002)

A home is not only a physical object, but also a sensory space that includes central feelings like a feeling of safety, peacefulness and contentment:

“The home is the totality of all things that are around you. It is not only the four walls inside of which you sleep. [– –] It is place where you feel content.”

(Keijo, September 2003)

In Rikard's parents generation the home was seen as an investment for coming generations. They worked hard for the earth and forest to make it productive in the future. Rikard thinks that although he is obliged and entitled to care well for his family home he thinks it is important that he lives for the moment. Rikard's children are not interested in taking over the farm. Both of them live in a city and have professions that have no connection to farming. Concepts of the home seem to be gradually changing because so many farmers face the same fate as Rikard. Switching from long-term thinking geared

towards the future to focusing on the present and only one's own life trajectory can for many be a difficult transition because of all the embodied emotions integrated into the idea of the home. The farm, the home, can be seen as an embodiment of happiness and virtue, a metaphor of the good life (see also Skultans 1989: 31).

Tools, trotters, tractors, televisions

Arja and Rainer's home is filled with old furniture, long pile rugs, paintings and selected framed photographs of Rainer's parents and other relatives. Arja's daughter attended a carpentry course and has repaired old furniture stashed away in the attic. In the kitchen, which serves as the main socialising space of the house, there is a dresser with some potted plants, candles and framed photographs of the family's horses. It somehow resembles an altar. One of the pictures shows Rainer's first Finnhorse trotter harnessed to a sulky with a happy looking Rainer holding the reins. Another one is a close-up of him face-to-face with a horse as a young boy. Rainer still trains Finnhorse trotters as a leisure time activity and he fondly remembers the horses of his past. In old photographs farmers and farming families are often seen posing with their horses, but also other small animals such as dogs and sheep. Homes of horse owners are often adorned with pictures of their racehorses, prizes and other horse related paraphernalia. The trotting horse is the extension of the working horse and the present day Finnhorse trotters are descendants of working horses. Before the mechanisation of agriculture the working horse was a vital partner and the success of farming tasks were often dependent on the skills, obedience and strength of the working horse. They were costly to buy and invaluable in the everyday running of the farm, seen as almost "sacred" animals by some (Lettinen 2004: 121). Because of their special position on the farm and in the home of the farmer they were viewed as family members and were given personal names.

The home itself is the fruit of your labours and this idea extends beyond the act of building the house itself to the maintenance and development of its interior. Many farmhouse women in the past attended home economics courses, organised by the Martta women's organisation or the home economics school on Koppars where they were taught textile skills such as weaving rugs and fabrics. Households would strive for a high degree of self-sufficiency in terms of a variety of domestic products. When you have painted and decorated the house, woven the rugs, sewn the curtains it is not easy to leave it. Erika, for example, has involved herself in her own home improvement project because it links her to her past and it is an issue of honour to maintain these visual representations of her family history:

“I have wallpapered, painted the furniture, I take the old [furniture] and think that ‘this was grandmother’s chest of drawers’. [– –] I preserve everything old, all the old tools. It is my ancestors that have been on this land. It is very important.”

(Erika, July 2002)

Farmhouse interiors contain inherited furniture, long-pile rugs, prizes won at agricultural shows and racing events, pictures of parents, grand parents, children and grandchildren, and paintings and framed, enlarged photographs of the family farm. Some local farmers attend auctions and decorate their homes with old furniture and farming implements. Work implements, combi-harvesters and tractors are also inherited from one generation to another and are left outside the barn or in the yard and some are, of course, still in active use. The visual storage of farm implements helps to evoke memories of past circumstances and one’s own farming experiences. Restoring an old tractor to its former glory is almost like creating a monument to praise the achievements of past generations and to the wonders of technology that has supported farmers in their work.

Another centrepiece of the farmhouse kitchen is the television set. Its importance is based in the manner in which it gives rhythm to life, dividing up the workday into slots that are partially dictated by various television programmes. It also is a source of security because it provides a sense of regularity and repetition to everyday life (see Jokinen 2005). To many individuals and particularly those who belong to the pre-computer generation (who are computer illiterate) the television is a connection to happenings on a national and international level and to new ideas and trends. In the home of Arja and Rainer the television is on during breakfast when one has finished the morning task of feeding the farm animals. In the early evening when the day’s work is completed it is once again switched on and remains on until the late evening. We usually enjoyed a light evening meal of tea and sandwiches while watching the television. The selection of programmes viewed ranged from news to series and films, both domestic and foreign. Events and ideas portrayed in these programmes often prompted interesting discussions about society, social relations and basic values.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

An inevitable question at this juncture is how the central values of Koppars inhabitants are linked to overall notions of Finnishness and the image of the Finnish peasant. Although farming conditions in the country have varied from

swidden to shifting agriculture and farm size has ranged from small-holdings to large estate there are basic values of farming life that are common to all those people who live in farming communities. The peasant, *talonpoika*, has been an idealised character in Finnish society and has been a central anchoring point in the idea of Finnishness as it was constructed during the national romantic period in the 1800's. He has represented the basic, sound values of loyalty, endurance, honesty, self-control and prudence. Due to harsh weather conditions self-sufficiency within farming required farmers to have a broad skill base and the ability make sensible investments and saving strategies (Apo 1996).

Finnish values have also been analysed according to the ethos of managing on ones own (Kortteinen 1992) and on the idea of emotional restraint (Roberts 1989). Within traditional agrarian culture marriage was a partnership based on strict work morale, where it was important that both the man and the woman cared for their work responsibilities well. Because of this mutual dependence conflicts and the expression of strong feelings were to be avoided. Self-control, sensibility and discipline in terms of ones behaviour were important features if a marriage and a farm was to be successful (Apo 1996; Rantalaiho 1994; Roberts 1989: 28). A major value for farmers is the opportunity to make independent choices and manage one's own affairs, the idea of the Finnish free farmer⁵³ (see also Abrahams 1991: 172). Of the Finnish peasant the ethnologist Teppo Korhonen writes: "Peasants had their own pride...the peasant was by nature diligent, plain and straightforwardly manly and frugal in his contentment in the outcome of his work" (1999: 14). The moral and discipline of work was focused on and one was expected to care for one's work flawlessly and on time – it was an issue of honour.

The idea of being satisfied with what one has and what one has acquired through the fruits of one's labour is a tenacious value in Finnish society. Part of the peasant ideology was firmly lodged in an ideology of self-sufficiency and settling for a level of wealth common to the area where one lived. The disinterest in social mobility is related to a so called land spirit, having the desire to farm and a feeling for the land, *maahenki*, which impressed itself in the peasant, as a desire to stay in place, in one's own, safe environment (Ibid: 14; Abrahams 1991: 190–191). But also the possession of *sisu*, "the capacity to work hard in the face of difficulties over a sustained period of time" (Abrahams 1991: 190–191) are central qualities that ensure the survival and success of the farm. These can be thought of as enduring and tenacious aspects of the farming life that have survived over long durations of time.

⁵³ In this context it is important to mention that there has never been serfdom in Finland so the freedom of farmers is a direct product of the development of farming in Finnish history.

Another feature of genuine Finnishness is that of inferiority, which according to folklorist Anna-Leena Siikala (1996: 145–146) can be traced back to the nation's history of being conquered – first by the Swedes and later by the Russians. Besides the threats represented by wars and the general geographical marginality of the country there has been poverty. This experience of the indeterminacy of life has, Siltala (1996) posits, been transformed into a metaphor of the world out there being ruthless and that it does not concern itself with the needs of the individual, which has also required individuals to be stoic when faced with adversity. The gradual process of maturity of both the Finnish nation and its population was implemented through various civilising projects led by the national elite and driven through the sobriety, youth and workers' movements (Ibid). In contemporary discourse about what the Finns are like there has emerged the concept of being ordinary, implicitly meaning “just like everyone else”. This Finnish “commoner” is in the eyes of outside observers honest and dependable. Although initially seen as introverted and quiet, the Finns are also valued for their unpretentious and forthright manner of being (Löytty 2004: 48). Being “just like everyone else” derives its meaning through the lack of something, that one minimises those features that stick out, a kind of modesty that strives at deflecting attention from ones own being (Ibid: 51).

Frugality and contentment with the state of affairs is also reflected in a general attitude towards money. Wealth is not flaunted and even if it is come by through sheer luck, like in the case of lottery winners studied by Falk and Mäenpää (1999), it is not squandered. Finnish lottery winners mean that money is both a practical means, something to be respected and used in a responsible manner: “The proper appreciation of money is considered to be learned by earning or getting it...earning money by means of working teaches a person to use money ‘in a hard-working way’, i.e. with careful consideration” (Falk & Mäenpää 1999: 104). Progressing slowly, but surely towards more wealth and well-being is what constitutes the good life. It means hard work, education, having an attitude of prudence and thrift, and having economic independence which is something that has been carried down from the agrarian ideology (Ibid: 119).

I have grouped the values that are central to farmers on Koppars under the concepts of wholeness and continuity because these are themes that emerged in farmers' talk about farming as a profession and a way of life. This talk is about experiences and activities in the mundane settings of life and it points to the central social and cultural meanings embedded in everyday life, to what is at stake in farmers' lives. My understanding of culture or cultural meanings is that it is something experiential, something felt and created through practical action, rather than learnt as a necessarily coherent set of ideas. I borrow Geertz's (1973: 5) idea that:

“Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun,
I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not
an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search
of meaning.”

The way people do things is tied to a customary mode of thought and performance, something they follow because it suits them. It is the pragmatic, rather than the intrinsic that gives value to tradition. It is something that happens not through formalised procedures primarily, but through the everyday experience of life. Culture then is produced in the actions and social interactions between people in a specific locality, in constant interaction with the world around us, tested and re-tested in the real life situations of life. Culture is performed as ways of working and acting together. It is intimately linked to place where the place of the home is like a stage where the performance of work is acted out. This is how the home gains significance through work. Meaning in life is constructed through a deliberate act determined through social conditions. Practising culture through work is a habitual stance towards life, part of people's *habitus*. As actors, individuals illustrate that they can play a social game, anchored in their bodies, in the social field and it is through work and social interaction that they place themselves in the field. This field is characterised by a struggle over what is at stake in the social world. It has a certain degree of autonomy, demarcated by specific investments, stakes and gains. These stakes are under threat of alteration and fragmentation due to the fact that farmers are hindered from working in a desired way, according to their own logic of practice. Instead they are now being instructed to work against this logic or according to a logic that is alien to them. When farmers on Koppars talk about keeping the farm intact, I believe, it is a way of counteracting the disunion which entering 'the Union' (ironically enough) has implied. Farmers hear and read of farms that have been split, sold off in pieces or in complete units. Their whole life circulates around this idea of unity or totality. It consists of many aspects; the social aspect of working together, the combination of physical buildings with fields and forests, the combining of work and means of work, and the land. Maintaining wholeness depends on there being continuity of knowledge, work and vertical kinship.

Work as a central value emerges strongly in the material. A good farmer is hard working, plans well, has the ability to combine multiple tasks and is free to decide over his or her work and these in combination dictate your standard of living – working can be seen as a signifier of a good and proper person and a good life. The significance of a strong work ethic in Finnish society emerges in the literary classic of one of Finland's most famous writers, Väinö Linna.

In his book *Pohjantähden alla, Under the North Star*, (1959, 1960 & 1962) he describes the centrality of work in the Koskela family, that work is part of man just like the clothes on his body and that it is through work that an individual expresses everything. It is a blessing, almost something sacred. Enduring hard work was previously thought to be part of life, an obligation (Eskola 1985: 231). Among rural inhabitants who have moved to the cities nostalgia is partially expressed in the loss of a hard working life, something seen as being valuable because although it was heavy due to the dependence on nature and its physicality, it was based on personal freedom – one was personally responsible for whether one succeeded or failed in farming (Ibid: 247). Nostalgia is also related to the recollection of eating sweet bread, pies and foods rich in animal fats whose “goodness” was linked to the fact that they were products of the home and the hands of mothers who were working daily in the kitchen to produce wholesome home cooking (Ibid: 248). The concept of work itself is changing, or, rather the issue of a changed necessity to work hard. In the post-war years life, society and values were different and working hard was an issue of honour and necessity. The meaning of work is and has started changing as the generations who had a direct link to the post-war years are leaving agriculture. Although this value has been passed on through practice and anecdotes I wonder if it will survive or gradually be replaced with a new morality.

Perhaps the act of working with the land could also be likened to a “hardening” of the land through generational continuity (see Bloch 1995) and to a “hardening” of the body itself through the physical labour it carries out and, thus, comes to symbolise endurance, an endurance mirrored in the meta-representation of the nation. A body that is hard and hardened, not only by labour, but also by the fruits of one’s labour – potato, rye bread, milk and butter – is a healthy body that will endure the hardships it has to undergo to keep the land productive. What emerges in informants’ talk is the thought that a person with a weak body, someone prone to illness is equated with a sign of general weakness. In other words, a “whole” person is someone with a strong, endurable body that enables you to be independent. When the body falls ill and becomes weak it deceives you and, for many, it is an indication of a personal failure, a failure to ensure continuity. The body itself is part of the idea of wholeness where there should be a balance between mind and body for the body to stay healthy. It is in many senses a site of consumption either in the role of consumer or in that of being consumed. What individuals ingest into their bodies – that which the environment offers them – is what ensures continuity. It is a necessity in order for the body to withstand hard physical labour and the pressures of modern life. But “good” food is ambiguous because according to present day health philosophy it is dangerous to your health. It

contains substances (animal fats) that can fragment the body. Farmers maintain that this is what the body needs and it is their moral obligation to keep their bodies intact and functioning. Foods that are produced “in situ” are filled with the concept of continuity and permanence. They become an extension of the morality which a good home represents. There is a generational difference in food habits. Younger people tend to eat more processed food and also the older generation of farmers will eat of this “new” type of food that is manufactured or semi-manufactured. Here lies a contradiction between good, traditional food and new, “artificial” food.

The home is a social arena where continuity is displayed in the buildings, on the land, in the implements and in the actions of those maintaining the farm. Everything around you – land, tools, furniture and other domestic objects – has a story that either ties back to the past or signals the present. Your work environment, the home, is like a log book of achievements and they spur you on to keep going, visibly reminding you of your legacy and communicating to your environment that you are a good farmer, a good person who resists failure, and particularly the failure to ensure continuity. The way the home looks is a moral indicator where a tidy home is equated with an intact home and good homemakers. Untidiness of the environment is about matter that is out of place, of the social order being out of order, and of individuals unable to maintain the central values of farming life. One could say that seeing a “nice home/farm” creates and expresses the idea of a “good home/farm”, a vision of a moral order. It should give an impression of being filled with the visible signs of human enactment on the environment, bearing witness to the fact that the individuals who work there are decent and hard working. The way the home is experienced depends on who is looking at it. A farmer’s understanding of the farm or home is based on an ‘education of attention’ (Gibson 1979), learning about the land focused on events in the environment and reading the signs in the immediate micro-environment. This embodied seeing implies that a farmer sees the traces of hard work on the farm and a hoped for future – that the next generation continues to farm the family farm through active production. This can be compared to the distant, objectified observation of an inspector whose manner of looking is tied to how directives and regulations have been followed, rather than perceiving the unity and long historical roots of the farm and the work carried out there.

The things that are awarded the value of goodness are simple – they are uncomplicated and minimalist. These are straightforward food from one’s immediate environment that technology has not tampered with; living a frugal life without family conflicts and having positive thoughts; having sound interpersonal contacts, and deriving satisfaction from the natural environment close to the home. Talk about the meaning of the good life is intimately

connected to the body where, I believe, the body can be seen as an arena where the ambiguities of modern life are acted out. In numerous studies the individual body has come to represent the social body, a symbolic extension of what is taking place in society (Lock & Scheper-Hughes 1998 [1987]). Because the body is “good to think with” (Douglas 1970: 65) it also helps us to think about society through the use of symbolism. There are also frequent symbolic connections made between the idea of the ill body reflecting the disorderliness or malfunctioning of society and that it is in this way that individuals voice dissatisfaction about the state of modern life through their bodies. A focus on unity and continuity of home and body is perhaps then actually also talk about a fear of disintegration of the central values of society, a breaking down of the parameters of the good life. The uncomplicated and simple pleasures that keep the individual body satisfied, both in a physical and mental sense, can be juxtaposed against how complicated life has become for farmers – there are constantly new demands, less time, and pressures to succeed in a new climate of production. The healthy, strong body of a farmer is an open, trustworthy and honest body, fed by hard work and hardy food and it is a body that resists being tampered with through medical interventions, for example. It can be compared to the closed body of the European Union which is suspicious of the actions of farmers and that farmers feel they cannot permeate or enter, and which is fed by directives and regulations that constrain the lives of farmers.

What is mainly spoken of in this chapter is the parameters of the good life; being healthy, eating healthy wholesome food, being honest and working in a manner that is honourable. It is a life where “good” people control the stakes of life. One can discern patterns of continuity and at the same time patterns of change. Some things are constant and will keep on existing, while others inevitably will be affected by change and evolve into something else.



A typical village house bathing in mid-winter sun.

7. FRAGMENTATION OF WHOLENESS

A year after I had completed my fieldwork I call Arja a few days before Christmas to ask her what she is planning for the holidays and how things are faring with her, the family and the other villagers. First she talks about the food she is preparing for the holidays and how she has been cleaning the house, a constant concern of hers before major holidays. That is when she knows friends and relatives may drop by and she wants the house to look good. After these regular Christmas time tidings she tells me there have been some sad happenings in the village and proceeds with outlining the tragic train of events that unfolded in Tanja and Verner's home earlier that month. Up to now those present in the house do not exactly know what happened because they were so intoxicated. Aimo, a young alcoholic who also lives in Norrås, had come over for a drinking session bringing with him a man from another village on the island. As the drinking proceeded into the night they had started fighting about something and someone pulled out a knife. In the morning they woke up to find Aimo's friend dead in a pool of blood on the floor, stabbed to death. Verner took the blame for the murder, although he, like the others, does not remember what happened that night. Some villagers doubt that the murderer is Verner and, rather, believe it is Aimo, known for his violent behaviour and the fact that he has on several occasions threatened his brother Ismo with a knife. This same brother committed suicide a number of years ago by slitting his wrists and jumping into a well. Verner received a sentence for the murder and Aimo continued to visit Tanja, once attempting to rape her. Although a neighbour, who heard Tanja's anxious cries, called the police they did not arrive to investigate the issue. They are stationed some 50 kilometres away in another municipality and since the house and its inhabitants were well known to them, because they had been summoned there earlier to clear up fights and disorderly behaviour, they maybe did not think it was so urgent to come straight away. After the event Tanja was very distressed and fell ill as a result of her diabetes and general state of ill health. She refused to be taken to the hospital and within a month died in her own house.

My memories of Vernerri are fond ones. He used to drop by Arja and Rainer's house with a fish he had caught or to chop up a big tree that had been cut down on the edge of the garden. He was a conscientious worker, skilled in cutting and fast in his movements. He told me about his life before coming to Norrås. He had suffered a lot when he lost his job as a lumberjack in northern Finland. He moved down to Helsinki and remembers the days spent in his small apartment in Vantaa, idle and waiting to get some work in the construction sector. He had once on his own initiative done some work in the yard of his apartment block, but the caretaker of the house had immediately come and told him off – he did not want anyone doing his job. One foggy spring morning we had gone fishing together with his sister Aili, who had driven her camper down through the country to spend the summer months with Vernerri. It was a peaceful morning and we discussed fishing luck, the sale of beach front property for extraordinarily high sums in a village nearby and the greed of those who have a lot of money.

I remember being told the story of how Tanja arrived in the village in her fancy car accompanied by a small lap dog. It was rumoured that she had worked as a waitress in a posh restaurant in the capital, but had been the victim of a brutal assault one night and had not managed to return to work. She went into early retirement and later became chronically ill with diabetes. Vernerri joined her and they built a small house on the edge of the village some 20 years ago on property that Tanja had inherited from her father. Vernerri did odd jobs around the village, in the forest and was a part-time fisherman. Both had severe problems of alcohol abuse. Their drinking sessions were sometimes loud events that echoed throughout the village and Aimo would join them on occasion. Piia, a woman who moved to the village around 15 years ago with her husband Arto used to have a day care service in her home. She recalls the encounters she had with Tanja when she had been drinking heavily. Once she was speeding down the village road in her Mercedes swerving off onto Piia's lawn where the children were playing. On another occasion she came knocking on her door with her face all swollen, lips white with thick cream, her eyebrows singed off and a black cap pulled over her head. Through her hysterical sobs she was trying to explain that she had set her kitchen table on fire and she wanted to borrow a telephone so she could call a taxi to take her to the health centre. In the idyllic village of Norrås, with ancient wooden houses and lush old gardens, children playing among the tall honeysuckles and billowing fields of grain, Tanja died one afternoon in the spring. It is still hard for me to believe that there are such tragic life stories concealed behind the polished facades of good, serene lives. Amidst all the beauty very tragic events occur and somehow it just does not fit into the neat picture of picturesque village life, the peace and harmony of the countryside.

(Field diary, September 2002 & telephone conversation December, 2003)

MODERN LIFE PULLS US APART

The irony is that although life is good on Koppars – it is a clean, peaceful environment and a safe place to live – there is a sense of fragmentation and isolation seeping in behind the façade of the good life. Families are struck by misfortune, of quotidian actions and unsettling events that shake the basis of social life. Many talk of an increased sense of isolation and marginalisation, an encapsulation and categorisation of everyday life experiences. Society on Koppars seems to be in a process of transition with changes in the family and in working life threatening the social order within society. There is talk of family conflicts, children moving to the cities, alcohol abuse as a growing social problem among the youth, as well as elderly sections of the populations and a rise in the number of divorces taking place. A gap seems to be growing between the generations and groups of people, a slow crumbling of the way social life was previously in the villages. People live apart from each other, retiring to their homes after work, many lacking the energy to socialise and engage in voluntary activities. Within the communities there remains the memory of an era of misfortune, a wave or “epidemic” of suicides occurring at the end of the 1980’s and the first years of the 1990’s. Stories of violent deaths and abusive behaviour circulate in some villages. Although tragic events have occurred they have not been spoken of or analysed in any deeper manner.

Loneliness and dark villages

Matti and Paula are depressed by the emptiness that has settled over their village and Matti says he can spend days not seeing anyone else than his wife. They both state that the best time of the farming year is in the summer, during the potato-picking season. There is a lot of work, but also there are people around, and the bustle and social activity surrounding the work is reminiscent of the old *talkoo*⁵⁴ spirit. Paula talks about what changes have taken place and what the village was like before:

⁵⁴ *Talkoo* means a voluntary work effort usually carried out among members of a village or an association. Typical *talkoo* work tasks would be roof laying, building a sauna or building a whole house. The system is built on mutuality and the active participation of all the members of a social group like a group of villagers. This type of manual work is usually carried out by men while the women or mistress of the house benefiting from the work input will prepare food for the work party. The *talkoo* principle is also used by associations as an income generation method. *Talkoo* work efforts were usually carried out according to the working manner of the most energetic and skilful individuals of the work party and these events were characterised by the joy of working, “*työnilo*” and the spirit of voluntary help (Vilkuna 1947: 119). For more information on *talkoo* work see Vilkuna, K. and E. Mäkinen (1943) *Isien työ*. Helsinki:Otava.

“You don’t see any lights.⁵⁵ And all these things like the shop bus and all the gatherings when the shop bus came. People would socialise. You would come early to have a chat. It came twice a week and the elderly ones would gather there. Then the mail was a type of happening every morning. There was a neighbour woman who would visit my mother-in-law and then they would wait for the mail together.”

(Paula, September 2003)

She explains that one of the most important roles of the visitor was to bring news from the outside world, like the gossip of villages further away or then more official tidings and snippets of information. Now with daily papers arriving into the mailbox of each individual house, as well as the existence of television sets in every home the role of the bringer of news is no longer so important. Matti remembers how in his youth villagers would come to have a sauna at their house if they lacked bathing facilities in their own home and that the local sporting association also used to have a weekly activity evening for men with sauna and dart throwing competitions. This has all disappeared now. The present pace of life has brought about a decimation of social contacts. All the necessary everyday services are now contained within the home and many more are just a phone call away.

The expression “there are fewer lights in the village” (fewer houses with lighted windows) was used by a number of informants. The lighted window is a common metaphor for this gradual process of population decimation seen in numerous villages on the island. Light can, thus, be understood as a symbol for a lived place. Many villages are totally dark during the autumn and winter months because they do not have street-lights. Some houses do have strong lights attached to the outside wall of the main building and various other farm buildings to light up the immediate surroundings.

The sense of loneliness and isolation is more concretely felt at these times of the year. Cottage owners will not visit their village homes very often in the winter months and perhaps not at all if the cottage lacks a proper heating system. There is also a general process of de-population taking place in many villages and with it a change in the demographic distribution of village inhabitants. Central institutions that used to bring people together, that served as meeting points such as the shop bus, village schools and the library no longer exist. Spontaneous and regular visits between neighbours rarely take place any more. Those who live in villages permanently are retired people or individuals working in service sector jobs like private companies, in shops or

⁵⁵ In Norrás which is just north of the village Matti and Paula live in electricity came in the 1940’s.

for the municipality. It is also an issue of a generational shift where in some locations village inhabitants are of an age at which they are slowly dying or have moved to retirement homes and few young families have moved in to houses which are now abandoned. In some cases houses are not sold off, due to drawn out inheritance conflicts, and many house owners are weary of renting out their property to strangers. There is a lack of housing available in villages, so young families move to the municipal centres where they are close to services and where housing to buy or rent is available. Young people who have just left secondary school often choose to move to nearby cities to receive further education or to work. Some of these may return later to Koppars with their families and commute to work from the island. Monica also finds that it is not only an issue of people moving out of the village, but that they are replaced by new people.

“Its different when you have lived somewhere your whole life and you know all your neighbours well. It does not matter when some people move out, but when it’s a matter of many and the whole village is replaced by new people it’s a loss. It is a different kind of loss to experience the depopulation of a village. It is a loneliness to do with one’s history being replaced by others, new people who come with different memories and experiences. The collective memory suffers.”

(Monica, November 2002)

Farmers also complain about the loneliness of the work itself. Those farmers who have a spouse or parents sharing the farming work with them have some social contact during the day. When there were more active farmers in the villages there would always be someone to ask for help or to share other concerns with. Monica laments the fact that now she has to call her neighbour to help her if she gets stuck with her tractor in a muddy field. When tractors were more primitively designed the advantage was that they would get stuck more often in the fields and neighbours would look out for each other on the fields. There were farmers doing the ploughing or harvesting work on near lying fields who would visibly notice that you were in trouble. This still happened in the beginning of the 1980’s when Monica started out with farming. There were no mobiles with which to call and ask for help and it strengthened the sense of community and made you feel good when someone came to help you. Today villages are so depopulated that there are fewer and fewer active farmers left to lend a hand and those who are left are so busy they cannot easily give of their time.

Talkoo work, an activity that strengthens the sense of community, has dwindled and much of the work that is undertaken is as a way of dealing with a distressing situation. Prior to the mechanisation of agriculture voluntary work

parties played an important role at various times of the agricultural year when there was need for a large work input such as hay making and harvesting and also in connection with the construction of buildings. It also laid the basis for a self-sufficient local culture and was an important form of socialising (Korhonen 1999). With mechanisation and village inhabitants working outside of the village it has become difficult to maintain the principle of *talkoo* work. Now it is most often associated with leisure activities and construction projects related to improvement of the local environment like a local beach or making a skating rink, work inputs that local village committees are expected to carry out in return for financial support from the municipality. Only one generation ago, in the youth of those who today are close to sixty, it was still common to engage in *talkoo* activities many times a year. *Talkoo* activities are today carried out in cases of emergency which changes the nature of the event from being a positive social gathering related to the growth and expansion of villages, e.g. by building a house, to becoming a rescue operation to save a fellow farmer in a crisis situation. What used to be mainly a constructive form of consolidating social obligation has turned into emergency work, Matti finds:

“There were all sorts of *talkoo* activities. They are very nice, that there are a lot of people and you do things together. There isn’t that type of thing any longer. [– –] There isn’t time. Who would participate in *talkoo* activities any more? [– –] If someone has become ill there can be, but not generally, no.”
(Matti, November 2002)

Also Timo and Kaija, a couple in their 50’s believe that people of their generation engage in *talkoo* work because they belong to the generation that were socialised into it since childhood. To them *talkoo* work is a form of social wealth, a cure against loneliness and a social activity which combines work and having fun together. They mention that the local sporting association has been built solely with labour input provided through *talkoo* work efforts. Today, unfortunately, younger people are not as willing as the older generation to provide work input without pay. The decrease in voluntary work efforts seen today is a sign of the times and of an individualisation increasing also in rural areas. Demands regarding efficiency and increased work loads for farmers make it difficult to spend time helping others.

Broken farms, broken farmers

Fragmentation is also about a dismantling of the diversity that used to characterise farming. The trend toward mono-cultivation combined with financial insecurity, which in the present day is different from earlier because so much of your income comes directly from subsidies and the amount of subsidies

can change even in the middle of a funding cycle, adds to farmers' vulnerability. The level of income has dropped and the amount of work has increased. Today it is no longer possible to survive in farming using the principle of self-sufficiency because you need money for everything:

“Before we had all kinds of animals. We had some farming and then we had a little bit of this and a little bit of that. There were many legs to stand on. If one thing failed you had something else. It was always fairly constant. [– –] It has changed with the EU. People do not care as much any more and not in the same way as before. The price of goods has become so much cheaper that people no longer care if they do not harvest everything. It has become more like this. That may be the reason why one gets other sources of income so one knows it is more important that it works.”

(Monica, November 2002)

Following European Union membership it took time for some farmers to realise how much the changes had affected their lives and with it insecurity regarding the future. When the profoundness of the situation became clear the stress of it all could have both physical and mental consequences. Matti finds that there is a clear demarcation between those farmers who have hope and those who have lost it. Farm size and the age of the cultivator affect how you view the future. Farmers who do not need to make any major investments are the successful ones in farming today. The gap between the successful ones and those left in “terminal care” is growing:

“And let's say when we joined the EU it didn't immediately dawn on people. Many did not immediately really understand the gruesomeness, but let's say the past two years now it's really...the truth is...many still don't want to believe it's as bad as it is. Here in the summer when a 41-year old died, a man. [*What did he die of?*] It was his heart. A farmer. And when you met him here just before his death he said 'it won't get any worse than this?' He said it the last time. He was so hopeless,(I think it should be 'devoid of hope' as hopeless now means no good at something) him too. He said 'it can't get worse', as if he was consoling himself. [– –] It's become clear to them now during the course of this year. There is no continuity...let's say the ones who have around 100 hectares they have some kind of faith.” [– –] At this point it is basically terminal care.”

(Matti, November 2002)

One of the greatest losses experienced by farmers is the loss of something one informant calls “farmer pride” which is pride over your life's work and that of many generations preceding you. This sense of defeat can in some cases be visible in one's manner of being, to be concretely expressed through one's body:

“[– –] The ones who have been left on the outside their possibilities have become even narrower. We are here as an annoyance, in a way, still. As long as the machines are humming.[– –] [It appears] as a kind of apathy. You do see it on them as well. The will to live, everything is gone.”

(Paula, November 2002)

Families changing

Many local people feel that the number of divorces is on the increase. Most of the divorce cases are among young couples with small children, although divorces occur in all age groups.⁵⁶ In farming communities divorce is still less common than in the cities, because if one spouse leaves the home it is impossible for the one remaining on the farm to run the farm without the support of paid labour and paying for a labourer is, for most farmers, too costly. In most cases it is the woman who works outside the home while the man runs the farm. The women who are in the most vulnerable position are those who have married into a farming family and who have no share in the ownership of the farm. Couples who married in the sixties still recall how the man's family wanted there to be a pre-nuptial agreement that stated that when the family farm was to be passed down to the younger generation, only the man would inherit the ownership of the property. Young couples would often live with the man's parents until they built their own house. Living in close proximity to the older generation could put strains on the relationships of young couples. If the woman additionally worked on the farm, she would be totally dependent on her husband for financial means.

A divorce is not just an issue between the couple – it reflects upon the whole family of the farm owner because if the farm can no longer function due to the decrease in family labour it may have to be auctioned off which brings shame upon the extended family also. This shame is connected to the moral obligation to endure difficulty, where women were socialised into sacrificing themselves for their families, even when it meant enduring difficulties and distress in their family life. In present day society the sense of obligation felt towards your husband's farm and his family has been diminishing as opportunities in terms of education and work for women has been increasing also in the rural areas. Women are no longer as ready to sacrifice themselves for the family as they were in the post-war generation (Kortteinen 1997; Roos 1987) and the majority of the informants in this study belong to this post-war generation.

⁵⁶ In 2004 the total number of divorces in Finland was 13 200, which was a decrease of 300 from the previous year (Tilastokeskus 2005).

The family as a central institution is under threat and the family itself as a concept representing continuity, permanency and the household as a unit of production and reproduction is undergoing changes. In traditional agrarian society the family was both a production and consumption unit consisting of several generations. The inner dynamics of the family in Finland and the industrialised world at large has undergone significant changes with the increased role of women as wage earners, increases in divorces, common law marriages, sexual freedom, low birth rates, conjoined families and single person households which have created a modern perception of the individualistic family. The family is based on romantic love and the emotional bond between two adults rather than a commitment to a larger social unit commonly found in agrarian society. (Jallinoja 1984.) As the agrarian way of living has changed so has the concept of the family in Finland, also in the rural areas. The gendered division of work tasks in Finnish families used to be strict still at the time of the Second World War, but started changing as a result of the growth of the welfare state which made it possible for women to find employment outside the home (Nätkin 1997: 216 & 233). Images and messages in the media abound with references to divorce and the breakdown of the traditional family.

In some cases inheritance conflicts have led to bonds between parents and children being severed. Inter-generational conflicts are also visible in relations between parents and children and an increasing lack of respect for people based on age and the authority afforded through age precedence. Informants who have worked with young people are worried about the way they are faring on the island. Benita, who has worked as a school-teacher says:

“The habits of the young are frightening. They smoke, drink and take drugs. Some become socially marginalised which puts them into a category of people who have bad health and who drink and smoke daily. It is a repeated pattern because their fathers drink. They are young people who have never left the island. They have been too static.”

(Benita, September 2003)

A replication or inheritance of detrimental behaviour patterns within the family, and the isolated nature of life among youths that have never been elsewhere, aggravate the issue of alcohol abuse. Benita who has travelled and known other places than the island considers stability and the static nature of being, in this case, to be negative. People need to break the boundaries of their social world to appreciate and grasp the opportunities offered elsewhere. As a young teacher in the 1960's she was shocked to notice that novels were not used as teaching tools. When she introduced the use of the novel as a means of expanding the horizons of the young many parents questioned the practice

and thought it was enough that their children knew the basics of reading. They feared that novels would make their children rebellious by introducing them to new ideas and perspectives on the world.

More work, less play

Regina in her work as a physical therapist meets many different kinds of people through her practice. Some are elderly citizens who need to be rehabilitated after a period of extended illness or an operation, others are younger individuals who have work or leisure related ailments, back or neck problems. During our interview in her office in the municipal centre she provides me with this analysis of why an increasing number of people are seeking out the services of a physical therapist:

“Domestic work is less strenuous than before, but people instead have the pressure of managing at work where there is a lot of stress and a high pace of work. The importance of tangible assets emerges so much and the leisure time activities of the children. People do not have time to talk with their next of kin and their friends. One does not have time to calm down. Before it was an issue of ensuring the pragmatics of life; food, protecting oneself from the cold and one was not aware of medications. Today the social contact in your immediate environment is lacking. One has to aim to find a balance and not hover between extremes. One has a lot of information one cannot use. It is the economic ‘squirrel’s wheel’ (rat race) that guides [people’s actions]. One wants to have what others have. [– –] All the psychic, mental is expressed in the physical. We are tired, tense and suffer from burn out [she uses the English expression]. Many are aware of this, but they are caught on the squirrel’s wheel. Those in power have been aware of it, but they have not done anything about it. There is a struggle over financial means for health care and preventive health care. Society rolls on at a distorted pace. In spite of the fact that we have information, statistics, we still have mental suffering. One cannot compare it with what we had before. At that time no one had a chance to make it in society. [*What causes this anxiety?*] People are worried over their financial situation. They can be worried about whether they have something to eat or whether they can afford to have a car. Material things have high priority, that one wants something because the neighbour has it.”

(Regina, July 2003)

Work and materialism emerge as a source of exhaustion particularly in young families. It is almost as if these factors were beings that move in the lives of people, causing life to move fast like accomplices geared at bringing down

the individual, exhausting our bodies and minds. The role of the economy is represented in a machine metaphor, but one that is hand or human powered – it is not a pure image of automated power. The toil of a living being is what keeps the machine moving. Also society itself is seen in terms of movement, like a stone rolling down a hill, gaining ever more speed. Regina talks of people being pawns in the power games of decision makers and the forces of economy.

Coveting what the neighbour has and feeling one has been given an unjust position in life because one has not achieved the same level of material wealth as one's neighbour can perhaps be interpreted as envy, something some informants mentioned being a specific Finnish trait. Within Finnish folk ideology envy both meant a dispute, argument or an adverse feeling state or the seizing of luck through magical means (Virtanen 1976). The general belief about luck was that it was of a constant amount and a limited resource so by wrecking the luck of someone else one's own amount of luck increased (Kuusi 1955; Honko 1960). The limitation believed to characterise luck was probably related to the nature of agrarian life where arable land was most often a limited resource. The only way to get more of it was by taking it from someone else (Foster 1965; Starck-Arola 1998). The issue of envy was always related to will, intent and focus – it was an issue of wanting what someone else had. The destruction of luck that envy implied was called a contamination, *pilaus*, and could be enacted by anyone through magic or the use of incantations. Contamination could be aroused by the sheer force of feeling, like the feeling of envy itself (Virtanen 1976).

Competing for resources, recognition and success is what drives people to visibly show how they manage but it also hinders them from expressing distress openly in the community. Another explanation for this could be the result of an “us against them” attitude that gives rise to a combination of a collective sense of identity and an antagonistic individualism, something one finds in a “community of account” (Sider 1986). In this system the overachiever and the lazy individual threaten the community. This makes people become more individualistic and not trust the motives of others (see also Davis 1989). Bourdieu (1977a) came to a similar conclusion in his work on Algerian peasants where doing one's duty in the village was an issue of not falling out of line and keeping pace with the others. Extremes of behaviour like laziness or being over enthusiastic were seen as violating conformity. It is similar to the ideology of the “Law of Jante”, of being just average (Sandemose 1933)⁵⁷, something that is a defining feature of many Nordic countries where Lutheran morals are thought to guide people's behaviour.

⁵⁷ The law is based on ten principles that outline that people should not believe they are special or better than anyone else. It is the law of ‘being average’ or just like everyone else and not distinguishing oneself above anyone else.

Many informants feel that contemporary life is placing too high demands on them and that a clear change is discernable in comparison to the time of their childhood and youth. Employers demand that employees should work more for the same pay. Both employers and people themselves place too high demands on the individual. They feel guilty about the impossibility of fulfilling the cultural script of being a hard-working, responsible individual, because of a lack of time. The expression “life is spinning too fast” or being caught on the “squirrel’s wheel” was commonly used to describe this general feeling of stress and inadequacy. The use of these metaphors maybe points to the idea of work being like an assembly line and people being expected to work like machines, or of being trapped in the need to move ahead, without actually reaching anywhere. The idea of living under the pressure of working life was expressed more often by those informants who were working off-farm in service or municipal sector jobs than those who were farmers. Farmers often talked about stress in relation to specific times during the agricultural year like the harvesting or sowing season.

Informants who are employed in the service sector talk of the increased demand to constantly learn new things. Since computers came into use the rate of work has speeded up. Work tasks have increased and employees are expected to work more although they are not paid more. At the same time employers are cutting back on the number of employees. Mental stress is seen as being more debilitating than physical exhaustion. It is sounder to be tired in the body because by resting one can regain one’s strength. Åke, a now retired worker who has spent all his adult life on the factory floor, laments that the rapid pace of contemporary life has changed the nature of labour. Keijo, a farmer, uses a concept of stress that focuses on the holism of body and mind, making a clear connection between the breakdown and ailing of the body and the nature of modern society. In present day working life it is hard for individuals to cope with the strains of stressful working conditions:

“Man is not made for the type of society we are slowly turning into. It becomes so crazy. Man is made for totally different circumstances. We create such situations that we cannot manage to live with them. All these unnecessary things, stress and the like. Too much hard labour was something that wore people out before, but somehow it was still different. Your body adapts to quite heavy manual labour if you have been doing it since a young age and are healthy then you get used to it and manage to do it for many years.[– –] This thing [stress in work] the body does not adapt to. It breaks down the body, quite simply this life that we live here now. It becomes too rapid. It isn’t good for either the brain or the body or the muscles.”

(Åke, September 2003)

“Too much work and too little time. You have to do more than you are capable of within a specific period of time. You constantly have things crashing onto you and it isn’t necessarily badly managed time, but then it is naturally an issue of personality. Some people make do with much less. A small amount is enough. With others it can be that [– –] they place such demands on themselves that they constantly have a hard time managing to deal with it. The amount of work just becomes too incredibly big. [– –] I believe that the human being is a totality after all. One cannot separate the psyche to an area apart when we already clearly know today that if a person is very stressed then he will much more easily get respiratory infections, influenza and all these sorts of things. If he is really stressed. Present day society is such that it exploits people a lot and they are on a kind of ‘squirrel’s wheel’. At the end of the day there are few people in today’s society who do not end up on that ‘squirrel’s wheel’.

(Keijo, September 2003)

The concept of stress presented by people on Koppars is one that can be equated with anxiety and exhaustion. The anxiety over whether one will manage to stay on the ‘squirrel’s wheel’ leads to mental exhaustion, which differs from the exhaustion characterising working life before. When managing was about doing hard manual labour, having sufficient physical strength and the physical health to remain in work, people experienced bodily exhaustion, aches and pains that were eased by rest. Exhaustion resulting from work today fragments the body, making it gradually break down as both a physical and mental entity. Contemporary society does not allow the modern person to rest, to slow down the cogs in the wheel of life. The metaphor of the ‘squirrel’s wheel’ illustrates precisely this that no matter how much one runs it leads nowhere and although there is a way out to freedom from this captivity one cannot get off the wheel spinning ever faster. Running, one believes, becomes a purpose in itself. The fact that the animal doing the running in this metaphor is a squirrel and not a rat mirrors core Finnish values, the closeness to nature, the squirrel’s ability to store food over the winter, its nimbleness, ingenuity and industrious nature, its ability to survive through harsh winters by planning well and saving with leaner times in mind.

BROKEN LIFELINES

“He was in a difficult state of depression and I believe it was partially that and then it also was that it was very difficult for him to leave the farm and stop working and move to the municipal centre. [– –] Of course depression comes as a result of different reasons and it’s clear that external factors affect the situation. He was somehow afraid and insecure. I found

a document here in a drawer. I managed the farming. He was always counting, always sitting with a pen in hand. All the newspapers were full of his calculations. I saw, when I found papers in a drawer that he had calculated how I would be able to manage the farm. I found these papers and I have saved them. He was always counting, every day.”

(Rikard, November 2002)

Rikard is talking about his father's suicide while we sit in the newly remodelled kitchen of the well-kept farmhouse that is his and his wife Karin's home. Workmen have installed a fountain in the middle of the front garden and the lawn is mowed, smoothly rolling down towards the gravel road that passes just outside their house. One gets a sense that this is a well-organised and prosperous home of a diligent farmer. Rikard's father had worked hard many years as a foreman so he could afford to buy a farm of his own and Rikard remembers how his father told him that when he purchased the house it was in such a bad state of deterioration that birds flew through it, having built nests in the rafters of the ceiling. He worked hard to make the abandoned farmhouse into the handsome building it was on that clear November day. It was difficult for Rikard's father to accept that he became physically incapable of working as he aged and even though he moved to the municipal centre from the farm he still came almost daily to the farm and did some work in the forest. Rikard's father could not cope with the uprooting which moving from the farm implied and the loss of meaning in his life that it constituted. He had a hard time accepting the process of physical deterioration taking place in his body and he feared becoming a burden to society as his condition worsened. Rikard ponders if the depression and finally the suicide had to do with his father being immobilised while in the war, having been traumatised by the idea of being constrained and driven into a dead end in the trenches. Karin says that he was the type of man who did not talk about his worries. His silence on these matters made him a typical man of that generation and it was linked to the fact that he had been in the war. In many families men never discussed the experiences they had during the war with their family members. They just wanted life to go on, to build up their farm and work hard. Silence and hard work was a coping mechanism for many men who had seen the horrors of war, lost friends, experienced hunger, cold and pain. During the period that many informants referred to as “the suicide wave” or “suicide epidemic” Rikard lost in addition to his father, one of his closest friends and a neighbour. But he has decided that he lives for the moment, for today, rather than gear all his efforts to the future, like his parents did.

Marjatta lives in an area of single-family houses built in the 1960's in a low brick building surrounded by a simple garden. She takes me on a tour of the

house to show me her collection of antiques, many of which she has inherited from her father who was a sea captain and then guides me to the kitchen where she has set the table with bread, cheese, cold cuts and cinnamon buns.

As the interview proceeds it becomes clear to me that this was the room where her husband hung himself. When Marjatta recounts the story of her husband Harld's illness and death she is strangely unemotional. She just states the train of events in a very matter-of-fact manner. Her descriptions of the fear and violence that characterised her marriage make me feel uncomfortable, distressed and emotionally exhausted. It feels unsettling to sip tea and to munch away on a cinnamon bun just a meter away from where a suicide has been committed. It happened in the mid-nineties. He was chronically depressed and in 1985 made his first attempt to take his life. At that time it was still taboo to talk about suicide and there was little understanding regarding the connection between depression and suicide. Most people thought it was a result of pressures in interpersonal relationships or external events such as changes in ones living conditions, but not a result of chronic depression. The doctors and Harald's family blamed her. It came as a total surprise to everyone because his illness had been concealed and he had forbidden Marjatta to talk to anyone about it. At times she feared for her life due to his aggressive behaviour, but would just leave the house or stay out of the house until he fell asleep. There were times she would sleep with her hands in front of her throat to protect herself from Harald's possible attempt to strangle her in the night. When he did finally kill himself her friends avoided her, the priest did not visit her, but the deacon did come because she was Marjatta's friend. At the funeral the priest held a short sermon because the deceased had not actively attended church services. When I wonder how Marjatta can bear to live in a house where her husband's suicide happened, she says: "We were friends. Why should I feel uncomfortable staying here?" Even when faced with the harsh tragedy of her husband's suicide she is stoic, bearing the reality of her life and remaining true to her husband by not abandoning their mutual home. Maybe she also believes that if she leaves the house she would in the eyes of her husband's siblings and society appear guilty of causing his death.

Violence and death

Between the years 1988–1992 many suicides occurred in a short span of time on Koppars.⁵⁸ Periods of "suicide waves" have occurred also before this in the mid 1960's when seven suicides took place within a period of two weeks. This was of

⁵⁸ Glancing through municipal church books from the 1900's one can discern a pattern in the manner in which suicides occur. When one suicide occurs, two or three follow. Some are cases of two people from the same village, eg. a young man and woman. In some cases, before 1965, descriptions were very detailed like; "man found with a shot gun beside him on a country road with a hole shot in his head".

course a time when there was a major move to the cities from the countryside, a time of disruption and change. Only a part of the more recent “suicide wave” was during the worst recession years that Finland has experienced in the post-war years and the reasons for committing suicide were not only economic ones. The use of the term “epidemic” infers that these deaths that happened had a character of something contagious that spread through the area. The exact number of suicides committed has been difficult to pin point. It has varied between six and seventeen persons of different backgrounds and ages, and mostly men. What has been significant is that they have been rapid decisions, not something the victim has been planning for long.

The local explanations of causes of suicide were almost exclusively linked to social determinants rather than mental ones. Sometimes it had to do with loneliness, being abandoned through death or divorce, or experiencing economic loss. Also the influence of the media contributed to the chain reaction. During the depression years the issue was talked about on TV, in magazines and newspapers. Although some informants want to downplay the role of disruptive social change at the time of the suicide epidemic, it is clear that the social environment, the sense of anomie needs to be taken into the analysis. Within a crisis group set up to analyse and deal with the situation one tried to explain the reason for the deaths, drawing certain parallels to the general developments on a national level like for example the economic depression. In a social environment where succeeding and keeping up a façade of success are important aspects of social comportment one could assume that the ripples of the economic crisis that was affecting Finnish society at large were felt on Koppars. It also made individuals ponder the issue of managing and of the potential of future failure. Even among people who were doing relatively well there was a fear of failure.

Everyday violence is an often discussed and commonly occurring phenomenon in Finnish society. Stabbings and death by stabbing are common types of violent crimes and many of these acts are directly linked to the abuse of alcohol.⁵⁹ In traditional society it was common that parties of men at public dances, weddings and other social gatherings would battle out their differences with knives. The traditional *puukko* knife⁶⁰ worn on your belt was part of the common regalia of men, a tool used in agricultural and forestry work.

⁵⁹ In a study carried out in 1997 on violence enacted against women by men 40% of adult women claimed to have been victims of violence carried out either by their former partners (50%), present partners (22%) or men unfamiliar to them (24%) (Heiskanen & Piispa 1998).

⁶⁰ The knife has traditionally been part of the regional festive attire in the Swedish-speaking coastal areas of Ostrobothnia from where the use of the *puukko* as a common weapon spread to other parts of the country. Carrying a knife for purposes other than in the context of labour was criminalised in 1850 (Ylikangas 1974).

Finnish society is often stated as having an unusually high rate of suicide and a substantial amount of research was conducted on the issue in the 1980's in an attempt to design more effective prevention strategies in the health and social welfare sectors. On an annual level one in every two thousand men and one in every 8000 women commit suicide in Finland.⁶¹

But why did so many deaths occur within a short span of time? Many informants believe in the “chain reaction” explanation, that when one person commits suicide then others follow suit. Is there something more to this than simply copycat behaviour? A Durkheimian (1987) perspective on this would be that the act of imitation is not the sole cause for a sudden increase in suicides in a certain society. He, rather, believes it is copycat behaviour combined with general causes of the social environment. Imitation exposes a state that was already present and which would have resulted in suicide even without the triggering force of imitation (1897: 141). To Durkheim the phenomenon can be seen as a consequence of the intensity of social life and the degree of social integration of the members of society, as well as the effects of “excessive individualism” caused by the disintegration of society. The moral confusion that ensues when the society that man serves dissolves, increases suicidal tendency not only in individuals, but in whole societies (Ibid: 213–214). The act of committing suicide, although apparently something private and individual is classified by social actors and, thus suicide becomes significant due to how it is perceived and classified by others. The contagion theory of suicide can also be analysed in the light of older folk beliefs regarding luck as a limited resource, mentioned earlier in this chapter. Bad luck was considered to be contagious (Virtanen 1976), so one could perhaps extrapolate that this could influence people's perception of suicide as being contagious.

Based on the experiences recounted by Koppars inhabitants to me I can only speculate whether Koppars, as a geographic location, is more prone to being affected by misfortune than other locations on the whole. Some local inhabitants feel the island has this reputation among outsiders, “others” as a place where “strange” accidents and violent incidents happen. Benita says many of the tragic stories she has heard on Koppars are not far from the tales told of remote villages in Lapland, an area known for its incidents of violence, alcoholism and isolation. She mentions the case of one man, a public figure, who abused his wife to death. The community witnessed this course of events without interfering. During my fieldwork period two accidents with lethal outcome took place. One was the case of a student at the local agricultural

⁶¹ Suicide statistics for Finland are higher than those of the neighbouring Nordic countries, but lower than those of Russia and the Baltic states. A particular feature of suicidal behaviour in Finland is the high rate among young men. Among men aged 20-34 suicide is the most common cause of mortality (Kansanterveyslaitos 2005).

school who fell under the wheel of a tractor driven by another fellow student during an exercise and the other incident was an intoxicated man who drowned in a small pond at the back of his house. Alcohol related accidents are cited as commonly occurring on Koppars. Law enforcement is not very efficient and it is common knowledge that people drink at social events and then drive home (see also Holmila 2000: 15).

What then is the purpose of all these stories? By talking about the misfortune of others or the tragic experiences they have faced themselves people seemed to want to communicate to me that life is harsh on the island, that there is tragedy and unforeseen events happening that alter life completely. They shatter the image of the good life and signal that behind closed doors there is more happening than meets the eye.

Talking and silence on misfortune

People told me stories of tragic events during interviews and informal discussions, but I was told that these matters were not discussed publicly to any greater degree. Although the number of violent deaths that took place in a small community over a short period of time was considerable, during the “suicide wave”, there was hardly any public airing of the issue. One can, though, assume that within families and closed groups of people it was a subject of discussion and concern. At the time of the suicide epidemic or wave in 1991 a crisis group was set up, initially starting as a volunteer group and later integrated into the work of the municipal health centre. At the time of my field work there was no regularly functioning crisis group besides one run by the church. Some informants speculate on why these events, which must have left a deep impression in a small community, were not spoken of. Erik believes it is difficult to set up and run a crisis group in a small community because people know each other which makes it more difficult to get the kind of support you need. There is also generally less anonymity so people want to protect their privacy. He also thinks it is not always good to talk about tragic experiences, because talking about them can potentially launch more suicides. A local therapist, Lisa believes people have lost faith in the crisis groups because they have made mistakes. One such incident was when the tractor accident happened. Two girls were involved in the accident and no crisis therapy was available for the one who was driving the tractor.

Although things are silenced publicly they resiliently remain in the memories of people. Benita believes this knowledge becomes transposed onto the place itself, giving it a particular hue of distress and suppressed stories of tragic events. People do not want to display their dirty laundry to outsiders and summer guests. Although they may otherwise fight about intra community

matters they stick together when something tragic occurs and if an outsider tries to find out anything they will clam up, a pattern which was visible during the suicide wave. Benita believes it is a typical trait of the countryside areas that people display a united façade. As an outsider you are never let into this inner circle of the knowledge of tragedy:

“The bad statistics were primarily at the end of the eighties, but there had been rough times before that also. Here you have a sample of all the horrible things that people do [to each other]. Everything from incest and abuse and it’s just that one does not know so much about it. The place knows. The memory of the place is long and the memory of families is long, but as someone who has moved to the area you are never accepted as one of them. This applies especially for Koppars. In the industrial centre it is easier because there has been more mobility. It is well known in Koppars that as a first generation inhabitant in the municipality you are not seen as a Koppars inhabitant.”

(Benita, September 2003)

People have a negative perspective on the practice of talking about others and they perceive it as being gossip. This is partially tied to not trusting the type of information that is circulated and the danger of it being distorted as it moves forward from one person to another. People become careful about what they say and will sometimes not even engage in small talk with other villagers. Talking about others is seen as a sign of narrow-mindedness and having deeply rooted attitudes and opinions about things. It has to do with having too few contacts with the outside world. That said, in spite of isolation, small communities thrive on the circulation of news about other local inhabitants. Although it is by some informants viewed as negative it has an important function because it upholds a sense of togetherness in a situation where social life is becoming increasingly fragmented. It is a way to mark group membership and is expected behaviour of people who live in a community together. Collective rules are manipulated, individual aspirations are voiced and social relations are being represented and contested through this type of talk about other group members (see Paine 1967; Haviland 1977; Heilman 1978). On Koppars talk between group members mainly circulates around the purely local, like municipal decisions and interpersonal relationships. All other information is readily available in newspapers and on television.

One way to analyse the negative perception that people have of gossip on present day Koppars could maybe be traced back to the role gossip had in Finnish folk tradition. The purpose of the practice of *kontinkanto* was to disseminate information about prospective brides and suitors. The information passed on as gossip was usually reproachful in nature and aimed at breaking

up a potential union. Gossip makers were employed by individuals who were envious or rival parties who wished to break up a potential match between a prospective bride and groom (Asplund 1969).⁶² Before the advent of TV people received all their news of the outside world, political events and decisions that affected the lives of villagers through travelling salesmen, relatives and neighbours. This network of information was vital for people's survival and in addition it had an important social function – it prevented isolation and increased people's sense of community, of belonging to a network extending beyond the immediate boundaries of the village.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

During the course of interviews signs of a general malcontent with modern life would trickle forth and informants would take the opportunity to air their concern over what is happening to the family, to society and to work, directing criticism towards contemporary life. In addition there was the more stark and dramatic reality of a period of violent deaths. Indication of this epidemic wave of suicides had reached my attention during one of the first conversations I had with a resident of Koppars. Emil Lindman, a retired former school-teacher mentioned the case of a school girl who had committed suicide. It had been all over the evening papers, so it was hard to avoid knowing about it. He then proceeded with the same manner of listing which several other informants would later repeat. I have pondered on what this talk is all about and why it emerged in the interviews. Could it be that when people talk about fragmentation they are expressing concern over the stability of life and that this is a point at which the taken-for-granted character of life is questioned? People seem to be asking themselves “what now? How to navigate in this new world of rapid change, higher demands, abandonment?” At the same they are creating culture because in the act of questioning lies an awareness of the necessity for change and for devising strategies that make it possible to sail the seas of changed circumstances. By talking about the unfortunate and tragic things that happen to others, people are talking about the unpredictability of misfortune and about how it can strike unexpectedly. It is a way of creating a picture of

⁶² The kontinkanto tradition originates in the east of Finland and it was part of a series of activities linked to bridal traditions. When a girl accepted an offer from a suitor word spread fast in the parishes about the happening. In this way suitors who had been too slow to react were mobilised into action. It was women, who usually also worked as traditional masseuses and blood letters, who carried out the practice of kontinkanto, “gossip”. Negative information about the bride's health was particularly detrimental to the proceedings of the matchmaking as the bride was an important source of labour in the family she was to join through marriage. Other matters they commented on were physical appearance and personality. The nature of the “gossip” passed on was usually reproachful and its goal was to break up the match, but also positive information was passed on (Asplund 1969).

social life and of signalling to others and oneself that in comparison to others, one fares quite well. The misfortune of others becomes a mirror in which to view one's own life.

What then of the silence on misfortune and suffering? Why do people avoid talking of it? When an individual commits suicide he transgresses the social order, which is why a severe moral prohibition is attached to suicide (Durkheim 1897: 330–337) and perhaps the same can be applied to other forms of violent deaths. Most of these acts of societal fragmentation are an issue of transgressing boundaries, of stepping into the realm of a new social order. Informants seem to see them as omens of things to come and indications of change. Balslem (1991) in her study of cancer in a working class community found that individuals thought that talking about misfortune was to tempt fate and not talking about it was a way of protecting others, the community and that which is shared. Misfortune can also be shared through silence and it may speak louder than words – not telling a story is an act of power (Wikan 1995). The silence on misfortune and suffering of others could be linked to an ethos of enduring hardship in silence, a kind of honourable sacrifice (Kortteinen 1997). Kortteinen (Ibid: 51) believes that within the Finnish ethos of honour and managing, difficult experiences are not discussed and people do not know how to discuss or analyse it maybe because it is too self-evident and intimate. Another explanation can be sought, much further back in history, in the Finnish folk ethos tied to the magical belief that verbal expression of emotion like a curse can cause damage to another person (Virtanen 1976). The effect of curses was based on the idea that the word itself contains the force or *väki* that damages the person at whom the word is directed (Hautala 1960). Similarly in the light of concepts of luck as a limited resource in traditional society, talking about events that represent “bad luck”, like suicides, was thought to induce suicides. Following this logic it would then be dangerous to talk about suicides because it may cause you or those close to you to become contaminated by the thought of suicide, put thoughts into your head and thus place you in danger of committing suicide. This map of misfortune that is outlined to me brings to mind that local people perceive that there is a “geography of difference” – as if difference resided in certain places. They seem to be outlining a microcosmic view of “otherness” or difference where the local geography is divided up into areas where the degree of otherness increases the further away one gets from ones own village and place of home. There was a local theory presented to me, by people living closer to the municipal centre to the south of Norrås that as one moves along the northern road towards Norrås and beyond, there are “all these crazy and delinquent people”. They list strange characters involved in partially illicit activities and just odd people who inhabit the small villages tucked away from the bustle of the main road. This northern road runs from the

municipal centre, the geographic centre of the island toward the periphery to one of the exit points off the island and is one of the logistical life lines between the island and the mainland.

No doubt the concept of work is constantly changing in the contemporary world, also in Finland. There is a vast number of people who no longer view work the way farmers and rural people do who have been connected to the farming life in one way or another do. The image of the hardworking Finn toiling away on his fields or in his forest is being replaced by the Finn moving in the world of information technology, working with a computer in an office, in a city. Children of farmers may still have the rural working morale left in their “blood”, but coming generations may not. On the other hand, the value of work is of a tenacious character in Finland – it has been part of the image of the Finn for a long time.

8. CANCER: CONCEALED DISTRESS

On a Sunday afternoon I take a moped ride to Matti and Paula's house for an informal chat, hoping they are not out on the fields, working. It is the month of August and the apples are ripening on the trees in the garden. Above their brick house, built in the seventies, is the house of Matti's parents, abandoned and dilapidated. I remember that Matti, during our interview, had his own theory regarding how illness is contained by the geographic features of the village. He mentions that on one side of a ditch near his house people died of cancer and on the other of heart disease. His parents' house had been called the "cancer house" because both the previous owners died of cancer and Matti's parents were afraid that cancer would get them one day. Paula answers the door and welcomes me into the house. It turns out that the neighbours Silja and Taneli have dropped by for a social visit. I say I can come back another day, but both insist that I stay. After all, I know Silja, having spent many hours on the potato picking machine with her just a few weeks ago. Fancy, delicate coffee cups are laid out on the living room table together with a platter of freshly baked cinnamon buns and various kinds of biscuits.

When the men leave the house to check out Matti's combine harvester Silja starts talking about a funeral she is about to attend. Her former employer, whom she worked for as a 17 year old girl has passed away. Then she starts talking about cancer cases – a man with cancer in his sternum, two women suffering from breast cancer and a man with stomach cancer. Paula and Silja recall earlier cancer cases like that of Sara, who for a long time thought she suffered from lactose intolerance until she went to the doctor. He made a thorough investigation of her stomach after she explained that her condition was so bad she could eat nothing else but candies. Her cancer was already in an advanced stage and was of an aggressive, "snappy" type so she died pretty soon after the examination. Of all the women with cancer that Paula and Silja talk about they say they were extrovert, happy women. With this comment they seem to mean that it is strange that they should get cancer because a positive attitude towards life has a tendency to protect one against cancer.

One of the women had a pain in her back for a long time. Silja says that the doctor dismissed it as the typical nagging of an old hag and did not take her pain seriously. It was when she found out that her husband had an affair with another woman that her cancer erupted. By the time she sought help it had spread to her brain and rapidly took her life. This woman's husband later committed suicide because his company was going bankrupt. When this specific case was recounted to me earlier I was told the man died in an accident through smoke poisoning coming from the stove in his office, but now they are claiming that he set his office on fire on purpose. One man had colon cancer, but concealed it from everyone because he was ashamed that an intimate part of his body had been taken ill. Silja and Paula list the names of six other people who have had cancer, and Silja adds: "There have been all sorts of unclear things happening here." They also talk about the tragic case of a whole family that was killed. Pertti, the father in the family was a proper man who worked hard. Their son Jaakko was very close to his mother and when she died of cancer it was a very hard blow for both him and Pertti. Their sorrow was so deep that Pertti first shot his son and then himself. There was another loss that happened in Pertti's life after the death of his wife. The land he had rented for years was sold without the owner consulting him as to whether he was interested in buying it. The land owner, who lived in the same village sold it to one of his relatives. It is not the first time I hear the story and it upsets me as much as it did the first time, that sorrow can be such a blinding force, so deep, so dark, so captivating.

What then causes this cancer, I wonder. Silja believes that the fact that someone gets cancer is the sum total of many factors. "Many people have died of cancer in the 1980's and 1990's. My mother-in-law died of it, the woman next door died of it, another neighbour died of leukaemia and yet another one of mouth cancer. I believe it has to do with dust from the animals and from the hay. People did not seek health care if they had a running nose or were sneezing. Nowadays there is just better care. The hay lofts were inherited and the mould dust with them. No one thought there could be any danger in it. Radon in the ground is another cause of cancer, but not everyone gets cancer in a radon area." She remembers that the local doctor had kept his animals inside all summer and did not harvest his own hay the year that "the bomb popped there in Chernobyl". She has her own theories about the incidence and about why the authorities have not yet disclosed anything about the nuclear fall-out: "You see in Finland they did not say anything. But when they had it on the Swedish side as well, when there is [radiation] at the same level in Sweden then they have just concluded that it is here as well. But I don't know. I suppose we will hear that it has been investigated somewhere in 50 years time, when enough time has passed for them to be able to admit it."

”When I ask why the issue is not discussed she replies that “Here we are a bit east Finnish [fear of the Soviet Union]”. Think of what a big catastrophe it was here. Even though it isn’t a lot, but we don’t know. Up until now they have said that it isn’t known how much it [the radiation] is, what produces what.”

Paula, like Silja believes that the cause of cancer is a combination of things – impure food produced with pesticides and fertilisers, radon, and emotional conflicts that trigger the release of the dormant cancer in your body. When the guests leave I stay on to also ask Matti what he has to say about cancer. He says; “They say it’s the radon in the water and what one eats. It can also be caused by psychosomatic or mental stress. The heart is the center of feelings so it is natural that it starts malfunctioning also when one is under hard physical stress.” Paula interjects that:

“When Matti’s heart attack came he lived under and still lives under horrible mental pressure because no one in the family will take over the farm. Already that is a huge disappointment. When it is a family farm then it’s like this that when it’s over it is really over. One has worked and built up the farm, saved the forest so the coming generation will have something to make investments with. One has tried to improve the circumstances and made it all ready and then everything is in vain. His parents’ house is a constant reminder of all the things that need to be done, repaired, looked after.”

Matti sadly adds:

“The more one ponders the more everything seems to be in vain even though you have done it well.”

He believes that in the coming ten years many farmers will die because of the pressure and the disappointments; “But” he adds; “the Finnish farmer is hardy. He is used to suffering without complaint.”

(Field diary, August 2003)

TALKING CANCER ON KOPPARS

There is a strong undercurrent of mistrust in Silja’s and Paula’s accounts of cancer causes and an intertwining of violent death with cancer. To them, like to so many other people, cancer concretely equals death in the popular imagination. The thing that struck me was how they seemed to express that things are concealed in society. Doctors don’t properly uncover why patients complain of unexplained pains, government officials do not tell the real story

behind a major accident that happened 20 years ago, people carry their pains in silence because they are ashamed of it becoming known that an intimate part of their body is ill. The fear of the Eastern neighbour is also present – that one cannot trust what they are up to behind the border. Even the ground, the environment itself cannot be trusted. Is this a feature that has been part of society always or is it a product of present day society? Is there more mistrust now than before? What is the meaning of all this talk about cancer?

Cancer was not a theme of focus when I started my fieldwork. It emerged gradually in the second fieldwork phase and it was also something that I chose to focus on more consciously once it started cropping up in my interviews. What is important to mention is that the majority of informants⁶³ spoke about the cancer of others; relatives, friends, neighbours, other community members – and not about their personal experiences of having it. A very limited number of informants (3 out of 20) spoke about their own cancer because it was difficult to find informants willing to do so or even to get people to refer me to someone I could talk to. When I started more consciously focusing on perceptions of cancer I used to approach the subject in a variety of ways during my interviews. Sometimes I would ask informants directly about high cancer prevalence or refer to the fact that other informants had mentioned this concern. At other times I just asked what they felt was the most common public health concern in the area. The subject of cancer would also crop up in informal discussions and usually in relation to the cancer of a neighbour, relative or acquaintance. The mention of cancer could emerge during an interview when the subject of suicides was discussed or the notion of “good health”. The connection to suicide is significant because, like cancer, the frequency of suicides would be referred to as having a virus-like character, spreading like a virus or a wave through the fieldwork area. Both these expressions of distress are unpredictable and uncontrollable. In the majority of interviews talk about cancer was always about other people who had contracted it and it usually concerned people in the near environment such as relatives, neighbours and friends – in other words, individuals who were directly connected to the local environment by residing there or having lived there at some point in their life. There was some speculation as to whether the issue of proximity contributed to the fact that people had this perception of ‘high prevalence’. During informal discussions informants would list all the people they knew in the local area who had cancer, had recovered or had perished from it. The issue of proximity is significant in this other, psychosocial sense. When what is “at stake” is embedded in

⁶³ The total number of informants included in the study was 45 and out of these 20 informants mentioned cancer. Initially interviews centered around life and work in general. In the second phase of the field work I focused on illness perceptions more actively. The informants I describe in this chapter belong to this special group of informants asked to reflect on the common public health concerns of the fieldwork area.

your immediate social environment and network of social contacts the threat becomes subjective and intimate. Especially when death from cancer affected people of a productive age with families or if it concerned a child, the tragedy seemed more intense because it was considered more unjust and senseless than if an elderly person contracted it. In everyday experience, lay concepts of risk which must be understood as a dynamic experience of personal uncertainty about one's future (Gifford 1986), made all the more tangible when it happens to a cousin or "the guy next door".

There is a general notion that those who have contracted the disease do not want to talk about it, a conspiracy of silence imposed both by others and the self. Also, statistical sources indicate that cancer is not more common on Koppars than elsewhere in the country. Cancer was not, though, the only distressful state or phenomena that emerged in the course of the interviews. There was also talk about fibromyalgia, diabetes, heart disease, depression, weak nerves, and suicide. The central question is; what in the nature of cancer makes it a more feared disease and more representative of a general sense of malaise that people are feeling in life than the other major public health concerns such as heart disease and diabetes?

EVERYDAY THEORIES AND METAPHORS OF CANCER

The expressions that are linked to informants' talk of cancer point to the idea that cancer is a physical state, that it is an entity within an individual, through talk that describes cancer or cancer producing substances as being *in* a person, in food or as an *'it'*. The general impression one gets is that cancer is rooted: it is located in the ground, in families, in food, but it also has the capacity to move in space and in time. The trajectory of its movement is from the outside to the inside of the body, as well as mobility within the body. It is also a signifier of moral values, where cancer takes on a judicial role, having the capacity to punish people who have behaved in a morally unacceptable way and have a damaging lifestyle as a result of smoking, drinking, eating artificial foods and being under pressure. Cancer can pass judgement by making moral offenders punish themselves. Overwhelmingly the metaphors that emerge in informants' talk, present cancer as a being or animal involved in a variety of actions. It has the capacity to transgress bodily boundaries and once it has penetrated the shell of the body it proceeds to move within the body. Some of its actions reflect concepts of work and production within agriculture and other actions present the cancer as an out-going creature with definite goals for its mobility, moving in both space and time.

The “it” of cancer

The metaphors surrounding cancer in the talk of the informants mainly deal with the actions of the cancer, cancer as an ‘it’ with an agency of its own, something uncontrollable that enters the body and wreaks havoc there. Cancer is something one ‘has’ or ‘gets’, but also something that ‘comes’. Getting something means that there is a giver, an unknown, hidden agent that affects an innocent receiver. The nature of cancer is definitely one of deceit, concealment and mystification. It is the great unknown, whose identity escapes us and increases our sense of fear and insecurity. One informant, Erik, when asked about the issue of cancer, talks about the arrival of cancer and its movements among and within people:

“They say that it’s Chernobyl, but I don’t know. Still they have this mammography check-up here. Also with prostate cancer it is possible to take a blood test that shows if there are any of *those substances*. But I don’t know if there is so much more [cancer] here. It is everywhere that way *that cancer* starts coming more. [– –] Then it’s like this that if you have worries in life then it maybe lies there that cancer and then *it blooms* if you get a lot of worries. [– –] And then it spreads from there. [Why does one not discuss the cause?] Maybe it’s difficult. It’s difficult to know where it comes from. You have this thing with radium; this thing that is in the ground. Tests have been taken here. There are places on the island that have very strong radiation. Earth radiation. Many can live in houses that are really radiating houses, as they are called. Its expensive to clear a house [of radiation].”

(Erik, July 2003)

In some cases, cancer more clearly appears to be a being, that has very specific actions, likes and dislikes, and that progresses through different growth stages within a reproductive life. Here comes to the fore, not only a consciousness of time, the progression of time, but also an awareness of space, of invading and filling up space. Mary and Benita talk about their cancer cells as though they were individuals residing in the body, and using a definite article when talking about the “it” of cancer:

“They say that *cancer cells cannot stand fresh air*. Oxygen, oxygen, oxygen is the most important thing for humans...*It cannot deal with it. It does not live* in oxygen. [– –] Bacteria and *cancer cells mainly live and reproduce* in oxygen poor environments. Through added oxygen supply one strives to *slow down the growth* of cancer cells and destroy existing cancer cells.”

(Mary, August 2003)

“In terms of *that cancer* I was fairly sure that I probably had something of the sort, but I let it be many years without going to the doctor.”

(Benita, September 2003)

Some explanations communicate a strong sense of fatefulness on the part of the receiver which at the same time removes responsibility from the affected individual. Many informants believe that the inevitability of illness is part of many people’s life trajectory, entering ones life quite naturally. It is part of that something that “always comes” when one gets older and a natural part of the ageing process that a weakened body is more susceptible to illness. It also points to the idea that the risk that cancer represents has become habituated, a part of life and, thus, also built into the idea of the every day and familiar quality of risk. Cancer puts us all at risk because it gambles, taking chances with our lives. Several informants talk about the chance of getting cancer as if cancer was testing its luck in the betting office or of the “fairly poor odds” one has of recovering from it.

The inevitability of cancer also seems to be something that people resign themselves to. If you are born with the probability of getting cancer it does not matter how you live, because you may get it even when you have minimised risks by adopting a healthy lifestyle not smoking, drinking moderately, exercising and eating pure foods. At the same time, the idea that there is no escape from cancer added to people’s fear of the risk they had of contracting it, giving rise to suspicion and a need to protect oneself from the devious nature of an illness that can sneak up on the unsuspecting individual. Keijo recalls how his life has been touched by cancer and its chancy nature through the experiences of a friend:

“They discovered it during a normal yearly check-up at the dentist. He had something out of the ordinary in the mucous membrane of his mouth. He did not pay any particular attention to it, but then they took a biopsy and it was cancer and they started treating him for it and then they thought it was treated, but then he just died. I knew him from my childhood. One could not lead a healthier life than he did, also a farmer. Did not smoke. [– –] Did not use alcohol. Lived a very family centred and peaceful life in every way so it is quite *mysterious that one [person] gets it and the other one doesn’t.*”

(Keijo & Karina, September 2003)

Informants who had suffered from cancer themselves and recovered from it have a more inter-subjective attitude towards it. These informants talk more in terms of an active acquisition of cancer. Benita explains that her active

involvement in the acquisition process of her cancer is related to the fact that she did not listen to her body. Both her body and the cancer are subjects that communicate with each other. In the initial stages of her illness she remains a passive vessel for this battle that is raging in her body. She explains it as an inability to listen to the body because her body was veiled by sorrow after her husband died:

“One really does *get oneself* [cancer] in the same way one gets oneself lung cancer by smoking. Because if one did not smoke one would perhaps not get lung cancer. That one acts against one’s own best judgement. That *one punishes oneself*. Maybe it is a slow suicide. The mechanism probably works in that way. One does not like oneself and then one punishes oneself by making oneself ill. This is what I believe.”

(Benita, September 2003)

There is a clear link to the autonomous individual who is responsible for acquiring the illness where the illness becomes a form of self-inflicted punishment. At the same time it has a psychological dimension because it affects your self-esteem. Here cancer takes on a judicial role, having the capacity to punish people who have behaved in a morally unacceptable way and had a damaging lifestyle by smoking, drinking, eating artificial foods and being under pressure. Lisa, whose father died of cancer, tells me that he was orphaned at a young age and later in life had an illegitimate son whose existence he concealed from his other children. He also believed in putting on a perfect façade so that no one would have any reason to complain about his behaviour. Lisa calls her father a responsible and polished man who feared that someone would discover his misdemeanour. His concealment of the truth caused him sorrow and bitterness which, Lisa believes, made his cancer progress and finally take his life. His act of concealment was, according to her, intimately linked with his attempt to avoid being judged by society for what he felt was reproachable behaviour.

Like a number of other illnesses of contemporary society, the preventive message of cancer tells us what is the right way to live. Interpretations of illness contain moral messages of what a good and sound body is. As moral actors humans are sometimes agents, shaping their lives as best they can. At other times we are the passive victims of wayward powers of evil and destruction. Cancer can actively come upon a person where one becomes affected by it. Some of the metaphors are clearly linked to a vocabulary of doom and judgement by a higher power. Some talk about receiving the cancer verdict or just simply call it a *death diagnosis*. Metaphors of cause intermingle both religious symbols and biomedical explanations. A number of explanations seemed to communicate that cancer moves genealogically, within one’s family

history. In most cases informants mentioned that the cause of cancer was genetic. Metaphorically this explanation of cause shows that cancer is firmly located or positioned in certain families. It is a physical entity that seems to reside in their genes and thus also in their genealogy. It has the ability to wait and choose a particular time to enter the lives of individuals, in other words, it has a consciousness of time. It is also tied to birth, to the act of being born into a family and to the idea of progression or growth within the body, as if cancer had a reproductive capacity and a life trajectory:

“In the genes. It must *have its beginning* somewhere, some time. When one is aware of what they do with our genetic material and all that. One does not know *what will be born* in coming generations, if one will be affected by something, yes. Maybe it lies dormant there. First nothing happens and then something happens that makes it happen, maybe.”
(Åke, September 2003)

“It [my being healthy] shows that I have succeeded with my gimmicks and tricks to raise my immune defence system. It is as if I have decided to care for my immune defence system so that all those *cancer beginnings*, which probably exist in every human body, especially as one grows older, that not all of them become cancer. Every day we have an abundance, thousands of cells that can become cancer cells. Every one of us! And when we are weak, due to whatever reason, then there is a chance that they can develop.”

(Benita, September 2003)

The genetic inevitability of cancer was also called a “family burden” or a “weakness in the family”. Particularly one informant, whose husband had committed suicide after struggling for years with various health complications and clinically diagnosed depression, claimed that her husband’s family was weak because many relatives had died of cancer, suffered from depression and one had committed suicide. When asked what actually contributed to cancer developing in the body of a person who carried it genetically some informants would claim that loss and grief could activate the dormant cancer in your body and cause it to spread. The genetic model was, naturally, also applied to other public health concerns like diabetes and heart disease. From a moral point of view genetic explanation models are liberating because they free the individual from responsibility over the cause of illness.

Grounded in work and farming

The image of the body as a piece of faulty machinery connects to the ethos of production, to work and to the necessity of functioning technology. Many of the

explanations of cause display the idea that upsetting life events and conflictive situations in the family, which cause emotional stress, release the dormant cancer in your body. Cancer here is clearly an agent that takes over your body or strikes at the weakest part of your body when under stress. From there it proceeds to move around in the body. This link between the lack of something good or wholesome, emotionality⁶⁴, pressure caused by work or demands placed by society on the individual (see also Tontti 2000; Furnham & Kuyken 1991) and the development of cancer in the body is firmly established in many of the responses I received. When Erik talks about what cancer does inside the body he uses clear cut images from the natural world and agricultural production in particular:⁶⁵

“Then its like this that if you have worries in life it then maybe *it lies there that cancer* and then it *blooms* if you have many worries. [– –] Stomach cancer is said to move up into your liver and so on.”

(Erik, July 2003)

Erik's description of what the cancer does can be likened to a seed on the field, which lies dormant in the soil until the effects of the climatic conditions make it grow into a crop.⁶⁶ A more specific referent is to a phenomenon discussed during the summer months in the archipelago region – that of the blooming of poisonous algae. The year that the field work was conducted the extent of the poisonous algae was particularly bad and it was discussed both in the media and among the locals.⁶⁷ It can also be connected to an image of weeds spreading on the fields because of the new environmental regulations put into place by the European Union. Cancer works the same way in the body as blue algae does in the sea. It lies dormant until fed by contaminating substances which turn a latent cancer/algae into an active and dangerous one in the body/sea.

⁶⁴ Margaret Lock (1998: 10) clarifies that although findings show a link between emotional states and cancer you should not interpret that it is certain personality types that cause cancer, but that there is an inter-dependence between the immune and the neuroendocrinological systems and that social and physical environments are in a dialectical relationship with individual biology.

⁶⁵ The use of agricultural metaphors is common in Finnish political rhetoric. One talks of a *budjettiriibi*, a brainstorming on the national budget where the word “*riibi*” means drying barn, or the verb *puida*, to thresh, when thrashing things out, or of *iltalypsy*, the evening milking session, of a political meeting to improve already settled agreements, a process of “milking” more benefits out of an agreement (Ramstedt 2004).

⁶⁶ This metaphor is used in connection to boils – they mature and are said to bloom when puss seeps out from them.

⁶⁷ Run off of pesticides, fertilisers and industrial waste in Russia and the Baltic states makes the water become over-fed with nutrients. As the bottom of the sea heats up it causes the algae to bloom.

Rosa's cancer talk reveals the metaphor of covering, packaging in the body completely. Cancer that resides in families, envelops the family members, suffocating them with the illness and transgressing their boundaries of intimacy:

“From my mother’s side of the family we have a hundred percent *cancer coverage*. She [Rosa’s mother] has it from my grandfather’s side [of the family]. They were eight siblings and I think all of them had had some type of cancer.”

(Rosa, July 2003)

Interestingly, the act of covering in agricultural work deals both with life-saving and life threatening activities. In the fall and spring farmers fear that frost will cover the fields at night and kill the crops. This is why fields are covered to protect the crops from being destroyed. When sugar beet have been harvested and await transportation to the sugar factory they are covered with tarpaulins to protect them from night frost and, thus, prevent them from a loss of sugar content, which decreases their productive value. The integration of the “natural” with illness experiences are found in numerous cultures. For example Hmong refugees, when talking of measles, use metaphors of growth and seeds to describe the trajectory of the illness (Henry 1999).

The machine metaphor is used when talking about cancer and the idea that when the body is healthy and intact all its parts function well. When one part is malfunctioning it becomes weakened when cancer enters the body leading to the whole body system gradually falling apart. The crumbling structure of the body becomes starkly illustrated by the use of the expression “to give in”, as if the walls of the body were caving in:

“Off the record, anonymously, I believe it has many psychic causes, like *cancers have* and many other illnesses. It is *the weakest part* of ones constitution that *gives in* after long-term, prolonged stress. If one has to stay healthy in the head then the body suffers instead. But then one can live carelessly and ignore what one even knows. One does not care for oneself and one feels ill.”

(Benita, September 2003)

Benita's perceptions of what the cancer does in the body indicates the idea of balance between body and mind. In order for one part – the head, in this case – to stay intact and functioning the body will break down instead. The modern way of life with increased use of technology and chemical products, substances coming from the “outside” as well as stress caused by a modern life style, and

the introduction of “poisons” into our bodies, may weaken them and make us susceptible to getting cancer (and other deadly diseases), Keijo and Karina believe:

Keijo: “These types of PAP compounds that are in the western dietary regime when food is made by heating it so that of course is one explanation and then these hydrocarbons that we have an awful lot around us. *Constantly moving*. The use of cars has spread to such a degree and fuel use in general. All types of solvents everywhere. Then there is the environment of the home. When you decorate your home there is an enormous amount of these, although they claim the opposite, but anyway pollution from all these materials comes into the air inside the house. Pollution also comes from the textiles we wear. And from detergents. All cosmetic materials. All types of deodorants which we put under our arms every morning.”

Karina: “Yes, they are dangerous. They contain aluminium and the like.”

Keijo: “Yes, and all these types of things. Nowadays our life is so artificial. An incredible amount of substances that were not used before. Now we see it as something obvious that we should use them every day and every moment. We have cooked up this soup ourselves. Man himself has brought this about. We have these dioxin levels today. The polar caps have been studied and also there are large amounts [of dioxins]. On top of it all there are grease solvents. And the heavy metals that are amassed in our bodies. Cadmium, lead, quicksilver. All these types of compounds they are found everywhere these days. Really in every place.”

Karina: “[– –] There is still a lot of these [mysteries], secrets regarding why these cells work in this way and this happens and to others it doesn't. So there is still much of this [lack of knowledge].”

Keijo: “Yes, there is and then there is still left to investigate that when a person is really under stress their immune defence is weakened and then they more easily get all sorts of viruses and infections. What is the effect of these things when cancer is born? Sometimes one has believed or come to the realisation that if a person has fallen ill a lot with virus based infections then it may also be a contributory factor for the birth and development of cancer.”

(Keijo & Karina, September 2003)

LOCATIONS AND STRATEGIES

The idea that cancer has the ability to transgress the boundaries of the body moving from the outside, the environment, through food, drink or air into the

body cropped up in numerous descriptions of cause. Contamination arises in the image of a potent substance, almost like a potion designed to bring about misfortune. It is an alien substance that has the potential to move across space and time, and to be stored in the ground to then emerge from there and to seep imperceptibly into the body of humans.

Rooted in place

Informants cited that cancer was located in the ground, water or air itself. There was a common belief that the high content of radon in the ground⁶⁸, which radiated into the houses that people inhabited, was a cause of cancer. One informant, mentioned earlier in this chapter, even spoke of “radiating houses” where another speculated that the cause of the radiation was the radioactive content of gravel used in the foundations of the houses. Crushed slag stone from the iron foundry industry in Kullabruk had been used in the construction of houses. Similarly, the ingestion of arsenic found in wells of private houses or bacteria found in the drinking water of Kullabruk were connected to the cause. Airborne contamination had a more clearly political twist to it, and an indication of conspiracy enacted by political decision makers. It was believed that radiation had polluted the fields of the area caused by radiation fall-out following the accident at the nuclear power plant in Chernobyl in 1986.⁶⁹

The theory that radiation from the Chernobyl accident has increased people’s susceptibility to contract cancer in the local area is significant because it reflects a historical fear of the powerful neighbour in the east. The territory of Finland has been invaded and its people subjugated to the regulations and decrees of invading powers. This has happened in very recent history at the time of the Winter and Continuation Wars when the Soviet Union threatened, once again, to take over Finland. A small country fought a giant and won. It is a moral master narrative that Finns seldom forget. This also implies that there still is a large degree of caution regarding Russia and its power to penetrate Finnish society. Patriotism is a value deeply engrained in rural populations and the need to defend the land, the nation and freedom in itself. Believing that radiation coming from the Soviet Union can potentially kill the population in Finland fits into this model of fear of the eastern neighbour. There is also mention of

⁶⁸ The Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority have measured the radon content in both dwellings and well water. On Koppars radon content measured in single family houses exceeded the permitted levels of bequerell in 1-10% of the measured houses (Voutilainen, A; Mäkeläinen, I; Pennanen, M; Reisbacka, H; and O. Castren 1997). In well water there are scattered areas on Koppars where the radon content is high (Voutilainen, A; Mäkeläinen, I; Huikuri, P; and L. Salonen 2000).

⁶⁹ Koppars belonged to the area of the country that had the lowest cesium 137 levels in the country lying at less than 3 bequerell (Säteilyturvakeskus – STUK (Finnish Centre for Radiation and Nuclear Safety 1987).

radiation that is emitted from secret military bases located underground on Koppars. The location of the field work area, on the coast, in the extreme south west corner of the country, is a strategically important place and a military depot is located there. Chernobyl becomes the symbol of this fear of the alien, unknown and the failure of technology. The bad that it represents has the capacity to be absorbed through the leaky borders of the body. Roy, for example, believes that Chernobyl killed his friend who was out harvesting with him right after the accident:

“And I am the only one of the two of us who lives. He died of cancer, the other one. So, I definitely wonder if he would still be alive without Chernobyl [taking place], because we felt it clearly. We also discussed what it was. And it took two days before they then told us anything. And we were out there harrowing, the two of us, so that this dust whirled around us. So we have sucked up a fair amount of bequerell.”

(Roy, July 2002)

Cancer enters the intimacy of the body which can be paralleled with how new regulations within the working life of farmers is experienced as a transgression of the boundaries of people's intimacy and the intimacy of the home. The unknown, an alien logic enters their homes and dictates how they should do their work. It also transgresses generations and generational knowledge. The idea that contaminating substances can be transported over the geographic borders is also present in theories concerning pest control. I have heard farmers on Koppars talk about how invasions of the Colorado beetle⁷⁰ have to do with an inability to contain pests in Estonia, formerly part of the Soviet Union, which may cause the bugs to consequently fly over to Finland in search of new potato crops to destroy.

The issue of contamination was also mentioned in connection with drinking water in the industrial centre of Kullabruk. When I ask a couple, Åke and Elsa, who have lived and worked in Kullabruk since their youth, how the issue of cancer is discussed in the local area they start explaining to me that they suspect there is something in the drinking water. In the beginning of the 1990's there was some kind of bacteria found in the drinking water and a tank truck brought water from another part of the municipality to the inhabitants of the industrial centre. They have had a filter installed on their water tap because they do not trust the quality of the tap water. They were upset because they felt no proper

⁷⁰ The Colorado beetle, which is not indigenous to Finland, is one of the major pests affecting the potato crop. Whenever it has appeared on the crops extermination measures have been taken immediately to stop it spreading. The last discovery was in the summer of 2002 when more than 100 potato fields in the south east of Finland were affected (Åkesson 2003: 14).

explanation was given to them at the time and then additionally they know that there is an unusually high incidence of specific forms of cancer linked to the digestive tract in Kullabruk. They feel they are up against the wall, uncertain because they do not know what the exact cause of the cancer is.

There was also mention of a “geography of contamination” in the sense that some informants spoke of contamination being located in specific villages or houses. One informant claims that the village her husband came from is a place where people seem to have been more affected by cancer than in villages on average. She lists a number of her husband’s relatives and other villagers who have contracted cancer. She believes that there must be higher levels of radiation in the ground in that area:

“You know what is very strange is this thing with cancer. And it’s in Lappholm. And it’s exactly in the place that Harald is from. [– –] Once a long time ago [– –] they started going through and noticing that during a long time period there were so many deaths and people who had cancer. Different types of cancer. So one started thinking that it could be that there is something in the earth there [in that village], for example, that could have caused it. Strangely enough this thing with cancer is very common.”

(Marjatta, July 2003)

Although blame and guilt is connected to cancer, as well as there being a direct link to the issue of lifestyle, of living a risky life by smoking, for example, this aspect of cause was surprisingly seldom mentioned by informants and very rarely as a primary reason. The connection between smoking and cancer would be mentioned in passing, if a person known to the informant had died of cancer and had been a heavy smoker. The majority of lay theories implied that cancer was caused by something that people could not control themselves, characteristic of polluting substances (Douglas 2000 [1966]). Weiss (1997), in a study on Israeli cultural constructions and signification of cancer, explains that two key symbols have been connected to cancer: “pollution” and “transformation”. Cancer is seen as a disease where the body “turns against itself” as a kind of domestic subversion where infected cells overrun the organ systems in the body. This contaminated space is also a symbolic one, where the sufferer’s self is transformed, becoming estranged from itself through something that comes from the outside. The idea of the contagious and fateful character of cancer can be linked to a historical antecedent on Koppars, namely tuberculosis, another public health concern of major significance in the field area from the beginning of the 1900’s up until the 1950’s. Many informants had close relatives who were affected by the illness (see also Holmila 2000: 15).

Concealed and silenced

A physiotherapist, whose elderly patients have suffered from cancer, tells me that many people fear getting cancer and they do not want to know where it comes from because it would reinforce their guilt feelings about not taking care of themselves. This is also why they want to keep their illness a secret. They do not want to be blamed for having uterine or prostate cancer because discussing it would be a transgression of the boundaries of their intimacy. Young people who employ alternative healing therapies, similarly, do not want to discuss their illness with people outside of their own reference group. Because there is no certainty, even among physicians and medical researchers, regarding the cause of cancer, most lay people find it difficult to discuss, explains Erik, a voluntary health educator. Concealment and a refusal to clearly communicate cause were present in the case of water contamination in the industrial centre presented above. Inhabitants of this small town were embittered about not being given a proper explanation and it just increased their sense of fear of the unknown. They feel that the local doctor who issued these statements should not have said anything unless she had proper evidence to back up her claims.

Mary, who went through an extraordinary struggle with her cancer and recovered tells me that you are expected to keep the story of your fight with cancer to yourself.⁷¹ She has tried to organise an informal group for those who have or have had cancer, but very few people turned up. When I ask her why she thinks people do not want to join a group, she talks about the fear of publicly confronting anything related to cancer:

Mary: "It is not spoken of. You know when I started spontaneously and openly talking about what had happened to me, how ill I had been and so on people looked surprised, "how is it you are talking about that?" When I came walking on one side of the road and when an acquaintance was just about to come face-to-face with me they would cross over to the other side of the road. They could not even bear to meet me."

Susanne: "Why is that?"

Mary: "It is a horrible disease. It is almost death."

Susanne: "People are afraid of death?"

Mary: "Afraid. Afraid of the disease, quite simply. And afraid and do not have the courage to say so. They do not know what to say. Poor with

⁷¹ Weiss (1997) explains that 'cancerophobia' operates by distancing the other. In patients it is about separating the tumour from the patient or distancing the person with the disease, and it is a manifestation of the stigma and fear that people feel regarding cancer.

words. All the things one says in that state. And I experienced it many times. It amused me sometimes (laughter). And when I noticed some fear and embarrassment then I thought that now I will really [talk about it]. Like this.”

(Mary, August 2003)

Avoiding people whose lives have been touched by misfortune is something that on a certain level is hard to grasp. On an immediate, human level I want to believe that it would be natural to extend your support and to attempt to understand the experience of someone who has been through such an ordeal. At the same time, talking about illness, particularly an illness that is so closely associated with death is frightening because it can make you think about what it would be like to be in the ill person's shoes.

AVOIDING DANGEROUS SUBSTANCES

How do people respond to the threat of illness? How do they protect themselves from cancer? Some informants outlined to me how to act in order to minimise the risk of getting cancer. A number of preventive measures are taken to protect the living environment from contamination in the ground (earth radiation and arsenic in drinking water). There is one belief regarding the nature of the land that is implicitly tied to cancer causing contamination. This is the belief surrounding the negative health effects of magnetic fields and water veins located under dwellings. Magnetic fields are seen as a general cause of distress, headaches and insomnia. They are identified by using a divining rod, which is also used to find water and the location of water veins.⁷² Some informants mention that at the point where these magnetic meridians cross one should not build one's house. Building copperplates into the walls of the house prevents the radiation from penetrating into the house. Rosa tells me in the beginning of the interview that she remembers from her childhood that her parents were always very tired and in bad health, suffering from various aches and pains. They worked hard with the small and out-dated dairy farm they had

⁷² The idea that people, so called *kaivonkatsojia*, well finders, have the ability to detect minerals in the ground using a divining rod is an older phenomenon dating back to the middle ages. Locating water veins under ground through the use of the divining rod was believed to have come to Finland from Germany or Sweden. Still in the 1950's the services of well finders were used when people wanted to detect the most suitable location to dig a well. Lay theorists of the earth radiation theory believe that radiation coming from outer space hits underground water veins on the surface of the earth and the reflection that takes place causes radiation under ground. Other sources are the phases of the moon, nuclear testing, and sun spots. Radiation is thought to cause a number of diseases and states of pain such as sleeplessness, migraine headaches, cancer and generally illnesses that medical science cannot find any explanation for (Tuovinen 1984, Pohjonen & Jantunen 1982).

and never had any time off before the substitute system was put into practice in the 1970's. Rosa and her husband Kennet take up the issue of magnetic fields when pondering what cancer is caused by. Rosa tells me that her father is skilful at using a divining rod and that her parents have built-in protective copper plates in their house. When I ask Rosa and Kennet about the causes of cancer they first talk about the centrality of a genetic explanation model and then move on to environmental explanations of cause:

Rosa: “[– –] Now it's in the following generation where there are many. There are many who have cancer. It's as if it would be totally family related in many ways.”

Susanne: “What makes some people get it and others not?”

Rosa: “[It is] In the ground, somehow.”

Kennet: “What about radon?”

Susanne: “Very many have mentioned radon.”

Rosa: “Because there is very high radon content on Koppars of all places.”

Susanne: “And many who radiation protect their houses?”

Rosa: “Could be, yes.”

Kennet: “Then there are also the magnetic fields. Have you heard of them?”

Susanne: “No. Someone may have mentioned them to me.”

Kennet: “That there are meridians and if they cross you should not build your house there. You should build outside of that crossing.”

Susanne: “How can you find that out?”

Kennet: “It is the same as with water.”

Susanne: “Oh, yes.”

Kennet: “That someone comes who has a divining rod.”

Susanne: “Yes, ok.”

Kennet: “I have heard of many who have it and they place copper plates on the outer walls. So that it will isolate the radiation. It conducts the magnetic fields away [from the house].”

(Rosa & Kennet, July 2003)

Lisa tells me that she has also insulated her house against radiation. Lisa and her family used to live in an apartment and an old woman, who had previously

visited the apartment when the previous owners lived there, asked her how her home was and what the blue and the yellow room were like. When she said her son slept in one of the rooms the woman told her to move her son into another room because he was sleeping in a place where a radiation wave passed under his bed. He had developed allergies and now she understood that the cause of the allergies was the radiation. She has seen that in Russia it is more common to measure radiation as part of alternative therapies and that the method is also slowly coming to Finland.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Illness, and by analogy, perceptions of illness goes beyond the purely medical field of knowledge, as Fainzang (2000: 8) aptly notes, referring to the work of the French sociologist Herzlich. "Like the concepts of body and health, it expresses relations between the individual and society, and is connected particularly with the categories of work and production and the notions of activity and inactivity." This view by Fainzang is informed by her research among the Bisa of Burkina Faso for whom illness is viewed both as a manifestation through bodily symptoms and as an event that can generate an accusatory process. The perceptions of cancer that informants on Koppars have presented to me illustrate that illness is an event that triggers off an accusatory process. The question is; who are they accusing and how does this lay bare social relations and inter-subjective understandings and meanings of what is happening in informants' lives? I seemed to discern a collective narrative that emerged in terms of what cancer represents, which also explains why it was mentioned at all as a "public health concern of this area". The collective narrative, as I understand it, is intimately linked to work and production and the social tensions that the illness interpretation expresses. I propose that the discourse about a "high prevalence of cancer", as expressed by informants on Koppars, serves as a way of expressing feelings of anxiety and uncertainty about the future and people's fears about losing their source of livelihood. Perhaps it can be understood as a way for individuals to express personally their sense of uncertainty, in both a bodily and emotional fashion. The afflictions that can affect the body can, thus, be a primary mode through which individuals speak about experiences of the physical, emotional and social changes associated with being potentially faced with a drastic transition in life; being forced to give up your livelihood.

When things change in life we may experience a loss of control if the new life situation is one characterised by uncertainty. Loss of control and the invasion of an "other", something foreign entering the body are common lay perceptions of what happens to the body in cancer. The cancer disease process

itself serves as an apt metaphor for the loss of control, a central issue in the postmodern world (Balshem 1991: 167). In a medical (psychological) discourse it seems that blame, i.e. why an individual gets cancer, is sometimes attributed to psychological and psychosocial reasons or to lifestyle. Due to the punitive notions and stigma that surround cancer it becomes a shameful disease whereby the patient is made guilty of having contracted it. The persistence of these metaphors and perceptions of cancer are confirmed by my own research – cancer is presented as devious, a doom, a fate one cannot escape or then something one has brought upon oneself. The responsibility is placed in some cases on the individual and, more often, seen as the fault of no-one, something that just happens that is beyond individual control.

The connection between emotionality (depression, worry, grief, conflictive interpersonal relationships) and cancer, also supported by scientific studies, is another popular lay theory. Cancer sufferers may be people – most often women – who have suffocated their feelings and sacrificed themselves for their families, jobs or ideals (DiGiacomo 1992; Laiho 2005) or then individuals who have “bad” habits like smoking, putting themselves at risk of getting cancer (Balshem 1991). Sontag (1978) believes that psychologizing of disease is a way to provide control over experiences and events that people actually have no control over, providing a necessary distance to enable one to think “this will not happen to me”. There are, though, other directions that lay explanations take where informants resist being blamed and victimised and where the “evil” of cancer is located in forces beyond their control like fate (genetic explanations), in a contaminated environment, in polluted, unnatural foods and in a belief that even some environments can be carcinogenic in themselves (Saillant 1990; Balshem 1991; Gifford 1994; Weiss 1997; Karakidou 2006). There are striking similarities between the lay perceptions of Cretan farmers and those of Koppars inhabitants. On Crete cancer is thought to be a result of environmental contamination from pesticide and fertiliser use, radiation from Chernobyl and American military bases, or to be located in drinking water derived from asbestos lined water pipes. When contamination or “evil” is located outside of the individual body, beyond individual responsibility, it originates somewhere “outside”, in the unknown and unfamiliar. Here we see the familiar dichotomy of outside-inside at play where the inside stands for the familiar, that which is good, the home as opposed to the outside which is unfamiliar, bad, other, impersonal (not intimate).

Susan Sontag (1978), who has made an investigation into the metaphors of cancer, says that cancer equals death in the popular imagination, and because of this lethal connection it is surrounded by conventions of concealment. When faced with something thought of as being fateful there may be a social contract of silence surrounding it. This conspiracy of silence has characterised cancer in

public discourse, at least in the context of the United States as late as in the 1970's (Patterson 1987) and still today in some countries, such as in the case of physicians on Crete in Greece who may conceal the cancer diagnosis from the patient (Karakidou 2006). An avoidance to tell or talk about cancer can also be seen as a form of defiance when the conspiracy of silence is grounded in the person ill with cancer. Not revealing it is tied to having a positive attitude that has a life sustaining aspect to it. Informants in Balslem's (1991 & 1997) study on cancer in a working class community in Philadelphia reckoned that uttering the word cancer in the family circle or testing oneself to know one's status is tempting fate. By focusing on the disease one attracts it or invites it to come into one's body.

When informants communicate their lay perceptions on cancer, I believe they are also telling another story and not only one about what they suppose happens inside the body. Their perceptions are informed by other life experiences, of how they perceive social relations in society and of how ideas, products and acts move from one place to another. It is also an issue of what this "evil" does inside the body. The metaphors found in discourse on illness interpretations indicate what the uncertainty felt by informants is based on and how it is linked to the central values of life on Koppars. Overwhelmingly the metaphors that emerge in the talk of informants present cancer as an entity within an individual, a *being* involved in a variety of actions, having an agency of its own. Referring to cancer as an "*it*" is a way of creating distance between person and illness and is also useful for the purposes of expressing denial, hope and faith (Weiss 1997). Cancer has the capacity to transgress bodily boundaries, coming from outside the body to enter the body and wreak havoc there. The general impression one gets is that cancer or cancer producing substances are rooted: they are located in the ground, in families, in food, but they also have the capacity to move in space and in time. It has a life that progresses through different growth stages within a reproductive cycle, linking it to the idea of production within agriculture and of the body as a machine with a faulty part. In numerous studies on the metaphoric expressions of illness the body-as-machine metaphor is used where the breakdown of the body is paralleled to that of faulty machinery, and by analogy a dysfunction of society (Martin 1990 & 1992). The essential role of the sensual or lived body is central to our understanding of illness, because of both its physical dimensions as a biological body and its symbolical dimensions as a social body or the body politic. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock (1998: 348) developed the concept of these three bodies; the individual body of the lived self; the social body where the body comes to represent a symbol with which to think about society, nature and culture; and, the body politic (see also Turner 1984) connected to the regulation, surveillance and control of bodies through a variety of activities

like production and reproduction. The body in cancer can be explained in terms of all three levels as a body experienced through the lived reality of cancer, as a representation of what is happening on an inter-personal level in society or as a body disciplined by, in this case, surveillance and regulations of work.

In research conducted on the metaphors of cancer the disease signifies a body in flux, where fluids and cells are polluting the body, moving from latency to infecting the tissues of the body, fragmenting the body's defence system. Bodily fluids are interpreted as being socially dangerous when they flow out of the body because they challenge our sense of order and orderliness. Cancer is firmly connected to metaphors of fluidity, of having an amoeba-like character, transgressing boundaries within the body. Weiss (1997) points out that cancer is firmly linked to the post-modern body concept, rather than the Fordistic machine body (Martin 1992). This body is a fluid one, which signifies fragmentation and dissolution from within the integrated body system, a vessel for rapid, flexible change, just like society itself. As such, it becomes a metaphor for industrialisation and the cancer producing effects of toxic chemicals. The notion of contamination or pollution are central aspects of human existence, according to Mary Douglas (2002 [1966]). It is something that breaches classification and is ambiguous. Mary Douglas explains that, "dirt is essentially disorder...it exists in the eye of the beholder...In chasing dirt, papering, decorating, tidying, we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea" (2002 [1966]: 3). Disorder is dangerous and powerful and it can press on the external boundaries of a society. The image of society is often paralleled to that of the body because: "the body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious" (Ibid: 142, see also Turner 1984), which is how the body becomes a symbol of society.

In the original meaning of the word cancer means abominable, obscene and an invocation of consumption – that the body is consumed from the inside and that it needs to be fed (see also Saillant 1990; Gordon 1990). The sense of fluidity found in the contemporary social body, of a world where global flexibility has increased, has made borders more permeable. It poses a further threat to the orderliness of the individual body and social relations by allowing foreign substances, ideas and individuals to enter society and fluids to seep out of the body (Shildrik 1997; Turner 2003). I would like to extend this argument by reversing the direction and transforming the nature of the flow to include the dangerous fluids that leak within the body, for example, in the form of rogue cancer cells that pollute the body. What we ingest can place the leaky borders of the body at risk and, in the case of cancer, it can come to alter the composition of cells contained within the body.

Paradoxically, perceptions of health and illness in this study indicate that ingested substances can both pollute and strengthen the body. Ingestion has the capacity to fragment, fortify and re-assemble the body, all at once. On the one hand consumption is tied to the production of food and to the consumption of food one has produced oneself. Informants talk about the importance of wholesome food that hardens or strengthens the body because it is substantial basic fare. Although they use pesticides in producing this wholesome food that they themselves consume they consider pesticide amounts to be small in comparison to food produced “outside”, in foreign, unknown places where substantially higher amounts of pesticides are used, so food produced “inside”, at home is good and life sustaining. On the other hand, consumption as depicted in the guise of cancer is destructive and life taking.

Metaphors of ingestions are commonly used in many contexts and cultures. Ingestion is linked to a process of social incorporation through the act of eating a ritual meal together. Here the body is open, ready to be taken or symbolically eaten into the community and at the same time eating into its own body (Falk 1994: 21). But, Bakhtin (1968 quoted in Falk 1994) outlines that the modern body is closed compared to the medieval body that was open and had flexible boundaries. Control over the bodily openings and also affective expression is what Elias (1978 & 1982 quoted in Falk 1994) has described as an armouring process. The issue at stake is the relationship of eating or being eaten by. Things that are uncontrollable or not known are seen as dangerous, like poisons. The uncontrollable character of them, both practically and symbolically inverts the eater/food relation: “Incorporating them does not result in gaining possession over them. In fact, the very reverse is the case”, Falk (1994: 85) explains. I take cancer to fall into this category of something uncontrollable that takes possession over the body. Although one tries to control the orifices of the body the fatefulness and danger of cancer’s eating capacity lies in its ability to transgress the boundaries of the body, and penetrate orifices by simply entering through the mouth, nose or skin as some of the lay explanations on Koppars would suggest. In the explanations of cause and the metaphors contained within these explanations, the mouth gains an important symbolic role as both a vulnerable and a strength-giving point of reference. Through the mouth enters both harmful and fortifying substances that affect either maintenance or disintegration of the body and its boundaries. When the perception of both the life-giving and life-taking aspect of ingestion is transposed to the social body I propose that informants, through the medium of “cancer talk”, are delivering a moral message about the disordering and fragmentation of society that they are experiencing, a breakdown of the wholesome life and of the boundaries of the body, both individual and social.

Similar perceptions have been identified in both every day and medical theories of ischaemic heart disease in Finland, where food containing animal fats, alcohol and cigarettes ingested into the body have been perceived as risk producing. The symbolic importance of the mouth and ingestion as an act of transgression is linked to folk traditions and beliefs. According to old folk explanation models illness could enter the body through the process of contagion coming from a certain place or substance either through fright or by being fed harmful substances⁷³ placed in food by a person who wished misfortune upon you (Honkasalo & Hinkkanen 2003). The act of eating or being eaten by is contained within the etymology of the Finnish word for cancer, *syöpä* which is derived from the verb *syödä*, to eat, or *syöjä*, eater. Already in the 1600's the word *koiso*, originating from the Swedish language described cancer of the skin or finger. This again is linked to a parallel word used for cancer, *ruumiinkoi*, which means a pest, insect or a worm of the body (Etymologinen sanakirja 2000: 235). In the material collected by Elias Lönnroth⁷⁴ there is mention of how to treat a cancer swelling, thought to be the initial stage of having a worm in your body. A central parallel can be found in the idea of contagion from the environment and that harmful substances resided in what was ingested into the body, both food, drink and air. The ability of natural elements, air, water and earth to cause disease is also found in folk explanations of illness aetiology. Cure was administered using the principle of like curing like, that is, if illness came from the ground it was to be cured rubbing the ill spot on the body with some earth (Hästesko 1910).

⁷³ These were called "väki" or "kalmanväki" which was a non-personified power. (Honko & Pentikäinen 1970; see also Vuorela 1979) usually tied to a specific place related to the core values of social life (Anttonen 2001). It was also linked to the power of that which is on the border between life and death, e.g. graveyards or the vagina (Apo 1995; Stark-Arola 1998).

⁷⁴ Elias Lönnroth started collecting folklore poetry in Savo, Häme and North Karelia in 1828. He continued making several trips to the Karelian region between 1832-1840, while working as a district physician in Kainuu in eastern Finland. The material was published as a collection of ancient folklore poetry on 1835, 1836 and 1840 (Kanteletar). The first version of the Finnish national epos Kalevala was published in 1849 (Wikipedia 2006).

9. ENGAGING WITH UNCERTAINTY

Keijo is a talkative man who proudly displays his majestic looking new house to me, in two stories with a large kitchen and an assortment of rooms, including a wine cellar. He has a well stocked library and says he likes reading. From the windows a spectacular view opens up with expanses of fields that roll down towards the sea. On the other side the house is surrounded by forest which belongs to the family. Just a few years back they all lived in the old barn where Keijo's parents previously kept cows and later pigs, but when he took over the farm he emptied the barn and concentrated all his efforts on working the fields. Almost entirely alone, Keijo demolished the old farm building because it had a mould problem and since it was a wooden construction it required a lot of maintenance. As a modern man enjoying his creature comforts he wanted a concrete house, with all the gimmicks that modern living can provide. When Finland joined the European Union Keijo was ready to sell his house and move to Helsinki and even contacted a real estate agent to get his farm onto the real estate market. Nonetheless, they stayed put and, he explains:

“It was an indication of the fact that time heals all wounds and humans are quite adaptable and elastic. Many a times we have cursed it, but still, here we are. This house construction has been a survival strategy because there has been so much to do every day that there has been no time to ponder trivialities [– –] and we did quite rapidly pick ourselves up in such a way that there was a will to fight and we started thinking about ways to adapt also to this situation. [– –] We are here in the most ideal place on Koppars island. We have one of the most beautiful environments in Finland on this island and such opportunities to do so much more than just farming. The farmers who only have fields [to build their business on] they are not cracking many jokes now.”

Although it nearly cost him his life and health the construction of a new home gave Keijo a definite orientation towards the future and by

just acting it prevented him from pondering too much on the possible uncertainty of the future. In general, he is a very enterprising man. He explains how throughout his farming career he has understood to get out of a line of production immediately when there have been signs of a drop in demand. He has stayed abreast of new trends and has diversified his line of work ever since he took over his parents' farm. He says he has also been fortunate because his fields are exceptionally fertile and situated on high lying ground, so they are not as easily affected by frost. His parents still help him on the farm and his wife has an off-farm job. Keijo is a typical entrepreneur and is confident that he will manage well with his farm, although he is critical of the EU regulations and the manner in which they control his work.

(Field diary, September 2003)

HOPE AND DISTRESS

The maintenance of a good life is intimately linked to a tacit discourse on hope expressed through engaged practice, through action. This discourse of hope is about dealing with uncertainty through various forms of acting that consolidate a feeling of belonging and continuity which improves the local community. People engage in local associations like village committees, sporting associations, women's associations, activity days, voluntary work parties and village dances or "table parties", participate in the hunting party, organise yearly events such as sea days, attend agricultural fairs or, for example, engage themselves as amateur trainers of trotting horses.

Independence and self-sufficiency are important values in Finland and among farmers the ethos of managing is age old. It is expected that hard work should support oneself and one's family. This approach is defined by experience amassed over generations. It seems almost built into the idea that if one produces food how can one not manage – after all, it is a basic necessity for all, that someone produces our food. Naturally there is also a growing realisation of what a globalised world has done to the labour market, also in farming – food is produced much cheaper elsewhere. So, how do farmers make sense of their distress? Today the course of working life is unpredictable and uncertain. The situation is always changing and it is hard to trust decisions passed in the European Union. So what keeps farmers and other individuals in the rural milieu going in spite of the odds? I argue that it is simply *acting* and not actively pondering too much over the future. Why would the farmers, deemed as having farms that are too small or too inefficient for the present model of farming promoted by the EU, even bother to continue working at all? Hope of a change, of a better future for themselves or for future generations sustains

their common sense notions of the necessity of continuation, but it is a hope constructed in acting, rather than an abstract theologically or philosophically grounded notion.

How has hope been used in the analysis of distress and can this notion be adapted to the situation of the farmers in this study? Although hope is a well-known concept in western cultures, within anthropology it has received surprisingly little attention. The concept of hope has to some degree been discussed in medical anthropology in studies dealing with cancer and schizophrenia (Del Vecchio Good 1990 et al.; van Dongen 1998), but in relation to hope in the context of the everyday, the “small suffering” of quotidian life, I have not been able to find any studies.

Hope has different cultural meanings and functions reflecting cultural ideas about people, social relationships and the good life. As an idea it is geared towards the future, but, van Dongen (1998: 170) reminds us that it is a complex notion: The development of the concept is governed by the tension between positive and negative values, between mystery and rational calculus of probabilities, between self-realisation and realisation of the good for a community.

The workings of hope can be as an attitude enabling one to accept a situation or a strategy to maintain social relations. In the context of my field work hope needs to be viewed within the framework of the protestant tradition and its conceptualisation of the person as an independent entity, irresponsible for him or herself. Since people have to direct their own lives they are, through hope, urged to keep things going in order to ensure continuity. The Christian tradition also moulds the way in which one deals with adversity by teaching individuals to expect to be released from distress, trust in the belief that this release will take place, to long for this to happen and to have the patience to endure it (van Dongen 1998: 171).

Hope is based on the idea that life can be controlled, but it is ambiguous at the same time because farmers are faced with a loss of control. Many carry with them the idea that “there will always be something else after this”, “It cannot all end here”. Symbols of hope surround the farming profession even in this time of distress. The political economy of EU rhetoric and the discourse on agricultural negotiations within the EU gain from promoting an image of hope to farmers. This is achieved through the promotion of positive images of the negotiations in the media (Koski 2005), of positive images of the future of farming at trade fairs and in the producers’ organisations.

The official stories of the agricultural negotiations within the EU and Finland’s role within these negotiations to some degree illustrate the struggles that small nations have had in gaining favourable grant conditions for farmers. As Finland is a marginal country, both in terms of political clout and its

geographic location at the borders of the union, it has weak negotiating power. In the pre- EU referendum period control of information about the details of the agricultural negotiations was a way of instilling hope in farmers that there would not be changes for the worse after joining the union. Another symbol of hope can be found in the promotional material produced by the central organisation of Swedish-speaking agricultural producers. On the organisation's homepage a T-shirt is marketed which shows the face of a smiling farmer wearing a comically tilted flat cap and a stalk of wheat between his lips. The caption says: "the farmer is needed". In this image the farmer symbolises familiarity, closeness, a jolly fellow who has just emerged from the wheat fields in the peak of the summer. Also on the level of the community, in Koppars itself, there are places that are symbols of hope such as a newly built sports complex and a housing area recently constructed in the municipal centre. They send out the message of belief in the continued growth and development of the community. In the official publications of the municipal authorities the safe, peaceful and clean environment of Koppars is stressed. This signals a message of belief in the future and of the fact that the positive value of these characteristics will continue to be attractive to newcomers.

Within the American tradition, and most prominently within oncology, hope is seen as a positive force to endure illness, positively influencing the attitude of patients towards physicians. This is something Del Vecchio Good (1990) calls a "political economy of hope". The American discourse of hope emphasises the issue of "will", that if one has enough hope one will change the course of one's distress. If I apply this term to farmers I would claim that hope for them is not so much an issue of "will", but rather an issue of the imperative to act honourably and the power of hard work in keeping life going, keeping disorder at bay. This acting is a way of expressing belief in the self. Cheryl Mattingly and Linda Garro (2000), who have analysed stories of illness and healing, remind us that when faced with uncertainty, individuals tell a story through their own enactment, through a performance of the known and the familiar. By trusting the present they also construct a trust in things to come.

BELIEF IN FARMING

It is obvious that people don't just sit back and let the unknown and uncertain happen. They take stock of the past, look at the present situation and devise future strategies. The approach to the uncertain is highly pragmatic – it is about taking action to mitigate misfortune (see also Whyte 1997). Long-term planning lies in the nature of farming, it is a natural stance towards life. It is the action of farmers and that of those close to them that determines how their future will look and how their farm will fare in spite of how conditions

related to farming change, such as new regulations, changes in income, weather conditions. Farmers try to contain the negative effects of these changes through specific strategies of economics or by building alternative social networks, which give them a sense of security.

Although farmers are aware that they cannot alter the ultimate outcome of future farming conditions in Finland, they still devise and use micro-strategies of survival to smooth the rough edges of risk. They seek moral gain from the way in which they manage their work and ensure continuity through this continued work. In this way they can exert some control over the way their work functions and the way their farm looks. Both the signs of success and those of decline are read as socially meaningful within their environment. In this way actions take on the role of moral trajectories that build solidarity, expressing a common performance of struggle. Relations with different people in one's environment like kin, neighbours and friends have significant impacts on one's farming career. The significance of, for example, *talkoo* work, although now decimated, attests to this fact or the continued importance of village action committees. People spend their leisure time in various associations building up their community and consolidating social networks because that is also part of the ethos of production – producing sociality and permanency.

Nearly half the farmers included in this study owned large farms with over 100 hectares of arable and forest land. In addition to land, many of them had made large investments already before Finland joined the European Union. They were in a favourable position to manage the transition and adaptation required of farmers at this time and were thus what one could call “successful” farmers. Although they are managing well they still look back at this period as one of deception, a deception so profound it led to a sense of paralysis and apathy in many farmers once it became clear that Finland was in the union. Lasse and Maija tell me what the reactions were like and also how they then eventually changed:

Lasse: “Mainly the impetus to strive ahead; it dwindled. There was no will to try. [Farmers thought] Now we are beaten. As the years have passed one has accepted.”

Maija: “One has noticed that it is better to just keep on working”
(Maija & Lasse, June 2002)

Although it was a hard blow to many and they initially lost their motivation to work, most farmers, in spite of it all, kept on working. A sense of hopelessness was kept at bay by just acting, keeping things going. And, also, giving up would have been a sign of total defeat and a deception of one's legacy. Farmers not only act with their land by concretely working on it, but also act

within organisations as social actors set on influencing the political agenda on farming. Lasse tells me how the matter of European Union membership and its effect on farming is now discussed among farmers:

“There is an active discussion in the producers’ movement on how we can influence the EU. This is among the active farmers within the producers’ movement. Most of them are aged between 35 and 55. There are very active, both young and old ones [farmers]. They pursue everything that has to do with us farmers, economic and social issues.”

(Maija & Lasse, June 2002)

Farmers have taken to a number of survival measures to cut costs and make their production more efficient and less labour intensive. Those farms that still were involved in animal rearing have given it up, and those farmers who already were struggling with their farms before EU membership gave up farming. The possibility of finding employment outside farming has also been a saving grace. Because farms on average have been larger in the south west the process of abandoning animal rearing, and particularly dairy farming, on a large scale was more common here than in other parts of the country. In Ostrobothnia, which Lasse takes as a point of comparison, farmers most often have sought to secure the survival of their farms by looking for solutions within farming. They have developed joint venture farms and conglomerates consisting of several farm units. It is also harder to find off-farm employment in Ostrobothnia, Lasse believes.

Lasse and Maijas’s hope regarding the future is ambiguous, but still characterised by faith in the fact that there will be continuity. This attitude was expressed by several other farmers with farms of over 100 hectares:

Lasse: “Now there is uncertainty. We know for 5 years ahead [what will happen with the grant system] and then there are new negotiations. I find it difficult to believe that there would not be any farming here. I want to cherish this cultural landscape⁷⁵ and produce food for people.”

Maija: “One does not see it as an alternative to sell the farm.”

Lasse: “This is something I want to pass on to my children. During our lifetime farming will not end. It would be too expensive for society. We cannot afford to do it.”

(Maija & Lasse, June 2002)

Although they talk about high societal costs being the reason for not ending farming, they are also at the same time talking about the symbolic expense

⁷⁵ The term “cultural landscape” is partially derived from a term now used within the grant discourse. Part of the discussion on the environmental grant is related to getting compensation for keeping older landscapes intact, like old meadows and fencing systems.

involved in putting an end to farming. The desire to pass on the farm to their children is not just an issue of passing on an investment, but of passing on a legacy. The imperative to keep farming going is a moral one – continuing to farm creates a moral structure to everyday existence. Hope and actions to mitigate the uncertain has to do with just *doing* it, just farming and not pondering about it too much.

Roy's attitude parallels what Lasse and Maija have said about what makes them have hope regarding the future of farming and the possibility for them to continue in farming. Roy, just like Lasse, is one of the active farmers in the producer's movement and it instils in him a sense of being able to influence policy making, of being part of this "political economy of hope". By being active he meets many farmers and it gives him an opportunity, not only to talk about policy issues, but also to air everyday problems and to widen his horizons. The producer's movement is to him both a forum for discussion and an activity that enforces social belonging and social competence:

"Some [farmers] are so closed and locked into their own thoughts. They don't have any contact with others...with my engagement in the producers' movement I meet lots of other farmers. One does not only talk about issues regarding the producers' movement, but also everyday types of problems. That way I constantly get snippets [of information] that I can learn from."

(Roy, July 2002)

Roy is active in a number of other social contexts like the hunting party, municipal politics and he has a wide circle of friends with whom he and his wife socialise regularly. He explains further that the key to survival lies in being mobile also in one's manner of working. When I ask him what a successful farmer is he answers:

Roy: "A farmer who moves with the times. He adapts to his time."

Susanne: "Now with EU membership weren't there many farmers who felt they could not move with the times?"

Roy: "Yes, but one has to say that the farmer who gave up probably wasn't a good farmer. It's the farmer who can see a bit further into the future, that although there are problems now, [he can see that] in the long-run that which is wrong usually can be put straight."

Susanne: "So, having a long-term perspective is an ingredient?"

Roy: "For a good farmer, yes."

(Roy, July 2002)

The metaphor of movement that Roy uses in describing success underlines the action component of attitudes towards the future. What is paradoxical is that farmers have to move in order to stay in one place. Their stance towards reality must be a dynamic one so that they can ensure permanency. Stagnation, in turn, would lead to up-rooting, a movement away from the familiar and secure. At the same time, entering into unfamiliar areas, into the unknown, the experimental in farming is what ensures success.

Permanency and continuity as symbols of hope are also woven into the landscape because one's personal history grows into the landscape. Keijo and Karina say that one becomes attached to the landscape of one's childhood. To stay in place is of significance to one's mental health because places, landscapes represent wholeness:

Keijo: "In addition to there [in the landscape of your childhood] being those familiar landscapes there are also familiar people and all of that wholeness."

Karina: "Yes, wholeness, wholeness. Yes, yes."

(Keijo & Karina, September 2003)

The idea of wholeness is tied to a basic attitude of humanity, to seek in a philosophical sense the wholeness of people, to become healed of the fragmentation of life by being a member of the brotherhood of man (Plügge 1962 quoted in van Dongen 1998).

Mona has for several years lived in a small town situated not far from Koppars, but when her father died and her mother moved away from the family farm Mona and her husband Tom felt they should return to Koppars to take up farming. They have a farm of 170 hectares of both field and forest land. When I ask Mona about what types of changes have taken place in farming she says that compared to her father, who owned all his own agricultural machinery, her husband now cooperates with other farmers, sharing machines to save on costs. She finds it is difficult to predict what will happen with agriculture in Finland, but refuses to have a dark picture of the future:

"I find that it has to be necessary [with farming] and we cannot live without farming. We have clean products. We have a lot of good to offer. The quality of the products we produce here in Finland is good. And farming, it is part of the Finnish countryside. It would look rather empty and horrible if there all of a sudden was no farming any more."

(Mona, September 2003)

This is a hope many farmers express, that consumers have a sense of solidarity with farmers and they want to eat pure food, produced in Finland. They reason that because the need for food is always present there will always be a demand for locally produced food. The countryside will experience a social and cultural death if we stop producing food. The image of farming has improved among the general public in comparison to what it was in the period before the referendum on EU membership.

Ralf, a now retired farmer places the present situation in a historical perspective and says that farmers have always had a fairly good position in society and much of the welfare in Finland today has been built on the efforts made within farming and forestry. In farming there have always been periods when farms have needed to expand. Now with the EU things are tight, but it has been this way throughout the ages. Ralf does not yet have a pessimistic attitude regarding the future of farming. He thinks that farming in Finland without a doubt will continue to prosper also in the years to come. He says that a lot of it is up to the consumers and how well-informed they are about the products. He is worried though about the fact that when genetically modified products are much cheaper than conventionally produced food, consumers are "so crazy" that they will opt for the cheaper alternative.

The above examples indicate that due to the unpredictability of the grant negotiation system farmers need to constantly redefine their options, be alert about innovations and new products, be one step ahead of everyone else. Entrepreneurialism is the catch word in the producers' organisations, within advisory services and the Ministry of Agriculture. This is the symbol of hope these institutions offer to farmers. By adopting an entrepreneurial spirit they urge farmers to look ahead, to be innovative and keep pace with the times. But there is a dichotomy between the focus on the present moment, or the future, and the past. A good entrepreneur must be attuned to the present, act fast, while at the same time farming is characterised by long-term planning. Society demands of farmers the ability to adapt rapidly, but they know nature cannot be dictated to by a fast ticking clock. They are caught in a bind of being pressurised to be modern and at the same time respecting the pace of nature that no-one can control.

What then is the future of farming in Finland? Today young people do not want to take over farms because of the low income level, the many investments required to be made and the investment risks involved. They are also concerned in terms of personal capital and grant levels, which are constantly being decreased. Today it is no longer possible to create new capital in farming. It is hard to survive even if you have large scale production. If we look at the current

statistics in terms of the decimation of number of farms since 1995 there is little hope that many young people will want to enter the profession of farming.⁷⁶

Monica does, though, believe that there is a future for the countryside because she wants to believe that it will not all be dismantled and the fields left to be overgrown by forests again. The countryside can offer people more than just food. It can be a source of harmony and repair, a return to a quality of life which sets itself apart from financial gain, stress and the constant need to expand and become more effective:

“It is a living earth. [– –] I see it in the future. Somehow I see that people will just get worse. Everything just becomes worse and more miserable and there will be more criminality and horrid things. I believe that on the other hand agriculture and farming will become a small paradise in the future. A place where you have fresh (clean) air and where you can work with nature and familiarise yourself with other values than hard values. Somehow I believe that farms will become very valuable one day. You will never have the possibility of getting them back again [once they disappear]. [– –] It would be a place where people can heal themselves, where you can achieve mental health and balance. The resource of the countryside is no longer a matter of food security and national security to keep food production going in case of war, but quality of life, peace and a slower, healthier pace of life.”

(Monica, November 2002)

In many families, small-holders included, the spouse works outside of the home which means the family is not totally dependent on income from farming alone. Some farmers have developed their entrepreneurial skills and have set up side-line business like tourism services with cafés, lodging, water sports, coach rides, horse back riding and various other rurally based entertainment forms.

Hope is also connected to the particular characteristics of the place itself. One woman says that there are high energies on the island and the fact that it has always been inhabited by entrepreneurial people who, already hundreds of years ago transported goods to Sweden, is part of its attraction. Although it is a highly inhabited area with no so called wilderness or large stretches of forest, what counteracts this tamed character of the landscape is the unpredictability of the sea. It represents both possibilities and dangers. It brings a lot of boat tourists every year and it has been an inspirational force that has driven young men to seek a career at sea. Signs of this adventurous group of individuals are still visible in the landscape today in the form of captains and boat builders' houses.

⁷⁶ The number of active farms has been steadily decreasing since 1995 when the total number on Koppars was 310 and by the year 2000 this total was 262 with the most drastic reduction taking place in the largest municipality Källsvik (Maa- ja metsätalous ministeriö, Tike 2000).

WE ARE A COMMUNITY

It is the end of April and everyone is busy with spring preparations on their fields and in their gardens. Delicate, intensely green leaves adorn the trees and bushes. Puddles are drying up on the muddy village road. The sporting association of Norrås has decided that this is a time for celebration and relaxation. It has been four years since a dinner dance party, a so-called “table party”, has been organised. There used to be dance parties twice a month, but somehow the activity just tapered off. The building has been regularly used for other festive occasions since then such as wedding parties, major birthdays and anniversaries. These are traditional events, which gather up people from the area to spend a night out socialising, dancing and eating traditional foods. Antti and his wife Seija pick us up in the evening to take us down the road to the sporting association. I really have no nice clothes included among my field gear so I assemble a rather comical looking outfit with red stockings, a velvety dress with large flowers and some heavy looking walking shoes. I am assuming everyone else will have shirts, dresses, skirts and high heeled shoes. When we get there I realise I was not very far off the mark. The neighbour, Magnus, known for dropping snide remarks immediately notes my stockings and says; “Look it’s the red stocking” (in addition to its literal meaning it also means a left wing feminist). We settle down at the table that he shares with Johan and Maria, a couple from a village nearby. The men remember how as young boys they used to work in the summers for a funny man called Alfred Andersson. It involved heavy manual labour and they enjoyed being busy and working together. In the 1960’s table parties were organised often and it was one of the only forms of recreation for people in the area. I remember Rainer telling me that once he had to pick up a girl to take her to a dance by tractor because there was no car available. There was a tradition that young men would come to the dances all the way from a working class foundry community on the main land and the evening would always end up in a fist fight between the local boys and the outsiders. There were no hard feelings. “It was all in a good spirit, as a tradition”, Magnus says and adds that “today it is no longer necessary because people know each other”.

The sporting association was officially inaugurated in 1935 and the club house was built in the 1940’s with *talkoo* work, on land donated by the local community – it is a house that truly belongs to the community. The main part of the building is a large room that is used as a gym for exercise classes. There used to be a stage for theatre performances and bands, but it has been removed. It was a very meaningful institution in Norrås and the surrounding areas. All the youths of the local area were

active, as well as the adults. They had skiing in the winter and running in the summer. Being active in sports is also a way of marking distinction, of rising above the rest. Individuals who grew up in the 1940's and 1950's still used to ski to school in the winter. Membership in the association was seen by many as a kind of second home, as a place that teaches you social rules, builds up your physical strength – an important trait if you are involved in manual labour. Magnus says he remembers all the times he was forced to attend sporting events as a child and vowed to himself that as soon as he was old enough he would stop coming to the place, but he could not stay away. He has also donated a substantial amount of money to the association. Norrås sporting association had a very central role in young people's lives.

The present president, Antti's whole family was involved in the activities and his daughter ended up representing the association in both national events and international competitions. His wife had also been a sportswoman since her childhood, having parents who were enthusiastic skiers and runners. In the 1970's and 1980's they organised a skiing marathon through the island. It was a yearly event and this was the most active period of the association. The death of the caretaker, Harry, led to a decrease in the activity level. Antti's father was a long time chair person of the sporting association and Antti has inherited his active involvement in local associations from his father. He engages himself in both the sporting association and the village action committee. It has to do with his father building the club house, which makes him feel it is his obligation to continue the work. Being active takes time, but it also gives you a lot, like contacts with people and togetherness. He follows the principle that after the *talkoo* work has been completed there should be a party so that the work becomes combined with a sense of community and reward.

The village action committee has a central role in reviving the custom of organising table parties and they are involved in organising regular events in the summer such as the annual sea days and a barn dance. There is a lack of young people involved in the association and Antti feels that they do not reflect on the fact that the work input is an investment for the village and for coming generations. The activities and existence of the sporting association gains added importance in light of the current social climate that characterises many villages, where visiting among neighbours has diminished. Antti feels that the reason is not a lack of time and too much work. Although there was much work before, people still visited each other. Many people, including Antti, who complain of this increased loneliness and decimation of socialising among neighbours believe that the TV plays a large role in isolating people from each other. The sporting association has 200 members, but maybe only 50 are active. Many former

active members who have moved away still maintain their membership and some do participate in voluntary work.

A buffet style table is set in the middle of the room. All the food has been prepared in home kitchens by the organisers. We are served '*kinkekruusaus*' (ham casserole), warm smoked salmon, boiled eggs with caviar paste, salad, marinated beetroot and rye bread. A dance band arrives and they start setting up their instruments. As soon as the tables are cleared away the music begins and people get up immediately to dance. Someone tells me they are much quicker to dance in the Finnish-speaking areas on the island than the ones where the population is predominantly Swedish-speaking. People of all ages and sizes dance together and it is clear that it is an activity that people enjoy doing and are good at. In the city few young people know how to dance humppa, tango and waltz any longer. During the dancing coffee and coffee cakes are served and there is a lottery. The custom of hiding your bottle under your chair is still followed even though it is no longer necessary. The association has no rights to sell alcohol so people bring their own drinks. Most commonly *viina* (vodka) is consumed, but some have brought wine bottles and they have them placed visibly on the table. The custom of concealing your alcohol stems from the prohibition years. As late as in the 1980's the local police would visit the table parties to check if alcohol was consumed. They would talk to people outside the building before entering which would give someone smoking outside the opportunity to go in and warn people to hide their bottles. As the evening progresses and a number of glasses of wine have gone down the hatch Magnus becomes increasingly moved. The house is a nostalgic place for him – the walls are layered with history and memories. He looks at the people dancing calling them unique, wonderful, real characters. Magnus has opted to return to his roots and has moved back to live a large part of the year in his summer cottage after going into early retirement. This is something he shares with quite a few people whose relatives still live in the village and who have had summer cottages built in the area. I suspect he has missed the togetherness and feelings of belonging that the sporting association stands for. To him it's a homecoming in many senses.

(Field diary, April 2002)

Throughout my field work period there were a number of regularly occurring cultural and leisure events that structured the yearly calendar of Koppars inhabitants such as musical events, cultural programmes and social gatherings. A number of associations are active on the island and some have an extended historical presence in the local communities. At the end of the 1800's a number of civic movements gained momentum and importance in Finnish society. One of these was the Martha organisation, a women's movement that worked

mostly in the rural areas to teach women vegetable growing skills, handicrafts and general homemaking skills. The first local Martha group (Swedish language group) on Koppars was established in 1909. The main work of the group was tied to typical housekeeping activities like cooking, cleaning, child rearing and textile handicrafts. A local woman who is not an active member of the organisation says that the Martha association has always been for women from large farms, the 'successful' members of the local society. This was naturally not a specific regulation in terms of membership criteria, but clearly farmers' wives from large farms have been the most central characters of the organisation. Also sporting activities have a central role and a total of 11 associations offer sporting activities to adults and children. Some of the larger associations organise dinner dancing events a few times a year to gather revenue for the activities. The fact that a large sporting complex is being built next to the elementary school indicates that sports are an area that the local municipality wants to support and it is also believed that it attracts young families with children to move to the area.

Like many other areas in Finland Koppars has its fair share of musical events during the summer representing a range of musical genres from jazz, to rock and classical music and associations involved in culture and the arts. Over the years these events have grown in size and fame, attracting music lovers living both locally and further away. The local open air museum Lundagård organises theme days for both adults and children and these are mostly attended by local people, but also by summer guests during the holiday period. One of the most popular theme days deals with spring harvesting activities of the past. It gathers a lot of local people who come with their children and grandchildren both to view the events and to socialise with other locals. This is where a project was initiated to build a single masted sailing-ship, a copy of a vessel that sunk in the archipelago sea outside of Koppars in the end of the 1800's. Numerous volunteers, craftsmen and shipbuilding experts engaged in the project, which was completed in the year 2000. Local history is studied not only in connection to the activities organised by the Lundagård museum, but also by the historical society who have produced a highly popular book series of stories collected by local people about historical events. In addition there are amateur theatre groups and an amateur history society.

Many villages also have village action committees, which have worked to improve the living environment of the village by building roads, arranging for streetlights to be brought to the village and building a water distribution system like in Norrås. Every summer one of the municipalities is responsible for organising a Sea Day with a rowing competition, folk dancing, music programme, lottery, food and children's programme. Other village level activities are the hunting parties consisting of landowners and other villagers interested

in participating by for example driving the moose.⁷⁷ During the hunting season they meet regularly at weekends until the hunting quota has been filled. The meat is distributed among the hunting party members and landowners whose land the party has hunted on. At the end of the season they organise a traditional dinner, called *peijaiset*, to celebrate the successful completion of a hunting season. Although the main role of the hunting party is to decimate the moose population it also has the role of consolidating social bonds between members of the hunting party and people living in the area. When the hunting party drives the moose through the local forest areas they are also embodying knowledge and memories of the landscape.

The act of helping others and doing something for the community, together reflect a common desire to be part of the community. It is also a social frame used to make sense of life. This is something Els van Dongen noticed of patients in the closed ward for schizophrenics; that people faced with adversity in life desire to be part of a social group. They crave a community in the sense of ‘*communitas*’ (Turner 1974). The concept of wholeness that emerged in the numerous experiences I had of how community is constructed on Koppars is, I find akin to that used by Fernandez (1982). He employs it in relation to the process of “returning to the whole” through ritual. To Fernandez “the whole” is seen as a “state of relatedness – a kind of conviviality in experience” (1982: 191) which requires a mutual, sensory “tuning-in” by together hearing, smelling, seeing, touching, tasting and a coherence of domains, usually through the enactment of ritual, but also in mundane settings. Åström (2001) who has analysed aspects of Swedish-speaking culture finds that summer events organised in the countryside are a form of ritual confirmation of belonging. These events are typical of the modern times as they are secular, democratic and pluralistic – they offer some form of activity for everyone and invite all types of people to attend. The ritual character is based on the repetitious nature of the events – they occur on a yearly basis – and on the fact that the events are something out of the ordinary life of the summer months. They offer a break in the routine and allow people to come together and show themselves as belonging to a specific group (Ibid: 274–275). They also have the symbolic role of creating order through the use of specific symbols (Ibid: 276).

RECLAIMING THE BODY

The issue of preventive and protective measures used to maintain a discourse on hope is visible in the stories of informants who had received treatment

⁷⁷ The moose drivers are lined up at the beginning of a stretch of forest. They walk in a straight line banging sticks of wood together to scare the moose out of its hiding place and drive it through the forest to the spot where the forest ends in an open field where it is easy for the marksmen to spot it and shoot it.

for cancer, both conventional and complementary therapeutic regimes, and recovered from it. Presently they act to ensure that they will remain healthy. These measures point to a degree of agency and to an active engagement with the issue of prevention. Their whole lifestyle is geared towards prevention and towards an awareness of both the body and of how contemporary lifestyles and society at large put individuals at risk. All of the three informants who were approached and agreed to talk about the trajectory of their illness worked in the service sector and two came from a farming background. Coincidentally they had all opted to use alternative therapies to heal themselves and were connected to each other as a consequence of this special interest. These informants made the disease a focal point of the interview around which was interwoven narratives about their journey from health, to illness and finally to recovery. A characteristic feature was that these were stories of survival and of a process of reclaiming the body from medical science, by abandoning conventional treatment regimes (chemotherapy and radiation therapy) and turning to alternative therapies (antioxidants, ozone treatment, “clean living”, using immune system boosting vitamins and minerals). In these stories Benita, Mary and Helmer are heroes of ordinary life who have survived the trials and tribulations of cancer treatment and recovered. These individuals are the agents who stage a rescue operation in the body by familiarising themselves with the body system and its needs by creating a sense of trust in their body, by listening to it and learning about it. They gradually build up the body’s immune defence system so they can undertake this project of repair and re-assembly. They make it into a subject which leads to radical transformations in the state of overall health, both physically and mentally, become stronger, better, more independent people by regaining control over their own bodies and, thus, also over their own lives.

Benita, who has recently been declared recovered, says that she failed to listen to her body for a long time because she was depressed following the death of her husband:

“The body knows because it is wise and it interprets the signals with the unconscious and then the individual does not let them emerge. [– –] [Now] I understand it as a repeated warning to “by god, you idiot, don’t you understand that you should get yourself seen to.” But I protested. I was in opposition, also towards myself, as with everything else. [– –] When I turned 60 and had to attend a routine medical check-up I spoke to the doctor about it and then it did not take more than a few weeks and I was on the operating table. [– –] Now I take care of myself. It was as if a veil had been removed from my psyche. Everything changed. Now I understand it as a strange person’s way of thinking. The change was so radical.”

(Benita, September 2003)

Emotional explanations and a sense of blaming oneself for living in a manner that was harmful to the body and soul were central concerns. They placed the guilt on themselves, but also redeemed themselves from the guilt by indicating how they had turned misfortune into strength and victory over the disease. Listening to your body can be paralleled by a wish to have a voice in society and thus a means of influencing the outcome of your future. Many informants feel that there are few channels of communication through which they can make their stories heard and their experiences of being exploited by a system (the EU) that objectifies them. When the body is unknown territory we become strangers to ourselves.

Mary, aged 60, abandoned chemotherapy⁷⁸ because she felt it was killing her and she gathered courage to go her own way and try to cure herself using alternative therapies. She traces her falling ill to sorrow, abandonment, loneliness and a longing for the past. The years preceding her illness when Mary's parents died and she was experiencing the emotional strain of a drawn out divorce process. After her parents' death she had a longing to return to the landscape of her childhood in Ostrobothnia (the mid-north of the country), to a place that represented happiness and fond memories of intimacy and belonging. She found employment there and lived there for a year. One afternoon she returns to the spot in the countryside where her first childhood home was before it was tragically destroyed in a fire. With fondness and longing she recounts how she connects with this significant place as an adult filled with grief over the many losses in her life:

“In August '87 I got the feeling that...I then cycled to the first place of my childhood where our home burned down [long pause, she is almost crying]...And it was sunny and beautiful [she stops talking and starts crying] Imagine that this can be so difficult! Still so difficult! And I lay myself down there on the grass. Thorny bushes and flowers grew there that have such a strong aroma, that my mother had planted and these small poppies. All of this had spread over that wonderful property. Old, fine birches. It was a hillock. So I lay myself down on the grass [she is still crying]..I felt that now I am saturated by this. Now I can leave this place. I felt this closeness with the earth. It was the last time I cycled out there.”
(Mary, August 2003)

Mary's nostalgic journey to her childhood is at the same time a comment on the need to value the basic, simple things in life, sound family ties and a love

⁷⁸ Mary worked in a library in Ostrobothnia that delivered books to the cancer ward of a hospital and she was very upset by the sights and sounds of suffering patients. She finally requested her employer to be liberated from the task because it was too difficult for her to face the rapid deterioration process of the patients.

of those who are close to you. It also tells of how we are saturated by our past and how dealing with our past may be one way of getting to know our bodies. Her need to connect to a place that represented rootedness and wholeness was related to her feeling of uprooting that the death of her parents and her separation from her husband had brought about. She eventually returned down south again, and decided to change professions:

“Then I started there [working], but that ended my walks. Now they say that cancer cells can’t stand fresh air. Oxygen, oxygen, oxygen is the most important thing for humans. And all those years I was perfectly fine because I ate healthy food. I almost always had carrots at [my work]. I have been interested in health food for many, many years. [– –] When I [started working] all that ended. I no longer had time. It was stressful for me to learn about everything. [– –] It was too much. I did not eat regularly. [– –] Nineteen hundred ninety five I started feeling very tired. I thought it was natural for me to feel tired. I missed reading books. I felt spiritually poor inside of myself. I missed my walks in nature. I never had time to relax the way I had before. And that must have felt bad for my body.”

(Mary, August 2003)

Mary’s decision to abandon conventional treatment methods was not an easy one, but her Christian belief and her belief in the efficacy of alternative therapies gave her the courage to fight herself through her doubts and ambiguities and make a change in her life. She makes several references to cleanliness; the need to have a clean slate with her husband and complete the divorce process, the impurity and un-naturalness of the chemotherapy injected into her blood, and the harmony and purity of the ozone injection treatment she received once she started employing alternative therapies. During the early stages of her illness Mary felt people avoided her because they were afraid of the deadly disease that afflicted her. Later on, during her recovery process, when she realised that she did have support of people in her environment, that she was no longer alone, she felt she had entered a new path in life and could understand also the positive aspects of her illness:

“There was so much that was positive with my illness. I must tell you that I got a new life when I recovered. My relationship with my ex-husband. I was going through a divorce when I became ill, but I just postponed it and there was no hurry with it. We continued almost three years like this although we lived apart. It became so important for me that everything, every relation, everything should be sorted out. Everything should be clean somehow. I so strongly wished that it had to stop now. I do not want to be part of it any longer. [– –] One day a small, sweet woman came into the shop. There were other customers in there as well. And then she

said ‘how nice to see you behind the counter. You look well. We have prayed for you all winter.’ [– –] I was so surprised. I had not understood that anyone would care about me and that they would pray for me in the village. I was touched and started crying and the customers became touched [she starts crying]. There was such an atmosphere in the shop. When I went home that day it was as if I had woken up from everything, from that horrible smell of chemotherapy.”

(Mary, August 2003)

Gaining independence in their sick role, through a gradual process of recovery is by all three cancer sufferers in this study described as an awakening, a regaining of sight that enables you to see the true nature of things. The overall feeling of abandonment and nostalgia, which runs like a thread through Mary’s story was an important ingredient in the narratives of Italian-Australian working class women studied by anthropologist Sandra Gifford. Their beliefs about cancer were directly linked to their changing social role, to a devalued status in society and a grief and sorrow over the life they left behind in Italy (Gifford 1994). What Mary is outlining in her narrative of her struggle against cancer is a rejection of contamination, both in the sense of contaminated environments, contaminated relationships and contaminating conventional treatment regimes. Her illness trajectory is a call to regain control over her life. These same features are visible in Benita’s and Helmer’s descriptions of their experiences of being ill with cancer.

In the story of Helmer, aged 55, who survived a brain tumour that was discovered in 1997, several central themes emerge. These can be summarised as control, purification, lack of trust and salvation connected to his contaminated body. His is an extreme case of reclaiming and protecting the body from the ills of society. In 1997 Helmer’s eyesight started deteriorating all of a sudden. Visits to an ophthalmologist indicated nothing out of the ordinary so he went to the hospital where a CAT scan showed he had a tumour deeply lodged in his brain in such a location that it would be impossible to remove it surgically. At the same time he had given up farming 40 hectares of wheat and sugar beets, because he had a knee problem. He believes that it is the pesticides used in agriculture that have poisoned him, mainly the quicksilver and blockages in the flow of energy in his body, caused by back injuries, that have given him cancer. Helmer believes we are genetically prone to fall ill with certain diseases, but also additionally it depends on how we have behaved during previous lives.

Lack of trust

Helmer’s trust in conventional medicine started crumbling early on in his career as a patient. His decision to refuse to have a biopsy done was, he says,

affected by divine intervention. The drilling machine that was to drill a hole in his skull stopped working and the biopsy intervention had to be re-scheduled. Helmer interprets this as a sign from God, that he needed to take control over his illness and find an alternative path to cure and salvation. He was prescribed cortisone to keep the swelling, caused by the tumour, under control. At the same time he started using complementary medicine and therapies like taking large doses of vitamins, anti-oxidants and using magnet and lymphatic treatment. You can minimise risks and you can reverse the contamination that has already taken place in your body by purifying yourself with the help of therapeutic mechanisms and substances. Another woman from Koppars who has had cancer told him about these methods. An additional factor that influenced him was the reaction of the doctor, who just saw what was in the x-rays, rather than look at him, the person who was ill. He suffered serious side-effects from the cortisone treatment, but continued taking the medication for the sake of his family (parents and partner) and eventually he ended up in a psychotic state and was admitted to the mental hospital in a city nearby. The psychopharmacological medication he was given blunted his feelings and “made me into a robot”. He started reducing his cortisone intake gradually and also eventually stopped taking the other drugs. Subsequent CAT scans showed that his tumour had shrunk and he was ordered to stop taking the cortisone, which he had discontinued using on his own accord already. Helmer is upset that the health care personnel did not listen to him when during an earlier visit he asked them to compare his two CAT scans. After his experience of being, he feels, a victim of the biomedical system Helmer started learning about his own body and about various complementary forms of therapeutic care and healing. Of his time within the conventional medical system Helmer says that:

”Today I know that you should never let go of what is yours. You are the one who is responsible for your own health.”

(Helmer, July 2003)

Before his illness he says he was gullible and believed what the authorities said. He trusted their ability to control the hazardous effects of substances used in agriculture. Helmer says:

“My faith in our authorities was one hundred percent. I believed and was gullible as long as I was a farmer. I believed in them if a new product came on the market, a pesticide. Take for example round-up or any other one. I have believed that it is our authorities that oversee these things, but it has nothing to do with this, but that the producers of the product order an evaluation from a certified company. They know the results in advance.”

(Helmer, July 2003)

His illness made him question authorities, the system, the things that we ingest. The lack of trust in his own body, in biomedicine and in society at large made him embark on a journey of self-learning. By learning about therapeutic regimes and applying them to his body he has gained trust in his body and in its ability to heal itself. All the products of modernity seem to be untrustworthy, but since we need to use them and they facilitate the dissemination of information about alternative therapies, we first have to purify them to make them safe.

Purification and Control

Helmer believes that the reason why he got cancer was that the channels in his body were clogged and did not allow for the free flow of his bodily fluids. The places where this jamming, the amassment of contamination inside the body takes place is where the cancer may develop and he talks about “working the bad out of the body”. The body itself is potentially clean, a clean slate before different forms of pollution enter it. Everything that comes directly from nature is clean like ecologically produced food. The forms of pollution that Helmer refers to are man-made, representing the ill, the evil and badness inherent in man, which has been used as a weapon of power to control those who are weak and powerless. He lists all the sources of invisible pollution in the environment; electrosmog, electrical fields, radiation from radars, radioactive radiation, radiation from computers and the internet, genetically manipulated food. He uses many of these products, but removes the radiation through the use of a magnet. He has sought to gain an ultra-holistic understanding of what affects his individual body. It is not only the world here and now that is the source of disorder, but also worlds and time periods beyond those presently at hand. He talks of cosmic connections, previous lives, how outer space affects our bodies through electromagnetic fields.

In order to have total body control, control of body fluids and flows within the body he has made a detailed analysis of his own body. This includes total control of what enters and exits the body. He talks of urine, excrement and sweat, food and drink ingested into the body. Everything put into his body is filtered through therapeutic technology aimed to purify whatever enters his body. He is very attuned to his body and talks of body sensations that indicate that something is wrong. It can be that he is receiving incorrect information, contaminated food or ideas. Control is also about controlling the body by controlling knowledge of the body and therapeutic measures used to purify the body. This control of information is enacted through self-learning, reading everything about different therapeutic regimes and receiving instruction from experts in the field. He has also developed his own theories based on

experiences with his ailing body. The phenomenological aspect of knowledge generation is vital in Helmer's learning process. He stresses that:

“It is my own [theory]. I have never read it anywhere. I have experienced everything myself.”

(Helmer, July 2003)

He says that after he stopped taking the medication prescribed by the doctors, “all these wonderful things started happening”, meaning he started the process of healing himself when he no longer was obstructed by the medications. Purification is connected to information, feeding the right type of information into the body, clean, good information so, implicitly, it is about reading the body, its signs and symbols. The body becomes a symbolic map that guides its bearer into new worlds, new dimensions and a new consciousness.

Salvation

Helmer presents elaborate conspiracy theories that evil and money rules the world, corrupting the intentions and actions of people. The new regulations imposed by the EU are also connected to the power of big companies that force farmers to use fertilisers and pesticides.⁷⁹ These contaminating substances make farmers into slaves. He talks of different dimensions of consciousness and that the world will destroy itself because we have behaved badly and brought this destruction upon ourselves. There is, though, a possibility of salvation and hope in the form of people living in another dimension, like shamans, who know about a divide and rule process that has been going on for hundreds of years. It all boils down to belief and self-confidence:

“You should find yourself. You have all the answers within yourself. Everything is there. But you should be able to open these channels. [– –] Of course you should always believe in what you are doing. There is no chance that you will succeed with anything unless you yourself have a belief in yourself. You do need to have self-confidence. If you don't have it you have to get it from somewhere. I have acquired it through these books.”

(Helmer, July 2003)

It is a matter of cleansing yourself of your past, having a clean slate. He has also achieved salvation by freeing the flow of his bodily fluids that help him remain healthy. Helmer says there is a purpose with everything, with his illness.

⁷⁹ He mentions genetically modified food and the power of the multinational seed company Monsanto.

It indicated to him what his task in life was. What our tasks in life are differ depending on who we are and on what the soul is meant to learn. His mission has been known to him as a very young child, when he was still unspoiled by the influence of other people and still had a divine connection, that he should be a healer/doctor of some kind. His illness made him not only question his body, but also the world around him. It made him open his eyes to the true nature of the world. He calls it a homecoming:

“[Coming home to] where you have come from originally. We are all part of God. It is as if I was coming home. I have experienced it also....that I believe I will live for a thousand years.”

(Helmer, July 2003)

To Benita and Mary cancer brought clarity and closure to their life. They had both suffered traumatic experiences of abandonment due to the loss of close family members. They fell ill, suffered and were cured because they started listening to their bodies, heeding the warning signs of a protesting body. To Helmer cancer offered him the opportunity to embark on a quest for knowledge and to achieve mastery over this knowledge so he could control his illness and his body. His concern was, not only to heal himself, but to also make himself independent of society. Gaining independence in their sick role, through a gradual process of recovery, is described by all three cancer sufferers in my study as an awakening, a regaining of sight that enables you to see the true nature of things. In the narratives of struggling against cancer there is a rejection of contamination, both in the sense of contaminated environments, contaminated relationships and contaminating conventional treatment regimes. The illness trajectories are a call to regain control over life. What these accounts seem to illustrate is a struggle between the “it” of the body and the “it” of cancer. They battle out their positions in a fight to regain health for the suffering individual. What is important to the body’s success in winning this battle is knowledge based in pragmatic experience. Because these individuals learn to *know* their bodies, through experience of living with them, they enable the body to fight cancer.

ALTERNATIVE ARENAS OF CONTROL

During my fieldwork I noticed there were a number of ways in which people dealt with uncertainty through engaged action, and here I shall specifically focus on the case of amateur trotting-horse trainers. On closer inspection I realised that trotting training activities are a manner mainly for men to progress in life and to constitute identity in a time of uncertainty. All the risks

and challenges taken in the racing world are a microscopic representation of reality. I came most intimately in contact with this social activity almost daily during my field work. I followed, at close range, how Rainer tirelessly trained his trotter Loistotar. In itself his commitment illustrates the resilience of hope and its intimate connection to the maintenance of social relations.

Rainer has been a horseman since early childhood. After being forced to give up his dairy farm in 1997 he became a part-time day labourer and a horse trainer. He could now finally dedicate his time to training the one promising trotting horse he had in his stable and, I believe, this has been a vital anchoring point in a life otherwise characterised by uncertainty and financial difficulty. In a situation of growing uncertainty in working life trotting training provides structure in life and arranges one's daily routine around the training and rearing of horses. Farming is a structured activity with a strict order of regularity, especially if one has been involved in dairy farming like Rainer. When this structure disappeared, as Rainer quit dairy farming, the training of the horse took over the role of maintaining this regularity in everyday life. An added bonus is the possible rewards it will bring as added social esteem when Loistotar does well at a race and possible financial returns in the form of prize money.

Home bred and trained horses are different from horses owned and trained as a business investment because usually they spend their whole life in the same farmer's family and live in the same home, the family farm. As such they are a symbol of continuity. Being involved in the training of a trotter is particularly important in the current climate of agricultural production in Finland today. In the current framework of control regimes and regulations, which control the way farmers are to produce, it is all the more significant that some farmers use trotting activities as a coping mechanism and a means of fighting against an increasing sense of uncertainty in daily life. Trotting activities comprise a form of alternative control that provides farmers with the opportunity to demonstrate how practical knowledge of horse and the home as training grounds produces concrete results and sometimes victory. The life of the races, the associations of breeders and horse owners offers them an alternative social network, a moral world of their own where they can fulfil themselves by showing that hard work produces concrete results. Those who work and live with horses tend to view themselves as people apart, as "others" and explain that people who do not belong to this horse-people group cannot understand why they spend countless hours of their leisure time and large sums of money on getting a horse onto the racetrack. Horse-people stick together, and they form closely knit social networks through which they exchange equipment, feed, advice and breeding material in the form of sperm for insemination, through covering or by purchasing each others horses. To many farmers, who in the present day work alone and often refer to loneliness as being one of the heaviest aspects of their

work, attending the racetrack gets them away from home and gives them an opportunity to maintain and strengthen social bonds with other men. Trainers tie the success of their horses on the racetrack to the fact that they have been socialised into racing in one, continuous, familiar environment characterised by the best of constant care – the home. They have been trained in an environment thoroughly familiar to the trainer – the back roads surrounding the farm. There are specific rules and common techniques used, acquired through reading books and magazines, but the most important source of knowledge remains that passed down from one generation to the next, similar to the manner in which knowledge in farming is passed down (Ådahl 2007).

Training a trotting horse is an activity that is clearly directed towards the future. Training is like a chain of events where one race builds upon another and the promise of victory looms ahead as a motivational force to keep going. Victory itself is not the most important outcome, but pulling off the performance on the race track honourably. A good racehorse that runs a race with honour reflects the preferred values of rural Finnish society – endurance, loyalty, strength, and commitment. Thus, racing can be understood as a moral performance. One cannot deny the importance of money won in a race. Naturally it is a welcome financial incentive for the trainer, but what, more importantly, is temporarily at stake is status. Trotting racing thus acts as a dramatisation of status concerns. It is a means for trainers to portray themselves to themselves, a form of “sentimental education” that teaches people the values of their culture, much like cockfighting does on Bali (Geertz 1973).

The routine character of training regimes offers stability in a world where personal life experiences are in a state of flux through the substantial changes that have taken place in farming practices as a result of EU membership. A trainer creates stability, safety and regularity for the horse. Training, thus, becomes an arena of alternative control where one can, albeit partially, guide the outcomes of intentional acts. Also, the horse itself represents stability, permanence and continuity through the fact that it is “home grown”, concretely and symbolically representing a product of the home, reflecting positively on the home if it is successfully moulded into a good trotter. In this respect trotting training activities are a canvas that mediates between the household and the actual or imaginary social actors in one’s environment; relatives, friends, neighbours, community members and other horsemen. Training and racing offer a window through which to explore how social actors, through performance, engage with and confront uncertainty in life (Ådahl 2007). It promises hope for the future in a situation where the future of smallholder farming in Finland looks bleak. But it is not without risks. Taking risks, according to Rebecca Cassidy, is a way of life at the racetrack, and “every horserace is a microcosmic reproduction of all the risks taken by the various contributors to the sport”

(2002: 167). She does, though, stress that the perceptions of risk which people at the racetrack have, differ from the standard definitions of risk presented in recent studies (Beck 1992; Douglas 1992; Lash, Szerszynski & Wynne 1996) where risk is viewed as hazards and insecurities induced by modernity itself. Risk in the horseracing world is a way for individuals to exercise short-term control and can be understood as an idiom by which they progress in the context of their lives in racing (Cassidy 2002: 172–173). Through training and racing amateur trainers devise their own ways of making sense of the unexpected by being actors who engage contingency as a part of the totality of life.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Many producers complain about the binding nature of their work. They seldom have holidays or visit their relatives and friends. Although many of them find their work is senseless, due to the low economic compensation they receive for it and the regulations implemented to control the way they work, they stay put. As one of the ethnographic examples shows, farmers in the area of my field study do not actively protest against the appropriation and surveillance activities. They live with the constant risk of being inspected or having their land taken, but stay on the land. Jackson (2005) reminds us that when humans lack the channels to be agents, culture generates alternative ways through which we can have an engagement with the future. Engaging in farming in spite of the odds and involving oneself in leisure time activities is a manner of resisting uncertainty in everyday life and of contesting the idea that farming will gradually disappear from Finland. These activities also clearly display a belief in the future.

The maintenance of a good, wholesome life, achieving “wholeness” is linked to hope as an anchoring point. It is something that keeps people in place. The maintenance of permanency is not theorised or even discussed that much. It is just *done* through engaged practice and it is communicated among farmers through action. In this sense hope is intimately linked to agency and directing actions towards the future, a point Galina Lindquist takes up in relation to practices of healing and magic in contemporary Russia: “Hope is the existential aspect of agency, and people craft ways for themselves to secure hope even under the direst privations” (2006: 8). When people’s agency in society is hindered and societal hope disappears culture steps into the arena to ensure survival by generating alternative ways in which people can have an engagement with that to come (Ibid: 9).

So, what other therapeutic measures to counteract signs of social and family disharmony can be discerned in terms of social relations on an interpersonal and collective level? Uncertainty is dealt with through various forms of acting,

which consolidate a feeling of belonging and continuity. People engage themselves in local associations like village committees, sporting associations, activity days, voluntary work parties and village dances or “table parties” or engage themselves as amateur trainers of trotting horses. It is their manner of dealing with this sense of uncertainty. Organising events, doing voluntary work, repairing fences and houses, going hunting, training a horse to possibly win are the small victories of the everyday that keep hope alive. These activities build a circle of life, a safety net against isolation, marginalisation and a loss of hope and continuity. Hope gives people the courage to endure suffering. When individuals have had influence in building up their immediate surroundings they produce certainty. In a vertical sense it can be created by deeds that leave a lasting mark on the world like building the sporting association in Norrås, building or maintaining your home, clearing and improving your fields, raising a trotter who becomes a winner. Engaging in altruistic actions gives one a deep sense of individual satisfaction, fulfilment and security, giving meaning to one’s life and a sense of being part of a bigger scheme. Continuity, in a vertical sense is, naturally also created through having children to carry on a legacy, but in a situation of change horizontal continuity perhaps takes on a greater role in terms of a hope producing capacity.

Farmers create life and in this process they hold on to what is there in their immediate environment. They work this environment through leisure time activities that build community on both a concrete and sentimental level. Quotidian acts give meaning to life – it is intrinsic to being human, to be continuously engaged in giving meaning to life in the light of the situation at hand. Built into the notion of uncertainty is a looking for meaning, finding names and symbols for experiences, and also, above all building on a certainty of continuity.



Dancing to live music at a table party of the sporting association.

10. GOOD LIVES AND HIDDEN MISERIES

SOCIAL CHANGE

Current societal trends are characterised by the forces of rapid change. We are seeing a gradual dismantling of the welfare state, the privatisation and externalisation of public services and labour, resulting in strained family relations and an uncertainty and temporality in working life. Neoliberalist ideology has created a situation in society that demands that individuals adapt quickly and effortlessly to changes directed by the market of services and goods. These same forces want farmers to join the entrepreneurial trend and stretch their professional abilities to include new skills and to have an ever more diversified professional portfolio.

When talking to farmers on Koppars about the recent changes that have taken place in their lives the picture that emerged was one of loss, that they are losing many central facets of the farming life. Perhaps one of the greatest losses they are experiencing is that of their autonomy, the freedom to decide over life which seems to be equivalent to a loss of honour, and an honourable way of dealing with the dependence on structures beyond their control. It is also a potential loss of the home. There was complaint of other pressures in life such as work related stress, the fast pace of life and strained inter-personal relationships. Informants expressed worry over the ingestion of artificial foods and other harmful substances in the environment. Felt uncertainty in their lives is brought about by increasing social isolation, feelings of depression, anxiety, guilt and distress. A concrete sign of the structural changes that are taking place in society is the emptying of villages. This is an inevitable process of change that has been going on for a long time, beginning already in the 1950's, but it adds to a sense of marginalisation and a loss of control. A changing landscape causes anxiety, which links back to ancestral narratives of land clearing and the hard physical labour used in taming the landscape to make it cultivable by converting forestland into fields.

Farmers feel that the new bureaucratic procedures that have been imposed upon them - external, alien forces - tamper with the sensibility of life by

introducing contradictions because two systems of logic are in use. The European Union has substantially influenced the way farming is practiced, as well as the moral implications of the work carried out because new regulations have been put into practice and a different system of compensation is used. The introduction of on-farm inspections and with it the issue of doubt and distrust that is inherent in this practice is perhaps one of the hardest blows to farmers' pride. They feel that a bureaucratic entity has penetrated into the sanctity of the home, transgressing boundaries of intimacy. Many also equate the present subsidy system with social welfare, living off a system, losing your independence. This has resulted in a loss of motivation to produce, because the reward for being a good farmer, one that strives to maximise his or her yields, is gone. Because work and autonomy has such a central position in the hierarchy of values among the farmers of Koppars, and in Finnish society on the whole, being forced to work in a senseless manner does impact on the ordering of reality and the central values that guide one's actions.

What farmers are experiencing presently is a mismatch between individual expectations and factual outcomes in the social arena. The cultural routines that they have to handle change need to be re-ordered because at present they are faced with two logics that are at loggerheads with each other – that of the indigenous farmer's logic and that of the alien EU bureaucrat/system logic. They feel that decision makers and representatives of the EU cannot understand, nor recognise the significance of local level knowledge, based in the reality of farming in Finland as well as the geographically specific areas of the country that "*good farming practice*" is based on. The "rationalistic" logic of a large structure threatens to cover the logic of local level practice, which is a threat to culture as it is made and sustained in action between people on a local level. This loss of autonomy is characterised by ambiguity because it implies a process of being given away to the EU, a relinquishing of place and the old way of life. The change that is taking place not only means losing something of a past way of life, but also of something new taking its place. Living this kind of a contradictory life means being surrounded by uncertainty about many central tenets of life; identity, relationships, changing values and fragmented futures.

At the same time, there are a number of givens in terms of difficulties encountered in the profession of farming. These are age-old characteristics of the job like being dependent on the climatic conditions and being bound to the place of your work. Farming has always been characterised by a certain degree of risk and uncertainty calling for specific investment and insurance systems to protect the farm. A sense of worry over the wellbeing of the farm has, in many families, been a feature of every day life and many farmers today have been socialised into living with this worry as part of the profession. These are aspects of the work that are seen as a being part of the work, as challenges that make

it interesting. The need for expansion and investment within farming is part of a natural cycle that has repeated itself throughout the ages - there have been periods when it has been tough also before the European Union got involved in Finnish farming practices.

Uncertainty among a number of informants was expressed through narrative means in the use of metaphors found in talk on cancer interpretations. It is impossible to judge whether the perception of a high prevalence of cancer in the local area is a recent phenomenon or one that has emerged before 1995. Through the use of explanatory idioms individuals can seek to understand difficult conjunctures in life – it is a manner of knowing one’s present situation both as individuals and by connecting people through the process of talking about cancer, giving it collectively shared meanings. By talking about cancer individuals communicate that they belong to the same social group of those whose life is potentially threatened by cancer producing substances that saturate their living environment. Cancer in this way becomes part of a shared identity of those who experience that the social order may become disordered

Illness in the form of cancer manifests both bodily symptoms and an event that triggers an accusatory process – either one of blaming oneself by believing emotional tensions trigger the disease process in the body – or of it being guided by the forces of fate like genetics, environmental contamination, and the ingestion of polluted, unnatural foods (Saillant 1990; Balshem 1991; Gifford 1994; Weiss 1997; Karakidou 2006). The body in cancer can be explained in terms of the individual body experienced through the lived reality of cancer; as a representation of what is happening on an inter-personal level in society or as a body politic disciplined by surveillance and regulations of work (see Lock & Scheper-Hughes 1998; Turner 1984). The act of ingestion when linked to cancer perceptions is both life-giving and life-taking – wholesome food fortifies the body, but is also contaminated just like the cancer cells that eat their way through the body. Transposed onto the social body this notion indicates that through “cancer talk” informants deliver a moral message about the fragmentation of the good life, as well as the boundaries of the individual and social body.

The cancer disease process itself serves as an apt metaphor for the loss of control, the invasion of an “other”, an alien force. It is a collective narrative that is intimately linked to work and production of both material goods and social relations. The master metaphor that emerged of social change was a destructive one depicting a body in illness and death, rather than a creative body pregnant with new possibilities and life generating force (see also Kirmayer 1992 and 1993). Humans relate to the world through concealed processes that take place in the body. To make these workings visible they employ metaphors. The metaphors found in talk of cancer causes is saturated with meaning that is

revised through action in everyday contexts. Cancer talk contains both explicit meanings of cause such as contamination, genetic transmission and emotional distress or implicit meanings related to the love of home, work, and living a balanced life.

When metaphors are used as vehicles of thought they also have the capacity to, not only express, but also *make* experience (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Sontag 1978; Van der Geest & Whyte 1998). They allow informants to, not only tell what happens, but to impart how an event takes on meaning for them. Cancer metaphors can be viewed as a window on society, something through which we can look at society. They represent central values – such as autonomy, endurance and permanence – tied to place and belonging and, consequently political actions. When metaphors relate to action I believe it supports the centrality of agency in everyday life. Pragmatic, hands-on acting, agency is something farmers can relate to because they use it as a means to make sense of an increasingly fragmented and disordered reality. When farmers metaphorically talk about the *doings* of cancer they are, by analogy, talking about the *doings* of the external force that has penetrated into their lives, something alien. The meaning of cancer perceptions in the lives of farmers emerges in their understanding of practical action both in the real world of the everyday and in the symbolic world of cancer action in the body. In social life farmers get on with their business rather than passively submitting to the indeterminacy of their present conjuncture in life. It is by seeking a break in the habitual character of everyday life that they can deal with uncertainty. The harmful action of cancer and its transmission is located in the immediate living environment and in strained relationships between people. Farmers continue living in this environment and sustaining social bonds in spite of the inherent danger of losing that, which gives meaning to life. Progressing in life, working the land and consuming what it produces, thus becomes a form of mitigating action that reflects upon the metaphors that are used in talk about cancer.

I would propose that knowledge derived from practical action seems to be the key to agency that allows metaphoric expressions to have a bearing on events in the social world. Through experiences of thinking through metaphors informants give cancer subjectivity and in the process of letting the “it” of cancer represent experiences in the social world, i.e. anxiety over losing everything that gives meaning to their life – the family farm – they are making sense of hands-on reality and are engaging in inter-subjectivity. They create meaning in action based in knowledge of lived reality in both body – on a symbolic or metaphoric level – and society. In a condensed form these complaints and anxieties illustrate a loss of the good, wholesome and sensible life.

A GOOD, SENSIBLE LIFE

What then is a sensible life to farmers? It means that one has the capacity to be a good farmer, and that one follows the moral imperatives set by the enduring values and conventions of the farming life. One central value is to work hard in order to produce well. Farmers talk about the importance of hardening the body through physical labour and the fruits of one's labour as a moral obligation because it enables one to be independent and to ensure continuity. Carrying on a legacy - nurturing the ancestral home by working the land - becomes a source of stability. It is a type of certainty that is explicitly worked into the land and into the home itself. Working hard also contains the component of creativity and of taking on a challenge, because one has the possibility of annually renewing what one produces and the manner in which it is produced.

Work connects the body to the land and to the ingestion of wholesome food. This means eating pure, Finnish food to nurture the body so it will be strong and able to do hard manual labour, and living in a harmonious and unpolluted living environment close to nature. Good food is sturdy, substantial and produced close to the home. It is basic in the sense that it has not been tampered with through manufacturing and the use of chemical additives. The ambiguity of this food is that it contains what health professionals consider to be harmful animal fats, but many farmers, nonetheless, believe in its strength-giving qualities. A strong, balanced individual not only has a well-nurtured body, but also a stoic manner characterised by emotional constraint. Avoiding worry and having positive thoughts is thought central to maintaining a balance between body and mind. Balance in life is also about living in a harmonious and unpolluted living environment close to nature, and having an orderly home built on solid family values. One strives to keep the nuclear family intact and providing a safe and stable home environment for one's children. Actively maintaining social contacts, attending social events and being involved in leisure time activities was another central ingredient of a good life. Many informants felt that satisfaction in life comes from nurturing and valuing the simple, minimalist aspects of everyday life found in one's immediate environment.

Farmers in general are not known to easily deviate from a standard mould of social behaviour, nor known to resort to drastic, rapid changes in life - and on Koppars it is no different than elsewhere. With this I do not mean that they are unwilling to adapt to social change or incapable of doing it, but they are careful and contemplative because the things they value most - the home, the homestead and the family - are the very basis of everyday life solidly rooted in the soil of their ancestors. Because the parameters for deviance are narrower on Koppars than in a city it also means that keeping up the façade of the good life is important. One conceals signs of fragmentation, and one seldom discusses

personal problems with people outside of one's immediate nuclear family. Failing in farming means a failure of everything that gives life meaning. The good, sensible life, then, is about resisting failure and, thus, indicating hope regarding the future. One engages in good, meaningful suffering as a way of dealing with uncertainty by working hard in spite of the odds. This agency, which is located in suffering builds on present values and strengthens the inner cohesion of the social world one inhabits. One does not actually need to verbally express the parameters of the good life that this meaningful suffering brings forth because it is seen in the landscape as tidy, well groomed fields, forests, houses and gardens. In farming you sacrifice yourself to the land in a positive sense, in order to meet the challenges it poses to human knowledge, labour and endurance. The landscape can, equally, communicate the failure of the good life. Here, fragmenting suffering is concretely seen in the dilapidation of one's immediate living environment. It signals to your peers how fine the line between survival and failure is.

AGENTS AS CHANGE MAKERS

I would like to return to the issue of agency and its role in the making of meaning and sense. Humans as actors and players of the social game of life act intentionally because they are striving for some goal. They have the ability to understand the relationship between the goals and the means of the action and have the possibility to choose between more than one means of achieving their goals. Not only are acts intentional, but they are also habitual in nature (Giddens 1984; Weber 1922). When one has a clear goal with one's action, when one strives *towards* something one is an agent rather than simply just an actor. In some schools of sociological thought the social order (structure) both restricts agents and is a resource to them. For example Giddens (1984) finds that a form of mutual dependency exists between structures and agents; structures exist independently of individual agents, but are at the same time totally dependent on agents because agents repeat structures through social routines and in this way maintain structures.

My understanding of agency has largely been informed by Pierre Bourdieu's discussions on practice. His focus on practical action and how it produces the social order has been particularly useful in my own research. What I do find to be slightly problematic, though, is a certain kind of loop argument inherent in his view of the action that human subjects engage in. Actions, according to Bourdieu, are neither a product of the free will nor totally determined. He posits that agency circulates in the structures and dispositions that constitute the habitus and that they are not actually a property of the subject, but can be discerned in human subjectivity within the bounded structures of society and

self. The habitus is conditioned by sets of relations (fields) through the means of practice, and habitus, in turn, informs fields. Although actors strategise these are drawn from the internalised location of the habitus (Ortner 1996). This theory of practice is restrictive in the sense that one wonders how actors bring about change and where resistance is located and produced. Although Bourdieu talks about how the social order is produced through action, it is restrained by values and norms. How does the disruption and transformation of norms take place? Is the logic of action as automatic and predictable as Bourdieu seems to make it out to be?

Then again, one cannot deny that actions are constrained by the social order. Farmers on Koppars are to a large extent like farmers everywhere – they are conservative and prudent in terms of adapting radical changes in their lives. It is their *habitus* – inherited through family structures along with social class position – that binds them to certain manner of being. Acting in a habitual manner is sedimented into this *habitus* and it moulds one's actions to follow a rhythm dictated by the forces of nature, society and social relations. One could say that farmers, par excellence, aim to maintain the social order. To farmers work is a way to organise experience – it is about agency, the ability to act and give meaning to life. New regulations or required working methods hinder farmers from acting in a desired way and, thus interferes with meaning making. For farmers meaning making is located both in the quotidian actions that guide the way one works with the land, in how one maintains social relations and in the way one perceives of the implicit and explicit causes of cancer. Acting in a habitual way is, in my material, linked to an embodiment of knowledge related to locally meaningful categories of experience. This knowledge is found in both practice and in discourse. Farmers' knowledge is in part guided by norms and also ones set by specific family practice. But although some norms guide people's behaviour and there are tried and tested ways of running one's farm, it is mainly knowledge derived from direct action with the land, a corpus of local knowledge that enables individuals to strive for possible future outcomes in life. According to Fabian (1990:6) this is an expression of culture because most cultural knowledge is stored in actions, not in words. To most individuals large areas and aspects of the cultural domain are not tangible in the sense that they can draw on this resource in order to express it in discursive statements. This means there cannot actually be any coherent logical structure deciding what is meaningful in any particular culture, but we are instead to understand meaning as it emerges in practice.

Habitus, as manifested through a habitual way of acting, is ambiguous because it both interferes with one's ability to be flexible and it creates safety, at the same time. In the face of change one must find a point where this habitual way of acting can be disrupted so that one can adapt to changes and demands

that new circumstances pose. Here it is useful to turn to a notion of agency that focuses on the strategic actor, someone who tries to overcome constraint, solve problems and realise values by using one's social resources and experiences (Jackson 1996 & 2005; Whyte 1997). However, it is not enough to have the desire, intention and will to act – one must also have the capacity to do so. When one is faced with social change and is controlled by external forces and discourses beyond one's control it can impact on one's capacity to practice agency, as is seen in the case of farmers on Koppars.

When the new regulations were put into place many farmers were thrown into a state of apathy and their motivation to continue working was seriously hampered. Some gave up and decided to close up shop, but the majority retained this will and intent to go on in spite of the odds. Why? Because in the midst of constraints and the demands to mould oneself to the social order there are also minimal forms of resistance (Scott 1985), small agencies that people engage in to prevent them from falling into passivity and a sense of submission in the face of adversity (Honkasalo 2006 & 2007). It can be seen in small acts like writing “No EU” in bricks of contrasting colours on the roof of one's barn. Another type of resistance is being active in a producers' organisation, in municipal or party politics so as to somehow influence the outcome of political decisions that impact on one's life. Although regulations and directives dictate the way farming is conducted there are still individuals who do not follow the regulations to the word. They find loopholes and devise ways of circumventing these regulations. Many horse owners, for example, have never built a septic tank for the dung pile although environmental regulations require it. Farmers who find rare flower or animal species, such as flying squirrels in their forest will not necessarily report it to the Natura 2000 network, because they resist the fact that their land will be taken.

One of the most obvious forms of resistance is related to the “cancer talk” that people engage in. It is used as a political commentary of the state of affairs, of people's fear of something foreign controlling their lives. It is a form of blaming society for making their living environment dangerous to dwell in and their food contaminated, and yet they keep on living in this environment. Former cancer patients display an even stronger resistance to the power of technology and institutions, more precisely those represented by biomedicine. They concretely reclaimed their bodies from the control of medical institutions by becoming familiar with their bodies and alternative means of being healed, of gaining certainty about the continuation of their lives. People create a sense of security and certainty through social support and employing sociality as an essence of endurance and hope – they are active in a variety of social activities on a local level and engage in hobbies that provide them with a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Also, when channels of action are obstructed

“culture generates alternative ways in which people can maintain their engagement with tomorrow” (Lindquist 2006: 9).

DEALING WITH SUFFERING

In my material I use the concept of suffering as an analytical framework with which to give meaning to lived experiences. Suffering comes about when independent acting is hindered and the idea of the maintenance of permanency and continuation on the farm is threatened. I see it both *a consequence of* and *an answer* to social change. For farmers it is natural to think that the importance of producing food makes their suffering meaningful, valuable and honourable. This positive, *meaningful suffering* produces wholesome food that feeds the nation and maintains our independence in terms of food security. When external forces or agents control one's life it brings about uncertainty and something I call *fragmenting suffering*. It challenges the moral stakes of the farming world by forcing farmers to work in a manner that is morally unacceptable to them, and, thus imposing forced change upon them. It interferes with their capacity to act in a desired way. These two forms of suffering are both caused by change and, in turn, cause change; it prompts farmers to act in order to sustain and change the social order. This shows that people have a need to reconstitute a proper sense of cultural identity and social purpose when they are faced with unsettling life events. Although the future is uncertain people know how to act in the present - images of a good future still push them forward.

And, indeed, why see uncertainty caused by social change as a hindering aspect of human experience, instead of an enabling one? There is a reason why people continue doing things, working, producing on the land, maintaining sociality and community although a lot of it goes against all economic logic. For farmers it is not only a matter of being engaged in practical action, but that the action has a quality of “meaningfulness” to it. I am concerned with phenomenologically grounded intentionality, which cannot be reduced to planning, strategising and acting, but to the issue of how knowledge is acquired in a situated, contextual sense (Giard 1998). It is based on a pragmatic stance towards knowledge. Consciousness, acting with purpose and intention is rooted in the lifeworld and allows individuals to progress in life. Farmers employ a *knowing-by-doing* born out of the experience of living and working with the land. They use this pragmatically based knowledge to maintain the process of acquiring knowledge about specific local environments that make it possible to farm the land to the best of their ability, according to good farming practice.

In an uncertain world actors need to take to diverse ways of acting in order to come to grips with the indeterminacy characterising life. We cannot escape

the fact that circumstance acts upon us, it offers itself to us prompting us to bring the new into being because, as Jackson (2005: xii) so aptly states about human wellbeing that; “It involves endless experimentation in how the given world can be lived *decisively*, on one’s own terms.” (Emphasis in original) Acting is a way of creating hope, although the outcomes of these actions are unknown. Lived experience, as I employ it in my research, is also about an acceptance of the perilous and precarious character of the world, which is, equally, a recognition of the ambiguity characterising experience (Jackson 1996). It is through working and being active in associations and other social activities that farmers can fulfil the central values of the farming life, those of continuity regardless of how economically unprofitable it has become to engage in farming especially for small holders. Farmers make the ambiguity of their lived realities understandable by referring to these core values that spring from the local context. This acting takes place both on an individual level, acting as individuals, but also acting together through the fact of being part of a group of farmers that resist the demands to give up on farming and the ensuing fragmentation of the community and the social order. Repeating the mundane actions of the quotidian life course like sowing, harvesting and maintaining the productivity of the land is a source of creativity which provides new promise and a new sense of community in times of distress – it fortifies the social body on the immediate, local level. Additionally, engaging in other forms of social and community action through voluntary groups and voluntary work efforts builds this constructive and active agency that I give precedence to in my analysis. Special events and social gatherings are a collective affirmation of social relationships in a manner that enriches everyday life. They offer a break in the routine and allow people to come together and show themselves as belonging to a specific group, creating order through the use of specific symbols.

A pragmatic stance to life is a valued feature in Finnish society. People just get on with matters without making a fuss. When it comes to people’s manner of dealing with adversity it is just lived through, endured like so many other matters in life. The fact that life is hard is an expected and accepted aspect of life in Finnish society. If one just works there is no time to reflect on what you have lost or are about to lose. More importantly, I would claim that acceptance of adverse conjunctures in life does not imply a passive “living with it”, but an active doing, a shifting through of options or just simply getting on with work and doing what one always has done. There is after all a legacy to fulfil and a social environment of peers that expects one to respond to difficulty by just getting on with work. They actually have no other choice than to act, because the alternative – not being able to do anything – is worse. The human capacity to endure difficulty is amazing and in it hides the key to survival.

EAST-WEST DIFFERENCES IN FINLAND

Is life better in the west than in the east of the country and do cultural differences impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals living in different parts of the country? Did the inhabitants of Koppars find that the research results presented by medical doctors Markku Hyyppä & Juhani Mäki (Hyyppä and Mäki 1997; Hyyppä & Mäki 2000; Hyyppä 1990; Hyyppä 1995) could be applied to their lives? None of the informants expressed outright that they felt they were healthier and lived longer than the North Karelians. Some did however speculate on what could make life healthier in the coastal areas of the country like eating fish, living according to the rhythms of maritime life, which required you to be patient, flexible and innovative; and that perhaps singing at table parties and social gatherings did make you happier. At the same time local health professionals expressed a concern over the unhealthy habits of some Koppars inhabitants, that social isolation drove many lonely people to abuse alcohol and that mental health problems such as depression was an issue that cropped up in their work.

Many locals did, however, recognise that Koppars was a special place with beautiful landscapes, old historical roots and a grounded sense of local identity. They were proud of the island and felt they were privileged to live there. The permanency that still characterises life among farmers on Koppars - compared to the fragility of life that has already for a long time characterised life in North Karelian villages - is of course something that impacts positively on one's mental health and provides a vital sense of belonging and community. Among farmers there was at the same time a fear over impending marginalisation of their professional group, which could result in further emptying of villages and increased loneliness.

Although informants may not explicitly recognise that living in a specific geographic location, shaped by specific historical happenings does impact on their well-being it is a feature to reckon with when seeking to understand the relationship between illness, health and place. Social science research conducted on Finland may often refer to the impact of culture, but much too seldom is it elaborated upon or analysed in relation to location and locality specific historical happenings. It requires a process of deep contextualisation like the inclusion of folklore data – a method concretely employed by Marja-Liisa Honkasalo in her research in North Karelia (see Honkasalo 2007). Recognising the existence of cultural difference within Finland and focusing on it through empirical research in situated contexts and specific locales is essential to our understanding of the multiplicity of lived experience and, by extension, the multiplicity of the experience of suffering. By taking up this issue within the research project particularly in relation to the east and west of Finland it has,

hopefully, shed light on the need to localise the concept of culture and how it can enrich our perspective on illness experiences.

In a globalised world differences are narrowing and so also in Finland, but the most significant contemporary global factor for Finnish populations dependent on farming is the EU. Following membership in the European Union differences between east and west in Finland have to some extent evened out. Farmers all over the country are facing a common uncertain future regardless of where in the country they live and the common “enemy” or representation of the foreign is the EU. Although the material basis of life is different in the east than in the west this research indicates that in spite of greater affluence in the west of Finland individuals in both locations employ small or minimal agency as a means of dealing with uncertainty in life. It points to how the issue of loss and its impact on human action is more than just an issue of economic resources, but, rather, and more importantly, a much deeper issue of a loss of identity, of a place in the world.

ENGAGEMENT AT HOME

Is it ever really possible to understand the meaning of values and perceptions of our informants or is the anthropologist always reduced to the role of speculative interpreter? Susan DiGiacomo (1992) cautions anthropologists to take on the role of a *besserwisser* speaking for the mute others. DiGiacomo (Ibid) suggests that a critical perspective in medical anthropology ought to rest on the fact that we number ourselves among the sufferers to enable us to combine analysis and ethics in our endeavours as anthropologists (see also Rosaldo 1989). We cannot be anything else than emotionally involved in the issues that our research springs from and I believe that from an emotional commitment should follow a political commitment. Understanding otherness is about positioning ourselves into a world of contradictions, ambiguities and the “consequences of the fragmentation of our *own* (emphasis in original) experience as ethnographers as well as the fragmented condition of our contemporary world” (DiGiacomo 1992: 132). Like Zulaika I believe that; “a successful ethnography must itself become a distancing device pointing out the “otherness” of what people experience, the ethnographer included, within the boundaries of their own cultural constructions” (1988: 350). The relativity of experience is based on the fact that we can imagine “the other”, because we always discover something of ourselves and our culture in the “other”. In this sense the “other” and I are one and the same. When faced with distressful life events it is the “otherness” of the events that throw our bearings off course and not necessarily the fact that those we experience it with are “others”. These experiences provide us with shared meanings and also shared courses of action to deal with the situation. Through

my empirical material I hope to have been speaking *with* my informants, rather than speaking *for* them.

So, at the end of this journey it is appropriate to ponder the applicability of the term suffering in the light of the empirical material presented in this thesis. It has been useful in bringing to light a social reality and the effects of social change in a small rural locale. I find it has proven its worth as a tool or a framework for making sense out of lived experience provided that we take on the challenge of using it within the social sciences, of making it visible through the use of ethnographic examples. The two-sided nature of suffering, both as something that fragments and destroys and as something that is positively meaningful - as an *enabling* factor in support of agency (Wilkinson 2005), prompting people to act - is what makes it so vital to bring into political discourse. Through my empirical material I have hoped to focus precisely on the fact that there can also be something called *good* suffering, which creates positive meaning and creative action. I believe that the central role of agency in the lived experience of human subjects emerges precisely because it is set against the backdrop of suffering, of the idea that those things which are at stake in one's life are threatened. It is also vital in a socio-political sense to point to the multiplicity characterising the experience of suffering by applying it to everyday contexts within the parameters of ordinary lives. By observing life in the context of a small rural village, talking to villagers about their lives in both formal and informal settings and partaking in the quotidian work of village life I have hoped to grasp the essence of lives adapting to change and uncertainty. My quest for making their voices heard has to do with my concern of bringing to light this ordinary, "small" suffering, the struggle for recognition, for a place in the world. This is something we all can relate to because we share the same quest in our adventurous journey in the sometimes contradictory and ambiguous landscapes of human experience.



Hunters having a coffee break before the moose hunt.

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