



CHAPTER 12

Nocturnal Nation: Violence and the Nation in Dreams during and after World War II

Ville Kivimäki

INTRODUCTION

My knowledge of everyday life has the quality of an instrument that cuts a path through a forest and, as it does so, projects a narrow cone of light on what lies just ahead and immediately around; on all sides of the path there continues to be darkness. This image pertains even more, of course, to the multiple realities in which everyday life is continually transcended. This latter statement can be paraphrased, poetically if not exhaustively, by saying that the reality of everyday life is overcast by the penumbras of our dreams.¹

With this elegant phrasing, sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) defined their idea of our everyday life and the socially constructed knowledge of how this life is made sensible. In studying past

¹Peter L. Berger & Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 45.

V. Kivimäki (✉)
Tampere University, Tampere, Finland
e-mail: ville.kivimaki@tuni.fi

© The Author(s) 2021

V. Kivimäki et al. (eds.), *Lived Nation as the History of Experiences and Emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*, Palgrave Studies in the History of Experience,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-69882-9_12

297

experiences, historians have usually been interested in that “narrow cone of light,” which represents the various ways of observing and making sense of the world. It is in the nature of historical scholarship—and the sources we use as our instruments of knowledge—to focus on the historically changing meanings and the processes of understanding when in a wide-awake state of everyday life; it has been less inviting to stumble into the darkness of the surrounding forest. The most serious attempt to study that darkness has been made in the area of psychohistory, which has used a Freudian theory framework to interpret the unconscious through concepts like wish-fulfillment, projection, fantasy, and transference.² The results have sometimes been original and innovative, but also highly controversial. Sigmund Freud seems to have had such a strong and continuous influence on the analysis of dreams that this may have warned historians—wary of the pitfalls of psychohistory—away from entering the field.

Consequently, in relation to the historical study of dreams, this chapter has two aims. First, I will show that “the penumbra of our dreams” is a worthy subject to consider, in its own right, but also in order to understand many aspects of the wide-awake experiences and behavior of people who have experienced massive violence. Instead of clearly separating day from night, the chapter tries to move in the territory of dawns and dusks, where dreams and awake states blur into each other. Second, in so doing, I think it is useful to point out that dreams can also be studied without the burden of Freudian theory. As I will demonstrate, there are other ways of looking at dreams than as a search for unconscious wishes and latent symbolism, as interesting as those interpretations may be.

Furthermore, the third aim of the chapter is not limited to dreams as such but is linked to the broader theme of the book, the study of nations as lived-through experiences. I am studying the dreams related to the experiences of World War II undergone by the Finnish “war generation,” that is, those Finns who experienced the war in their early adulthood or late adolescence.³ Although the major part of my research material focuses on soldiers and war veterans, I am also relating these experiences to those

² Psychohistory has nowadays become a marginal field, rarely discussed inside the historical scholarship. For an early but still relevant summary on the problems and opportunities of applying psychoanalytical theories in history, see Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Zum Verhältnis von Geschichtswissenschaft und Psychoanalyse,” in *Geschichte und Psychoanalyse*, ed. by Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1974), 7–26.

³ For general overviews on Finland in World War II in English, see Olli Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War: Between Germany and Russia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002);

of civilians. I am interested in the different contents of the dreams and in how the dreams changed. Most importantly, I see dreams as a way of studying the intertwined experiences of the nation and violence within the context of war and its aftermath.⁴ How did the nationally framed war experience manifest itself in dreams? What are the “national” meanings in war dreams and what does this tell us about the experience of a nation at war? Is it possible to recognize a specific dream culture shaped and created by war?

Although the questions above concern large issues of war, nation, and culture, I am approaching them from the perspective of individual soldiers and civilians and their war-related dream experiences. In nationalism studies, social anthropologist Anthony P. Cohen has used the concept of personal nationalism to analyze how modern-day Scottish people use the nation to express themselves and to formulate their personal identity.⁵ I have studied a similar kind of phenomenon regarding Finnish soldiers’ patriotic frontline poetry during World War II where the soldiers could be considered “artisans of nationalism” when they used the nation to give meaning to their war experiences.⁶ In regard to the focus on the personal, one can find parallels in the works above to this chapter; yet the direction of influence is mostly different. Instead of seeing the chapter’s dreaming subjects as active agents of nationalism, I will rather show how the nation invaded their nightlife by violent force and without invitation.

Tiina Kinnunen & Ville Kivimäki, eds, *Finland in World War II: History, Memory, Interpretations* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

⁴For recent reconceptualizations of war and the nation in terms of violence, see especially Louise Edwards, Nigel Penn & Jay Winter, eds, *The Cambridge World History of Violence*, Vol. IV: *1800 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); also Ville Kivimäki, “Violence and Trauma: Experiencing the Two World Wars,” in *The Routledge Companion to Cultural History in the Western World*, ed. by Alessandro Arcangeli, Jörg Rogge & Hannu Salmi (London: Routledge, 2020a).

⁵Anthony P. Cohen, “Personal Nationalism: A Scottish View of Some Rites, Rights, and Wrongs,” *American Ethnologist* 23:4 (1996), 802–15; for further development of the concept, see Raúl Moreno-Almendral, “Reconstructing the history of nationalist cognition and everyday nationhood from personal accounts,” *Nations and Nationalism* 24:3 (2018), 648–68.

⁶Ville Kivimäki, “Feeling the Fatherland: Finnish Soldiers’ Lyrical Attachments to the Nation during the Second World War,” in *Emotions and Everyday Nationalism in Modern European History*, ed. by Maarten Van Ginderachter, Andreas Stynen & Xosé M. Núñez Seixas (London: Routledge, 2020b).

HISTORY OF DREAMS AND DREAM SOURCES

My approach to historicizing dreams has been influenced by the work of three scholars. Circumventing the Freudian paradigm, historian Peter Burke has called for a cultural history of dreams, which takes as its starting point that “in a given culture people tend to dream particular kind of dreams.” The culture shapes dreams in at least two ways: the dream symbols have particular cultural meanings and there are typical stresses, fears, and conflicts that a person living in a given culture or society has to face and which then influence the dream world.⁷ We can thus speak of historically changing dream cultures, where the recurrent anxieties are processed through culturally specific symbols and meanings at night.

Discussing an extraordinary collection of dreams gathered by journalist Charlotte Beradt in the Third Reich during 1933–1939, historian Reinhart Koselleck has offered the important notion that these dreams are not only testimonies of terror, but a crucial part of that terror themselves. Hitler’s totalitarian regime occupied the private nightlife of its subjects, haunting the dreams with grotesque real-life events as well as phantasms of persecution.⁸ From this we can conclude that there are not only specific dream cultures, but that the dreams prominent in a given historical situation may actually have a considerable influence on people’s everyday life and the culture at large. This is especially the case when a large segment or the entire population has gone through a period of war, political terror, or some other collective catastrophe.

Literary scholar Irina Paperno has studied similar kinds of dreams to those collected by Beradt: Soviet dreams during the Stalinist era. According to Paperno, dreams provide a way of looking at a person’s existential situation and emotional concerns: what one knows and feels without being fully aware of it. Dreams commonly focus on fears and expectations toward one’s future, and thus they provide material well-suited for studying the experience of political terror, which forces a person to anticipate persecution and ever-tightening control over private matters. Dreams also emphasize the continuity of stress and fear long after the actual violence has

⁷ Peter Burke, “The Cultural History of Dreams,” in idem, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 24–5, 27.

⁸ Reinhart Koselleck, “Terror und Traum: Methodologische Anmerkungen zu Zeiterfahrungen im Dritten Reich,” in idem, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 292–3. Cf. Charlotte Beradt, *Das Dritte Reich des Traums* (München: Nymphenburger, 1966).

ended: nightmares related to the Great Terror did not end with Stalin's death in 1953, but went on for the decades thereafter.⁹ Even though war experiences as such do not equate to living under repressive totalitarianism, the immediate threat of violence, the lack of personal freedom, and uncertainty about the future *do* characterize both experiences. It seems fruitful to study war experiences from the same angle as Paperno has adopted with respect to the dreams of Stalinism: how people dealt with the most stressful and existentially threatening circumstances and how the nocturnal memory of this experience has kept a hold on people.

Taken together, Burke, Koselleck, and Paperno's remarks encourage a historical study of dreams in a dynamic relationship between the individual experience, the surrounding culture, and the varying dream contents. I will explore this triangle through two corpuses of sources. The first of them are the collections of the Finnish Literature Society Archives (FLSA), which is the most important folklore, reminiscence, and oral history archive in Finland. One specific collection stands out here: the Dream Inquiry (Unikysely) organized by folklorist Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj in 1989. As is common with the FLSA's materials, the collection is based on a public appeal or call distributed through newspapers and FLSA's respondent networks. The collection contains written firsthand dream accounts from 104 respondents: altogether 342 pages of information. The call was not issued specifically for war-related dreams. In the first sentence of the call, Kaivola-Bregenhøj asked people to tell "how they interpret" their dreams, and this primary interest was then followed up with questions regarding the personal meaning of dreams, whether the respondent shares his or her dreams with others, and further itemizations of these questions.¹⁰ But as the call was made at the end of the 1980s, it received numerous war-related responses—at that time, the Finnish war generation was still actively present in public life, and the late-1980s and the 1990s were generally the era of a memory boom regarding World War II.¹¹

⁹ Irina Paperno, "Dreams of Terror: Dreams from Stalinist Russia as a Historical Source," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7:4 (2006), 794–7, 823–4.

¹⁰ Finnish Literature Society Archives (FLSA), Unikysely/Dream Inquiry 1989.

¹¹ Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj, *Kerrotut ja tulkitut unet: Kulttuurinen näkökulma uniin* (Helsinki: SKS, 2010), 178–9; in English, see Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj, "Dreams of the Second World War," in *Dreams, Phantasms and Memories*, ed. by Wojciech Owczarski & Zofia Ziemann (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2015), 179–89. For the memory boom, see, e.g., Ville Kivimäki, "Between Defeat and Victory: Finnish Memory Culture of the Second World War," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 37:4 (2012), 482–504.

Furthermore, I have gathered war-related dream reminiscences from other collections of the FLSA. They do not form a systematic corpus, but they are useful in supplementing and bringing variation to other sources.¹²

My second corpus of sources is different in nature and contains only directly war-related dreams. In 1999–2000, the advisory committee on war veteran matters in Northern Finland organized a survey “From War to Peace” (“Sodasta rauhaan”), which aimed at collecting information and reminiscences concerning the war veterans’ experiences, challenges, and problems in their transition from military service to civilian life in and after 1944. The survey was distributed to those men and women who had served at the frontlines or in the war zone during World War II. The long form of 17 pages contains 123 questions. One of them (9.3.) had to do with dreams: “Did the war follow you in your dreams? What kind of war dreams did you see and for how long?” The space for answering the question was limited to a little over three lines on the form—and as part of such a long survey, the respondents were not inclined to use too much time on any one question. Yet the briefness of answers is compensated for by the size and range of the data: the survey gained 1058 responses in total, of which 882 were from men and 176 from women. Some of the women were answering on behalf of their veteran spouses, if the latter were in too frail a condition to do this on their own. Almost all the answers came from the Lapland and the Oulu Provinces in Northern Finland.¹³

SLEEPING IN WARTIME AND AFTERWARD

Before turning our attention to the substance of war-related dreams, it is good to say something about the sleeping conditions as a background for dream contents. Wartime and its aftermath affected also the ways people slept and how sleep was perceived and controlled.

I am grateful to Professor Emerita Kaivola-Bregenhøj for her kind and helpful comments on this chapter.

¹²Originally, FLSA started purely as a folklore archive, collecting and preserving the national heritage of Finnish folk poetry. From early on, dreams have had an important place in such mythological materials and their study. Consequently, the FLSA’s classification system has its own index code for dreams, which (if the materials are properly indexed) allows for spotting dream contents throughout the different collections.

¹³National Archives of Finland in Oulu (NAF Oulu), “From War to Peace” Survey 1999–2000. I am grateful to Soja Ukkola for first pointing this material to me more than ten years ago.

In an insightful article on this topic, historian Alan Derickson has studied the changing attitudes toward sleep in the US Army and on the American home front during World War II. From 1941 onward, as the United States entered the conflict, continuous sleep loss, prolonged wakefulness, and a chemical struggle against sleep became dominant features of military service. Unlike in earlier wars, where combat was usually paused for the dark hours, much more of the fighting now took place at night—on the ground, in the air, and on the sea. Consequently, falling asleep meant danger and sacrificing the initiative to the enemy; soldiers' fear of being caught unguarded became the main incentive to stay awake. The Army used conventional methods to fight sleep (coffee and caffeine tablets) and new methods were also applied (amphetamines). In the war industry at home, the coffee break was introduced during the war, and the first coffee machines appeared in 1946. On a cultural level, the ability to cope with sleep deprivation became a new feature of “tough-guy” masculinity, which has turned out to have had a lasting imprint on American manliness. War promoted sleeplessness; “sleep was something to be postponed, minimized, or otherwise avoided at all costs.”¹⁴

While there is no similar study available as to the influence of World War II on Finnish sleeping habits and attitudes, Derickson's findings correlate very closely with the information we do have. During the short but very intensive Winter War of 1939–1940, Finnish troops specialized in night fighting in order to raid their Soviet enemy and to compensate for their lack of manpower. On the other hand, Red Army artillery and patrols tried to harass the Finns during the night in order to deprive the defenders of any proper rest. In the last stages of the conflict, in February–March 1940, many of the Finnish frontline troops had not had a chance to sleep for weeks in a row, which resulted in utter exhaustion and nearly catatonic states. Soldiers might fall asleep in the middle of combat and in freezing temperatures.¹⁵

During the Continuation War of 1941–1944, sleep deprivation took more chronic forms. The conditions of the trench warfare lasting from the end of 1941 till the summer of 1944 were relatively stable, yet the

¹⁴ Alan Derickson, “‘No Such Thing as a Night’s Sleep’: The Embattled Sleep of American Fighting Men from World War II to the Present,” *Journal of Social History* 47:1 (2013), 1–26 (cit. p. 14).

¹⁵ Lasse Laaksonen, *Todellisuus ja harhat: Kannaksen taistelut ja suomalaisten joukkojen tila talvisodan lopussa 1940* (Helsinki: Yliopistopaino, 1999).

frontline soldiers had to become accustomed to poor sleeping conditions. Nightlife in crowded shelters was disturbed by lice, noise, sentry duties, alarms, and sporadic fighting. A good night's sleep was usually possible only during rest periods behind the lines and on home leaves. Furthermore, prolonged stress and potentially traumatic war experiences often had a deteriorating influence on the quality of sleep. In my doctoral dissertation, I studied a large sample of Finnish soldiers who ended up in military psychiatric care in between 1941 and 1944. Different kinds of sleep disorders were the most common symptom among the patients, so that over 60 percent of the soldiers had them recorded in their patient files. Subsequent to violent experiences, constant nightmares and a lack of sleep wore the men down to the point of complete mental breakdown (Fig. 12.1).¹⁶

At least some Finnish troops were supplied with Pervitin, a German brand of methamphetamine designed for military use.¹⁷ A more common source of physiological dependency was coffee, which was in short supply, so there were various attempts to find different surrogates in order to produce the same stimulating effect. The coffee shortage was such a key wartime experience that the coming of the first postwar coffee shipment from Brazil to Finland in February 1946 has been considered one of the milestones in returning the country to a normal peacetime mode. It is difficult to say whether the lack of sleep became such a culturally idealized feature of Finnish masculinity during the war as Derickson has argued for the American case; yet it is clear that bad sleep and sleeplessness were hallmarks of war experience also in Finland. This was not limited to frontline soldiers: at home, the workload of women, especially those with children, minimized the time for proper rest, even if conditions would have otherwise allowed this.¹⁸

The problems in nightlife acquired new features in the immediate post-war years. The Army's demobilization, the resettlement of over 400,000 Karelian evacuees, and the destruction of Lapland in 1944–1945 created

¹⁶The actual figure is probably even considerably higher, as the patient files were often filled in haste and with little attention. Ville Kivimäki, *Battled Nerves: Finnish Soldiers' War Experience, Trauma, and Military Psychiatry, 1941–44* (PhD thesis: Åbo Akademi University, 2013), 278.

¹⁷Mikko Ylikangas, *Univettä, kuolonleipää, spiidiä: Huumeet Suomessa 1800–1950* (Jyväskylä: Atena, 2009).

¹⁸Kirsi-Maria Hytönen, *Ei elämäni lomaa mahtunut: Naisten muistelukerrontaa palkkatyöstä talvi- ja jatkosotien ja jälleerakennuksen aikana* (Joensuu: Suomen kansantietouden tutkijain seura, 2014).



Fig. 12.1 An exhausted Finnish soldier during the summer battles of 1944. (Photo: T. Nousiainen, SA Photo 153773)

a dire housing shortage. In cities, the lack of apartments forced people to live in cramped, loud, and inferior quarters. For the parents of small children, war invalids suffering from pains, or night-shift workers, the sleeping conditions could be nerve-wracking.¹⁹ In the countryside, the physical

¹⁹ Antti Malinen, *Perheet abtaalla: Asuntopula ja siihen sopeutuminen toisen maailmansodan jälkeisessä Helsingissä 1944–1948* (Helsinki: Väestöliitto, 2014), 79, 116, 206, 215, 227–8. For similar findings, see also Laura McEnaney, “Nightmares on Elm Street: Demobilizing in Chicago, 1945–1953,” *Journal of American History* 92:4 (2006), 1265–91.

circumstances of sleeping were usually somewhat better, but hardly ideal: typical farmhouses were small, families big, and for the evacuees and other resettlers it could take years to acquire permanent lodging. One more thing added to the nightly disturbances: the yelling and rolling of those restless sleepers, who were constantly thrown back into the war in nightmares. A husband, father, or brother screaming at night became one of the most common nocturnal memories for their relatives in the postwar era. For the veterans themselves, the expectation of recurring nightmares could lead to a vicious cycle of sleeplessness, anxiety, and depression.²⁰

NATION ENTERS THE DREAMS

On the night before 30 November 1939, Helmi P., a woman in her mid-thirties, had a dream where she was walking on a road together with other women from neighboring houses. They were picking beautiful flowers as they went, and when Helmi P. turned back she saw that there were still several flowers left behind, but that they were all black roses. The next morning the Winter War started and soon there were fallen soldiers, also from Helmi P.'s home village. Women began to be anxious about the survival of their close ones, and so Helmi P. comforted her neighbors with her dream: because none of the women had picked up the black roses, it was felt that their relatives would not die in the war. This turned out to be true, in the end.²¹

In similar reminiscences, the anticipation and then the outbreak of war became visible in dreams. Typically, the growing fear of a Soviet invasion in the autumn of 1939 manifested itself at night in the form of dark, ominous clouds gathering on the eastern horizon or as airplanes and other flying objects storming in from the east.²² In dreams, the threat toward the Finnish nation and state was experienced in deeply personal terms: the foreign aggression was aimed at one's home and relatives. In October 1939, when the Finnish Army had started its mobilization but the war had not yet started, 28-year-old Kerttu H. had a dream of airplanes swarming in from the east. One of them crashed in the yard of her home and killed

²⁰ Irmeli Hännikäinen, *Sota ihmisessä – totta, tarua ja unta: Posttraumaattisen stressihäiriön taustaa ja kuvaa sodan veteraanin mielenmaisemassa* (Helsinki: Sotainvalidien Veljesliitto, 2015), 234–5, 238–50; Kaivola-Bregenhøj (2010), 44, 78, 107–8, 125.

²¹ FLSA, Dream 1989, Signum 245; see also Kaivola-Bregenhøj (2015), 184.

²² See, e.g., FLSA, Dream 1989, Signum 45; 119; cf. also Signum 216 (on the summer of 1944).

her husband. Trusting her dream, Kerttu H. was certain that her spouse would not return alive from the war—and on the last day of the Winter War she learned that he had died together with 14 fellow soldiers when their shelter was destroyed.²³

The war seems to have nationalized people's dreamworld to a great degree: besides the everyday fears and expectations that occupied one's nights, the fate of the whole country in its struggle became a serious concern in dreams. Moreover, one's personal existence was now tightly bound to the collective survival of the Finnish nation. For the soldiers at the front, this was a direct physical threat, and many of their dreams focused on this question, providing answers to it from different angles. Two months before the Winter War, soldier-to-be Matti N. had been asleep and was suddenly woken by a stranger who said that there "will be fighting on Independence Day" (6 December)—and then disappeared. Matti found himself at the front in early December, and as he was not quite sure whether the stranger had said "fighting" (*tapellaan*) or "killing" (*tapetaan*), he welcomed Independence Day with anxiety.²⁴ Another soldier saw a dream of his dead mother making the bed for two. The person asked if he could lay beside his mother who declined and said that the place was reserved for the younger brother. The next day the brother got seriously wounded and died within a couple of weeks.²⁵

Such ominous dreams connected with one's personal survival or wounding are very common in the soldiers' reminiscences. The front represented a borderline between life and death, marked by the arbitrariness of violence; and under these conditions it was natural that the soldiers searched for any signs that could bring some order into the chaos. In interpreting such signs, a person became an active individual agent and not merely a passive victim of war. Frontline fatalism helped soldiers cope psychologically by easing the anxiety of being responsible for one's own survival.²⁶

Finland remained unoccupied during World War II, and almost all the fighting was restricted to the frontlines. Thus, as the Finnish home front

²³ FLSA, Dream 1989, Signum 40.

²⁴ FLSA, Korsuperinne Collection 1973, Vol. 6, Matti N., p. 3.

²⁵ FLSA, Dream 1989, Signum 309.

²⁶ Alex Watson, "Self-deception and Survival: Mental Coping Strategies on the Western Front, 1914–18," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41:2 (2006), 251–3, 257–61; for similar observations in Finnish soldiers' letters, Sonja Hagelstam, "I stridens hetta: Krigets fasor i brev från fronten," *Budkavlen* 90 (2011), 37–8.

was mostly safe from direct violence, the dreams here centered on the fate of loved ones and of relatives at the front, as well as on the possible duration or cessation of the conflict. These dreams could have strong symbolic content that borrowed motifs from folklore, religion, and mythology. Helmi P., who had had the earlier dream of black roses, had another nightly vision of several boats departing from the lakeshore by the church. Resembling coffins, one of the boats came ashore near the house from which Helmi P.'s cousins had been sent to the front—and soon one of the cousins died.²⁷ A similar kind of boat theme was also present in other dreams—as a mythical symbol of death, travel, and crossing, the boat was well-suited to address the uncertainties and fluidities of the time.²⁸ On the home front, women seem to have been more inclined to see ominous dreams than men—or at least it has seemed to be more acceptable for women to express such beliefs.²⁹

In the above-mentioned dreams of both soldiers and civilians, the war entered sleeping minds. As Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj has written, war sensitized people to interpret their dreams as omens.³⁰ As testified by the dreams, the national war effort was closely linked to very subjective matters, such as the death or survival of oneself or one's relatives and the fate of one's homestead. The personal and the national became tightly interwoven. There were also dreams with explicitly national symbols. On the final days of the Winter War, a young female Karelian evacuee, Martta K., had a dream about soldiers from her home village, some of them already fallen, who raised a torn Finnish flag in a heavy storm. This could be seen as an omen predicting the coming peace: the country would be mutilated and territories lost but, thanks to the soldiers' sacrifices, independence would be preserved.³¹ In another version of the same theme, but this time during the Continuation War of 1941–1944, Mirjam L. witnessed how a red flag was first raised on a pole, followed by a Finnish flag at half-mast: peace had come but Finland had lost.³² Both in 1940 and in 1944, the

²⁷ FLSA, Dream 1989, Signum 246.

²⁸ E.g. FLSA, Dream 1989, Signum 79; 169; 215.

²⁹ Kaivola-Bregenhøj (2010), 132–6. For a rare dream by a soldier's father, see FLSA, Dream 1989, Signum 119.

³⁰ Kaivola-Bregenhøj (2015), 180–1.

³¹ FLSA, Dream 1989, Signum 136.

³² FLSA, Dream 1989, Signum 168; see also Tuomas Tepora, *Sinun puolesta elää ja kuolla: Suomen liput, nationalismi ja veriuhri 1917–1945* (Helsinki: WSOY, 2011), 319.

forthcoming end of hostilities and the new national borders were matters of ominous dreaming.³³

One more aspect points in the same direction as nationalized war dreams: the common appearance of political figures. In the threatening totalitarian dreams that were dreamt in Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union, dictators and their henchmen terrorized people at night.³⁴ In the Finnish version, the same persons were making foreign political decisions regarding Finland. Sometimes the sleeper had a say in the situation. A Finnish soldier dreamt of trying to negotiate with Stalin, who turned out to be quite a crook.³⁵ In the autumn of 1941, when Finland and Germany were co-belligerents, a young woman working in a tailor shop had a dream about having to iron pants for Hitler. Not knowing what might be Hitler's right fit, she decided to prepare three pairs of trousers in different sizes. Hitler came to fetch the trousers together with Eva Braun and a big German shepherd—and chose the third pair. The woman told her dream to a coworker, who swiftly interpreted its meaning: the war would last for three full years still, Hitler would lose and die in the end.³⁶ The same person Matti N., who had had the Independence Day dream in 1939, also dreamt of Roosevelt, Mussolini, Hitler, Churchill, Stalin, and the leader of the Finnish Army, Marshal Mannerheim, gathering around a map and contemplating future Finnish borders. Matti stepped in and pointed the right borderline to the other gentlemen, who then left the room in the same order as they would later die.³⁷ Another soldier saw Mannerheim entering a room some time before the outbreak of the Continuation War in 1941. “We’ll go again, boys,” Mannerheim said in a downcast mood. The sleeper helped Mannerheim to don his coat and leave the building. Soon a new war started.³⁸

World leaders toying with Finland's destiny is probably quite an accurate depiction of the manner in which many Finns experienced their country's foreign political situation.³⁹ Being a small state in a global conflict, most of the important military and diplomatic decisions were made

³³ E.g. FLSA, Dream 1989, Signum 29; 216; 302.

³⁴ Beradt (1966), passim; Paperno (2006), passim.

³⁵ NAF Oulu, From War to Peace, B:42 N:o 02038.

³⁶ FLSA, Dream 1989, Signum 117.

³⁷ FLSA, Korsuperinne Collection 1973, Vol. 6, Matti N., p. 3.

³⁸ FLSA, Dream 1989, Signum 153.

³⁹ For the public opinion reports on the Finnish home front, see Martti Favorin & Jouko Heinonen, eds, *Kotirintama 1941–1944* (Helsinki: Tammi, 1972).

outside of Finland. Yet the occasional interference of a “little Finn” in the political dream theater can also be interpreted as symptomatic of a Finnish war experience: unlike many other nations in Europe that fell under foreign occupation, Finland retained some control over its own fate. This limited but still existing agency can be recognized in the dreams above.

NIGHTMARE YEARS: RELIVING THE VIOLENCE

In his posthumous work *Conflict and Dream* (1923), British psychiatrist W. H. R. Rivers set out to oppose the dominant Freudian dream theory of the time. Having treated shell-shocked soldiers at the Craiglockhart Hospital during World War I, Rivers could not accept the idea that the best way to interpret dreams was to search for their hidden meanings in unconscious wishes. At least this was not the case with war dreams, which were, in contrast, characterized by their brutal and relentless repetition of the horrors the soldiers had directly witnessed. It felt absurd to see these dreams as symbolizing some repressed emotional conflicts in childhood; the only wish here was that the nightmares would finally come to an end.⁴⁰

As we now turn to the question of war-related nightmares in the “From War to Peace” survey, it is easy to come to the same conclusion as Rivers did 100 years earlier. Whereas the ominous and political dreams discussed above still allow for various degrees of symbolical interpretation, the vast majority of dreams recorded in the survey form of 1999–2000 were laconically straightforward. “For over ten years, almost every night,” a man responded to the survey question of whether he had had war-related dreams and for how long. “A group of thousand men is running towards me with their eyes and mouths wide open, but there’s no sound of shouting. This corresponds with the situation of my wounding.” In June 1944, the man had served at the site where the Red Army started its massive offensive against Finnish troops.⁴¹ Just as with this example, it is also noteworthy that soldiers’ war-related nightmares are often linked to a precise point in time: they are not vague semblances of earlier war experiences but direct encounters with a specific violent moment.⁴²

⁴⁰ W. H. R. Rivers, *Conflict and Dream* (London: Kegan Paul et al., 1923), esp. 65–8, 144, 160–4; see also Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2005), 125–8.

⁴¹ NAF Oulu, From War to Peace, A:14 N:o 02565.

⁴² Kaivola-Bregenhøj (2015), 182–3.

Most of the respondents to the survey in 1999–2000 naturally belonged to the youngest Finnish age cohorts that had been called to arms during World War II, having been born in the first half of the 1920s. For them, the devastating events in the summer of 1944 were the key war experience they carried with them into postwar civilian life. The dreams that reflect this experience are abundant in the collection and form its main stream. Central characteristics of the recorded dreams are physical and mental vulnerability, the experience of helplessness before violent powers outside of one's own control, and the graphic detail of this violence. Night after night in the immediate postwar years, the young veterans were about to be stabbed, assaulted, torn, mutilated, crushed, pierced, or taken captive. The same enemy tanks, artillery barrages, and dive bombers returned every night, as if following a timetable. "Yes, many years after the war I had dreams that the Russkies attacked our positions with their bayonets fixed and then I either ran out of ammunition or the weapon didn't work. I woke up just as the Russkie was about to stab me."⁴³ Usually the only personal action seemingly available in the dreams is trying to escape, which is then somehow hindered.⁴⁴

Indeed, a recurrent theme in the Finnish soldiers' nightmares is the sleepers' inability to act, or the malfunction of their weapons. "About ten years after the war I quite often had horror-dreams about war. Often, I woke up in a situation where I was fighting against an attack. When I shot at the attacking enemy, I could barely hear the gunshot and the bullet flew so slowly that I could have reached it by running. I woke up to that."⁴⁵ "Yes. The same dream has been repeated for 30 years. [...] The Russkie always attacks with a powerful Uraah-cry, my machine pistol never works, and an enormous panic strikes me. My wife wakes me up peacefully."⁴⁶ In dire combat situations, a soldier's life was dependent on the proper function of his weapon, and the fear of malfunction was thus a very concrete concern at the front. At the same time, this kind of dream connotes an experience of male vulnerability and impotence that has been recorded among war veterans in other countries as well, especially following a war-time defeat.⁴⁷

⁴³ NAF Oulu, From War to Peace, B:41 N:o 00520.

⁴⁴ For example, NAF Oulu, From War to Peace, B:40 N:o 01273 and B:23 N:o 00748.

⁴⁵ NAF Oulu, From War to Peace, A:16 N:o 03335.

⁴⁶ NAF Oulu, From War to Peace, B:41 N:o 00522.

⁴⁷ For Germany and Austria, see Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006);

In a study of Dutch war victims and their war-related nightmares over 40 years after the end of World War II, psychiatrist Bas Schreuder et alii showed that the combat veterans' dreams were often direct repetitions of their traumatic war experiences: "The reality content [of the dreams] seems to be so high that it is possible to speak of a re-enactment." Ex-soldiers' nightmares resembled nightly panic attacks and were closely linked with intrusive posttraumatic symptoms. In civilian war victims, however, such "replicative" dreams were less frequent, and the nightmares were more commonly about losing one's family members. Furthermore, civilians' war-related dreams were often better characterized as "posttraumatic anxiety dreams" rather than outright posttraumatic nightmares; they had a symbolic connection to traumatic experiences compared to the accurate replications experienced by the combat veterans.⁴⁸

Neither my sources nor my approach allow for such epidemiological results; yet even without any quantifiable data the reading of dream reminiscences both in the collections of the Finnish Literature Society and in the "From War to Peace" survey are well-compatible with the findings of Schreuder et alii. Some civilian dreams were also concerned with the threat of direct violence: usually in connection with an air raid or airplanes. It was more common, though, that the civilians' war dreams were concerned with the survival of loved ones at the front; as a result, they contained more symbolic, interpretative themes than the front soldiers' nightmares, which depicted violence in its naked form. As W. H. R. Rivers noted after World War I, the ability to symbolize and fantasize may be seen as a sign of healing in war dreams, as a way to distance oneself from disturbing memories and to transform them. The poverty of imagination in violent repetitive nightmares, in contrast, kept the sleepers captured by war.⁴⁹

Svenja Goltermann, *Die Gesellschaft der Überlebenden: Deutsche Kriegsheimkehrer und ihre Gewalterfahrungen im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (München: DVA, 2009); Ernst Hanisch, "Der Untergang des Kriegers: Männlichkeit und politische Kultur nach 1945 in Österreich," in *Männerkrieg und Frauenfrieden: Geschlechterdimensionen in kriegerischen Konflikten*, ed. by Elisabeth Anker, Silvia Arzt, Kirstin Eckstein & Julia Neissl (Wien: Promedia, 2003), 107–17.

⁴⁸ Bas J. N. Schreuder, Wim C. Kleijn & Harry G. M. Rooijmans, "Nocturnal Re-Experiencing More Than Forty Years After War Trauma," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 13:3 (2000), 453–63; Bas J. N. Schreuder, Marjan van Egmond, Wim C. Kleijn & Anouschka T. Visser, "Daily Reports of Posttraumatic Nightmares and Anxiety Dreams in Dutch War Victims," *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 12:6 (1998), 511–24 (cit. on the reality content p. 512); also Kaivola-Bregenhøj (2010), 91–3.

⁴⁹ Rivers (1923), 66–70.

TRANSITION DREAMS AND REGAINING AGENCY

Psychological studies on the prevalence of nightmares among the Finnish population from 1972 till 2007 have confirmed that the war generation was, indeed, a nightmare generation. The first comparative data available is from 1972. It shows that of those adult Finnish men at the time who had not served at the front during World War II, 2.9 percent experienced frequent nightmares. The same figure for men with frontline service was 7.0 percent and for war invalids, 10.9 percent. The women of the war generation also had more nightmares than other women. In a follow-up study covering the data from 1972 to 2007, the prevalence of frequent nightmares clearly decreased in Finland, as the proportion of war generation survivors among the general population became much smaller.⁵⁰ In a study concerning war-related themes in German dreams from 1956 till 2000, the frequency dropped, with the same obvious explanation regarding the decreasing number of people with war experiences in the population.⁵¹

Another reason for the diminishing frequencies of war-related dreams and nightmares is that the war generation itself had fewer of these dreams as time passed. In the "From War to Peace" survey, veterans were asked to recount for how long they had had war-related dreams. Some of the respondents said that the dreams had never stopped and for some they had started again in old age. Yet many, if not most, of the answers mention some approximate stretch of time after which the war-related dreams either disappeared or became much less frequent. These estimates vary from a couple of months after the war to several decades, but the most common answer sets the period at roughly ten years. Thus, in the mid-1950s the nightly agony was easing for many veterans.

Are there any traces in the dream content that might help to explain this change? As I showed earlier, veterans' war-related nightmares were a continuous repetition of violent experiences, with very little symbolic substance. Yet there is one common vein throughout the dreams that can be interpreted as a sign of transition: the war events started to take place in civilian surroundings, usually in and around the veteran's home. The sleepers had to dig trenches and defend them in their own yard; the enemy was approaching their home village; one's family was about to be caught

⁵⁰Nils Sandman et al., "Nightmares: Prevalence among the Finnish General Adult Population and War Veterans during 1972–2007," *SLEEP* 36:7 (2013), 1041–50.

⁵¹Michael Schredl & Edgar Piel, "War-Related Dream Themes in Germany from 1956 to 2000," *Political Psychology* 27:2 (2006), 299–307.

by the enemy; or the Soviet patrols were sneaking around the house.⁵² Some dreams depicted the outbreak of a new war that threatened the sleeper's family and homestead—and one dreamer living in Western Lapland had to fight against the Swedes, too.⁵³ “Strangely enough, usually the war events, the enemy are here right around my home. The sound of shells and explosions may be extremely realistic, just like the fear. But shooting does not succeed. When one should shoot, the bullets fall from the barrel of the gun uselessly onto the ground. There is no damage to myself or to the Russkies. This is the rule in war-related dreams,” a veteran reminisced in the FLSA Dream Inquiry.⁵⁴ For years, another person was continuously dragging an antitank gun at night in his civilian surroundings, to the frustration of his wife.⁵⁵

Civilians, too, had war dreams taking place around their homes, most importantly air raids triggered by the sound of an airplane or some other cause. Children could start to see war-related nightmares if they had eavesdropped and heard some war stories while awake or heard their father's cries at night. In their sleep, people feared a new war, having to leave their home once again, or being occupied by the Soviet Union and sent to Siberia in the near future.⁵⁶ In these ways, the past as well as the anticipated wars occupied the nights in Finnish homes for a long time after the hostilities had ended in 1944–1945.

On the other hand, the increasing civilian content in dreams tells us about the beginning of a postwar era. The theme of having to defend one's family home with insufficient or malfunctioning weapons is related to the earlier topic of male vulnerability: being caught unguarded in their civilian clothes and environment, ex-soldiers were thrown back into battle unprepared. After the long war years, which had required being on constant alert, leaving behind one's military identity was difficult and potentially dangerous, at least in nightmares. But as the dreams tell, this transition was nevertheless happening. Another way of saying the same thing is to note that the nightmares ended when one's life came to be full of new, civilian things: work, marriage, children, building a house, and so on.⁵⁷

⁵² For example, NAF Oulu, From War to Peace, B:20 N:o 00049, B:17 N:o 01077, B:20 N:o 00047, B:6 N:o 01168.

⁵³ For example, NAF Oulu, From War to Peace, B:62 N:o 03631 and A:9 N:o 03057.

⁵⁴ FLSA, Dream Inquiry 1989, Signum 190–1.

⁵⁵ FLSA, Dream Inquiry 1989, Signum 14.

⁵⁶ FLSA, Dream Inquiry 1989, Signum 46.

⁵⁷ Cf. Hännikäinen (2015), 249–50.

In a rare couple of reports at the Finnish Literature Society Archives, the dream itself becomes the site of relief from recurrent nightmares. On one occasion, this happened in the most aggressive way. War veteran Taito K. was having a dream where a man entered his home through a window. Taito first hit him with the blunt side of an axe, but the man kept coming. So, Taito decided to hit him with the blade and smashed in his head, which ended the dream. Taito had other dreams as well, where he was using different powerful weapons against the enemy. When doing so he could yell loudly and badly scare his wife.⁵⁸

These were a sort of empowering action dreams. A different kind of example comes from Paavo T., who had had continuous nightmares for ten years after the war, in which he was torn and killed by a bullet or a piece of shrapnel. “By the way it was remarkable that I was feeling horrible pains in my body and often I was sweating, and I had screamed while asleep.” Then Paavo had a dream which ended the nightmares for good. He was walking at night at his homestead and recognized that the men of his village were gathering in their old Civil Guard uniforms, carrying shot-guns. Paavo understood that the Civil Guards, which had been abolished after 1944, had taken up arms. The men tried to offer a weapon to Paavo, too, but he declined and said angrily: “You boys! It’s not the time for the Lapua laws anymore,” which referred to the radical right-wing Lapua movement of the early 1930s. As the men kept offering him the weapon, Paavo finally took it but decided that he would not be siding with these men but would join the Finnish Communist Party that had been legalized in the autumn of 1944. In actual fact, he never fulfilled this decision in real life.⁵⁹

Paavo T.’s dream can be interpreted as him being able to react to the burden of the past and resist the call to return to war. The reference to the Communist Party, as well as his rejection of the Civil Guards, also point toward his ability to adapt to the new postwar situation and to orientate toward the future. Not much can be generalized from a single dream, but for Paavo T. at least, the dream signified winning back his subjective agency and ended the nightmares that had terrorized him for years. In her analysis of Stalinist dreams, Irina Paperno noted that the dreams were both an indicator and an instrument, when the Soviet citizens were forced to adapt to the totalitarian realities by changing their own identity,

⁵⁸ FLSA, Dream Inquiry 1989, Signum 103.

⁵⁹ FLSA, Dream Inquiry 1989, Signum 312.

thoughts, and behavior.⁶⁰ We can see a reverse phenomenon in the Finnish transition and relief dreams above: as the distance from the war years grew, more freedom for the civilian identity and agency could emerge.

THE NATION AND THE CULTURE OF WAR DREAMS: CONCLUSIONS

The dreams that I have used as my source were all retrospectively remembered and recorded in writing. It is probable that their literary, diachronically constructed nature distinguished them to some degree from those immediate war dreams that were never written down and of which we have no evidence.⁶¹ Yet the dream contents' uniformity and abundance also speak for a common, war-related dream culture that affected the lives of hundreds of thousands of Finns who had witnessed the stress and violence of war, either at the front or on the home front. It seems reasonable to assume that the written dream reminiscences in the archives correspond, by and large, with the wider wartime and postwar dream culture; it is therefore also possible to use the dreams as a window into that verbally unprocessed and socially unshared dreamworld, which occupied people's minds at night. As historian Klaus Latzel has written, such visceral experiences may "vagabond" as raw material in individual and societal memory, without being properly integrated into our everyday reality.⁶²

If we think of the dreams in these broader terms, war-related nightmares can be seen as a mental canvas for the dawning Cold War period. The individual dreams' helplessness, vulnerability, and anxiety are depictive of the "little Finland" left at the mercy of the Soviet great power. Although there are considerable national differences in war and postwar experiences, this was hardly a uniquely Finnish phenomenon; if we could obtain the material to study European dreams in the 1940s and after, I am sure we would find a shared culture of nightmares. But unlike in Finland, in many other countries the nocturnal violence would not be limited to the frontlines and to wartime.⁶³ The history of war-related dreams also

⁶⁰ Paperno (2006), 823–4.

⁶¹ Cf. Kaivola-Bregenhøj (2015), 187–8.

⁶² Klaus Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten – nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis – Kriegserfahrung 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998), 370.

⁶³ Cf. e.g. Petri Karonen & Ville Kivimäki, "Suffering, Surviving and Coping: Experiences of Violence and Defeat in Post-war Europe," in *Continued Violence and Troublesome Pasts*:

points toward a history of war-related stress, which imprinted traces of violence, fear, and loss in people's bodies and minds, although we do not necessarily have any verbal accounts of these experiences. Epidemiological studies in medicine and psychology have shown that the Finnish war generation (and the more vulnerable subgroups within that generation) has suffered from various somatic ailments and mental health problems that have most likely been caused or accentuated by the experiences of major wartime stress.⁶⁴

Returning to Anthony P. Cohen's concept of personal nationalism introduced briefly at the beginning of this chapter, the study of Finnish war dreams underlines a reverse phenomenon. Instead of personalizing nationhood, I have shown how the war nationalized the most private and personal spheres of life. Here, the nation did not enter people's lives so much through the explicit ideology of nationalism, but as a collective context of war and postwar it created and shaped individual experiences in a very concrete way. For the men and women of the war generation, this happened at the formative age of early adulthood.

In the immediate postwar years, the war experiences as they manifested themselves in dreams were characterized by utter helplessness. This was especially true for those young frontline veterans who had experienced the chaotic circumstances of the summer of 1944. As I have shown, the worst nightmares started to ease roughly ten years after the war had ended. It is notable that around the same time in the mid-1950s, the first positive representations of Finnish soldiers and war experience began to appear in public. Frontline soldiers' war stories started to be published in the monthly magazine *Kansa taisteli* ("The People Fought")—a Finnish version of the German *Landserhefte*—and in the popular war-novel genre, pioneered by author Väinö Linna and his profoundly influential war novel *The Unknown Soldier* in 1954. In these publications we see the opposite of the dreams above: Finnish soldiers are skilled, active, and brave—and their weapons work with devastating effect. This contrast is interesting: maybe

Post-war Europe between the Victors after the Second World War, ed. by Ville Kivimäki & Petri Karonen (Helsinki: FLS, 2017), 7–26.

⁶⁴Tarja Kunnas et al., "Late-life coronary heart disease mortality of Finnish war veterans in the TAMRISK study, a 28-year follow-up," *BMC Public Health* 11:71 (2011); Craig A. Molgaard et al., "Depression Late After Combat: A Follow-Up of Finnish World War Two Veterans from the Seven Countries East-West Cohort," *Military Medicine* 156:5 (1991); Hanna Alastalo et al., "Cardiovascular health of Finnish war evacuees 60 years later," *Annals of Medicine* 41:1 (2009).

the action-style war stories were in such demand in order to get over the nocturnal memories of defeat and stagnating passivity? Maybe the forms of nationalism visible in the war's emerging memory culture were one way to give shared cultural and ideological meaning to those subjective experiences that had haunted people as raw and uncommunicated nightmares?⁶⁵ Borrowing Peter L. Berger's and Thomas Luckmann's metaphor at the beginning of this chapter, the Finnish memories of war, both private and public, would thus indeed be "overcast by the penumbras of our dreams."

⁶⁵For the Finnish memory culture of war and its nationalism, see Tiina Kinnunen & Markku Jokispilä, "Shifting Images of 'Our Wars': Finnish Memory Culture of World War II," in Kinnunen & Kivimäki (2012), 436–82; Kivimäki (2012).

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

