Juha Siltala, Ph. D. in 1985, has focused on psychohistory, defined as application of psychological theories and findings in history and the development of an up-to-date psycho-social synthesis on the basis of this ongoing process. His starting point during the 1980s was the psychoanalytic tradition, but since then he has enlarged his intellectual framework with situational social psychology, attachment studies, behavioural economics, evolutionary psychology and occupational health research.

Siltala’s dissertation on the right-wing movement and its political violence in Finland in 1930 ended with a treatise on the symbolic unity as a guarantee for survival, and this paved the way for a closer study of the individuation-dependence conflict in the loose trilogy of the nodal points of collective handling of private anxieties in Finland. Contrary to expectations, this trilogy says nothing of Finnish mentality as compared with other national characters but analyses with Finnish sources some central questions of modernizing societies and individualization, prevalent in the history Europe and the USA.

The monograph on the religious awakenings in the first half of the 19th century (1992) dealt with the vague dissolution anxieties of individuals under economic changes and collective regression as a progressive way toward a more complex psychological integration and freedom to choose. The theme of regression in the service of the ego and projective identification as a benign means of leaning on ideals was elaborated in the study of the private side of nationalists and reformers during the latter half of the 19th century (1999), all of whom resorted to their idealized nation as a mother-figure, conferring meaning and direction on their strivings. They were able to reconcile their individual social rise with the service of their people, thus creating a compromise between egoism and altruism. Their subjective world was shattered, as political tensions, group egoisms and class cleavages tore the beloved unity apart during the years of russification. The dissolution of the protecting cocoon culminated in the Civil War in 1917-1918.

Psychohistory of the Civil War concentrates on how the Reds and Whites created each others as dehumanized enemies in a half year in a process of suspicion, collective projections and identification with these. Situational factors such as closing time windows and keeping unity at the cost of individual second thoughts are included, as well as the fears of the leaders about losing their grip on the masses. The “irrational” explanations of the war itself and the ensuing terror is reconsidered from the point of view of the psychology of economic expectancies and the prevailing fear to lose; heuristic biases are pondered case by case. The book ends in re-internalization of hostile projections after war in order to restore a common frame and identity.

Objective economic factors, such as wages vis à vis prices, unfair change, unemployment, are present in this study. Even closer they have been dealt with the short history of the deterioration of working life in the countries where employees had attained a decent mastery of their life circumstances during the years of regulated national economies and welfare systems after the World War II. This treatise was a secondary synthesis of existing research in economic history and of working life surveys, both international and Finnish, illustrated with interviews with some employees.
The trend of deterioration was defined by the exchange rate of work, the bargaining power of the employees and the balance between efforts and rewards, considered to be central in occupational health and stress research. When the goal is set by the benchmark of the most productive in the world and yesterday’s records build only a self-evident baseline for further demands, the employees’ sense of control becomes threatened. I suggested – according to the established hypothesis by Fredrick Herzberg – that even though employees could love the content of their work (which they were able to control), they were pushed out of working life due to the intolerable comparison and organisational changes beyond their control, all of which endangered their achieved advantages, their recognized position as equal subjects, their professional autonomy, and the psychological contract of the limits between work and leisure.

This book, updated and enlarged 2007, seems still to have an impact on the field of discussion concerning working life in Finland, at least as a convenient straw-man.

A third longer line of research can be discerned from the pioneering book of gender studies from male point of view (1994). This book analysed self-biographies of common men and materials of media and popular culture, searching for the normative ideals of manhood in relation to winners and loser in the labour market. A growing discontent with the equation of success and right to exist could be seen in various biographies, whereas an established discourse in the media an in youth culture continued the tradition of stigmatizing occasional losers as ontologically different filth, needed only to boost the winners’ ego a favourable target of comparison.

The changes of family under working life and youth culture as reservoir of coping tools has been treated again in some articles (2008, 2010) in Germany and in between also in the context of the change of normative psychological theories/ideals and the problem of individuation in history (1996, 1999, 2001, 2004). A book is coming on the youth culture as a coping mechanism and the emergence of peer-group support and empathy among youth.

Major works:


Major articles:

Lapuan liikkeen joukkokannatus. Historiallinen aikakauskirja 82(1/1984): 16-33 (Social basis of the Lapua movement)


