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National indifferences during everyday nationalism: Experiencing the nation in Finland in the aftermath of the Second World War

Ville Kivimäki | Sami Suodenjoki | Tanja Vahtikari

The Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in the History of Experiences (HEX), Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

Correspondence
Tanja Vahtikari
Email: tanja.vahtikari@tuni.fi

Funding information
The Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in the History of Experiences (HEX), Tampere University

Abstract

Our article discusses the adaptability of the concept of national indifference to the context of post-war Finnish society and everyday nationalism. This period witnessed a transformation of previously exclusive and aggressive nationalism into a tempered and relatively inclusive version. Within this historical context, national indifference became an entangled category that could not be clearly attributed to a specific group of people but which carried with it a gradual change in subjective attitudes and consciousness. The case of post-war Finland demonstrates that just as nationalism changed its shape over time, becoming subtly embedded in everyday life, so too did national indifference. The article thus argues that an increase in the level of national indifference could actually make space for national integration and, furthermore, that any given expressions of nationalism, as well as the lack of them, must be studied against the background of people's experiences, which lend historically conditioned meaning to national sentiment and indifference alike.

KEYWORDS
everyday nationalism, Finland, national indifference, nationhood/national identity, Scandinavia

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1 | INTRODUCTION: NATIONAL INDIFFERENCES IN THE MID-20TH CENTURY CONTEXT

The study of nationalism has been one of the main focuses of Finnish historiography concerning the late-19th and early-20th century. During this period, Finland experienced a powerful emergence of nationalist ideology, the birth of civic society and finally, political independence from Russia in December 1917 (e.g. Alapuro et al., 1987; Alapuro, 2018 [1988]; Jalava, 2005; Siltala, 1999). Historians have also analysed the content and the form of Finnish nationalism in the interwar era (e.g. Alapuro, 1973; Siironen, 2012; Siltala, 1985; Tepora, 2011) and during the Second World War (e.g. Kemppainen, 2006; Tilli, 2012), yet their interest in the nationalism perspective has been minor with regard to the immediate post-war period. This reflects the consequences of Finland's defeat in 1944. Once a driving force of national awakening, independence activism and state-building, nationalism has not been seen as a key concept in historical research explaining Finnish post-war politics and societal development, aspects which had to adjust to the country's new foreign political compulsions in relation to the Soviet Union.

Certainly, political geographers have studied the Finnish nation-state from 1945 to the present, particularly from the point of view of the formation of state space, regionality and the relationships between the state and citizenship (e.g. Häkli, 2008; Moisio, 2012; Paasi, 1996); still, we argue that the *historical transformation* of Finnish nationalism at the end of the Second World War has not been properly thematised. In what follows, we will strive to do this by showing how the application of a national indifference perspective can afford a better understanding of nationalism in post-1944 Finland. Firstly, based on earlier studies (e.g. Linkola, 2013; Linkola & Jokela, 2017; Malinen & Vahtikari, 2021; Paasi, 2016; Raento & Brunn, 2008), we already know that nationalism did not disappear but rather changed its form in the post-war period. Is it possible to conceptualise this transformation in terms of national indifference? Secondly, instead of analysing nationalism as an ideology, we will turn our attention to how the nation was experienced and how this experience could change historically. In recent scholarship concerning the history of experience, experiences are understood as cultural, social and societal phenomena, bound to power relations, institutions and systems of meaning, instead of being located only within individual minds. Following this tenet, nations may be perceived of as a series of encounters and negotiations between individuals, social groups and institutions and as processes of an entanglement that have not been borne out from clearly top-down or bottom-up transitions. When a nation is studied from this perspective of socially and culturally mediated experiences, national indifference also shows itself as a highly diverse, flexible and relational category (Kivimäki, Suodenjoki, & Vahtikari, 2021). We argue that instead of speaking about national indifference in the singular, we should pay attention to its complexity and transformative nature during the immediate post-war period.

National indifference, a concept pioneered by scholars such as Pieter Judson (2006) and Tara Zahra (2008), has continued to provoke discussion among historians of nationalism in recent years. Historians have used the concept mainly within the context of late-19th and early-20th century Central and Eastern Europe, but the term has also been introduced to other periods and regions, including Finland (e.g. Jalagin, 2021; Suodenjoki, 2022; Verschaffel, 2019; Whittington, 2019). Depending on the context, national indifference has been associated, for example, with borderland populations possessing a marked local identity but with little linkage to nationalist projects, people shaping hybrid forms of regional and national identities or inhabitants in ethnically mixed regions pendulating between different national identifications (Miller, 2019; Van Ginderachter & Fox, 2019; Zahra, 2010). According to Fox et al. (2019), the usefulness of the umbrella concept of national indifference relies on its ability to direct attention away from the 'purveyors of nationalism' to the agency of ordinary people and to probe the limits of their nationalisation. While agreeing with this, our emphasis on the history of experience directs our attention to interactions and negotiations and encounters between people and the state (and other) institutions.

In this article, we explore the changing forms of national indifference within the context of post-war Finland, where the school system, political parties, media, civic associations and other institutions had for decades already mediated the idea of the nation to the people. Here, national indifference was something other than complete ignorance of the nation as a category. We acknowledge that by applying the national indifference approach to a new

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temporal, geographical and societal context—to the analysis of a mid-20th century Nordic post-war society—we risk stretching an already strained concept even further (cf. Zahra, 2010: 104). However, as a point of departure, the concept provides a crucial service to the study of nationalism by drawing attention to situations where there is *less* of the nation than earlier or where nationalism takes milder forms (cf. Judson, 2018: 153; Miller, 2019: 65; Van Ginderachter & Fox, 2019: 7–8; Zahra, 2010: 118).

Our analysis covers the immediate period after the Second World War, from 1944 to 1945 up until the early 1950s. In other words, we focus on the early years of what has been labelled 'the post-war period' and the early phases of an era, starting from 1945 and ranging to the early-1990s, which Michael Billig (1995) has famously viewed as marked by banal nationalism in the established nation-states of the 'West'. Over the past two decades, Billig's argument concerning the wide distribution of national discourses as a sign of nationalism's all-embracing, banal nature has been enriched and developed by the growing amount of scholarship concerning everyday nationalism, which also focuses on the workings of the nation in people's mundane daily practices and situated activities. Unlike Billig, who saw the masses mainly as passive recipients of nationalist propaganda, the scholars of everyday nationalism have advocated a more complex view, pointing to the multiplicity of nationalist discourses and practices and to the active role that people take in the production and consumption of nationalist meanings (Fox, 2017; Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008; Jones & Merriman, 2009). In addition, Billig's division between banal and hot elements of nationalism has been criticised as being too simplified. According to Jones and Merriman (2009: 172), it is the category of the everyday that conveys 'the fluid inter-relationship between hot and banal nationalism since it explicitly transcends the distinction between the more mundane and the more extreme circumstances that affect individuals' lives.'

Our attempt to understand nations through the lens of the history of experiences shares a similar understanding with the scholarship on everyday nationalism regarding the importance of the everyday in shaping nationalism and the intertwined relationship between hot and banal nationalism. Following our tenet that it is important to consider the experiential basis of 'less nationalism' or 'cooled-down nationalism' in people's lives, our focus will be on lived aspects of nations and nationhood, their changing forms in the immediate post-war era and the lack of them. This is in line with the argument that national indifference must be spotted and interpreted 'by studying ordinary people in concrete socio-historical contexts' (Fox et al., 2019: 253–254). What this means in practice is that any given expressions of nationalism, as well as their absence, do not explain themselves as such but must be studied against the background of people's experiences, which lend historically conditioned meaning and a point of reference to national sentiment and indifference alike.

In addition, the aim of this article is to bring the two concepts of national indifference and everyday nationalism into conversation in the context of post-war Finland. Looking at nationalism as a complex and situational phenomenon means that it is misleading to view particular groups of people as either expressing national indifference or engaging in everyday nationalism. Instead, both could simultaneously co-exist, one being foregrounded to the other in particular situations (Van Ginderachter, 2018: 591). We argue that both everyday nationalism and national indifference have explanatory power when analysing nationalism in post-war Finland. In short, our aim is to understand national indifference as a gradual, periodical and multilayered scale in sentiments, instead of as a static binary category. This means that national indifference is not only limited to a developmental stage preceding nationalism or to a particularly indifferent group of people but can also gain ground among 'nationalised' populations. It is also important to note that individuals within a society can have flexible national orientations, so that they at one moment may be nationally engaged, while nationally indifferent at another. Furthermore, we will argue that an increase in the level of national indifference could actually make space for national integration—and subsequently for the pacified, moderated, seemingly inclusive versions of everyday nationalism.

Despite our intention to search for national indifference in the history of experiences, this is not a detailed empirical study of the phenomenon but an attempt to theorise and explain the apparent change in post-war Finnish nationalism in relation to the concept of national indifference. We will, therefore, employ examples from secondary literature to make our case, instead of delving into primary sources, since there is a rich research tradition on

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post-war social and cultural history in Finland to draw on. Many of the examples are excerpted from our own research on various aspects of Finnish nationalism, national belonging, citizenship, war experience, political movements and social participation.

We will start with a compact discussion on an intense period of Finnish nationalism, extending from the second half of the nineteenth century to the Second World War. This part outlines the virulent forms of national othering that marked Finnish nationalism preceding the post-war period, thereby providing a historical context and a point of comparison for our main analysis. The latter part of the article is then dedicated to the immediate post-war period and to the manifestations of national indifference and their relation to the changing context of everyday nationalism. We will conclude the article by returning to the theoretical questions of national indifference: How does the concept transfer to the mid-20th century post-war Nordic context? What possible consequences does this have for the study of national indifference?

2 | NATIONALISM AND NATIONAL OTHERS IN FINLAND BEFORE THE SECOND WORLD WAR

If generalised in very broad terms, the history of Finland from the mid-19th century till the Second World War can be called the era of emerging nationalism. Finland was a latecomer to this European development; as an autonomous Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire in 1809–1917, the country was spared the violent conflicts that sparked heated versions of martial nationalism and national antagonisms in many other regions. Therefore, Finnish nationalism started as a cultural project to distinguish 'the Finnish people' from the Swedes—and expanded as a legal project to construct and preserve a degree of state-like sovereignty in relation to the Russian empire. Only from the turn of the 20th century onwards did Finnish nationalists take a more active stand against Russia, some turning to a militant version of nationalism that aimed at political independence. The Finnish labour movement was active in this struggle, too, although its idea of the nation differed substantially from the nationalism of the centre and right-wing parties of the political spectrum (Haapala, 2014: 29–30). The clash between the national visions of socialists and bourgeois nationalists eventually led to a bitter power struggle in the revolutionary circumstances of 1917, and this struggle evolved into a bloody civil war between the Reds and the Whites in 1918.

The Civil War left the newly independent country deeply divided, and the outcome did not satisfy either the defeated Reds or the triumphant Whites. In the interwar years, the White experience was marked by a deep distrust of the working class. Moreover, the winners were divided into conciliatory centrists and right-wing activists, the latter of whom were ready to circumvent democratic principles to secure the nation from internal and external threats (Silvennoinen, 2015). The experience of the Reds was marked by defeat, humiliation and exclusion from the nation. In addition, the interwar years witnessed a division between social democrats and communists. The conflicting perspectives of these different groups manifested themselves as contesting popular-memory cultures of the Civil War, including long-standing disputes concerning the actual name of the war (Kinnunen, 2014).

Notwithstanding some rare appearances, neither Finnish nor Swedish equivalents of 'national indifference' (*kansallinen välinpitämättömyys* or *nationell likgiltighet*, respectively) were key contemporary concepts in Finnish political parlance. A term used far more frequently in Finnish right-wing and centrist newspapers was the adjective *epäkansallinen*, which translates as nonnational or even antinational. It also appeared in left-wing newspapers, which often used it ironically when blasting the nationalist campaigning against the left.[i] This had to do with a narrow political understanding of the nation and its outsiders. In the 1920s and 1930s, many on the winning White side of the Civil War understood Finnishness as an exclusive category and defined it against various national 'noncommunities' (Zahra, 2010: 105, 118). These included, in various degrees and constellations, communists, social democrats, moderate centrists, Swedish-speakers, Russians and other ethnic minorities, workers, pacifists and 'internationalists.' This framing of noncommunities in nationalist discourses of otherness was significant for shaping popular attitudes towards the nation in the interwar years.

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The most evident target of national othering were leftist workers. Finnish interwar nationalism was constructed in opposition to Russia and Bolshevism, and any references to the East had strongly negative and unpatriotic connotations. In these circumstances, the nationalists eagerly labelled communists and even the social democrats as 'Russkies' and viewed them as a threat to the existence of Finland as a nation. The suspicions concerning left-wing workers' loyalty to the nation had a self-fulfilling impact, as the police surveillance, detentions and restrictions on left-wing associational activity nourished negative attitudes towards the Finnish nation-state among the working class. As a result, some workers shunned the blue-cross flag of Finland as a symbol of the White winners of the Civil War, and some cherished the idea of the Soviet Union as the fatherland of workers (Saarela, 2008: 643–644, 650–651, 671–675). Using Soviet Russia as a positive point of reference became a way for some 'Red' working class Finns to build a counter-identity to the hegemonic White nationalism. Communist youth, for example, sang the song 'Free Russia' as their anthem in the 1920s and 1930s—which provoked the noncommunist press and caused demands to ban the whole piece (Tikka & Suodenjoki, 2021).

The language strife between Finnish and Swedish, which had marked nationalist mobilisation as early as the 19th century, was another component of interwar hot nationalism. The conflict even divided the White activists, some of whom rallied under the banner of 'true Finnishness' (*aitosuomalaisuus*) to make Finnish the only official language in Finland. This form of ethnonationalism strove to shut Swedish-language citizens outside of the nation. Correspondingly, some of the Finland–Swedes did not affiliate unreservedly with Finland and Finnishness as they supported the East Swedishness (*östsvenskhet*) movement, the radical forms of which involved racist and irredentist tones (Kaihovirta & Wickström, 2019). The notion of 'Swedish soil' and the urge to protect it by promoting smallholding also gained ground in the Swedish-speaking regions of Finland during this period (Markkola & Östman, 2021). These kinds of attitudes indicate that the framing of Finland–Swedes as a national noncommunity nourished suspicions about the current course of Finnish Finland among this population group.

As the 1930s evolved, Finland witnessed rapid economic growth, the weakening of right-wing and communist radicalism and an emerging Nordic orientation in social policy. The consolidation of democracy was illustrated by the formation of a broad-based coalition government that by 1937 included the social democrats. At the same time, global political tensions underlined the need for national unity. The aspiration of smoothing out earlier schisms manifested itself in the independence celebration of 1937, the bidecennial commemoration of the events of 1918, and in the commitment of the social democrats to advocate a strong national defence (Soikkanen, 1984: 242–243, 251–253, 301–302; Tepora, 2011: 180–191). While the antagonisms based on class and language did not disappear from the Finnish society, these processes of the late-1930s paved the way for nationalism and national identification that was less based on militant othering. Thus, the outbreak of the Winter War in November 1939 took place at a moment when the traumatic divisions of 1918 had begun to ease.

3 | WAR EXPERIENCE AND POST-WAR REACTIONS: TAKING DISTANCE FROM THE NATION

Nationalism was, of course, a central ideological and political driving force in Finnish society during the Second World War. First, the Winter War of 1939–1940, waged against Soviet aggression, gave birth to strong feelings of national unity that aimed to undo the divisive legacy of 1918, and second, the outbreak of the so-called Continuation War in June 1941, where Finland joined the Germans in their Operation Barbarossa, represented the heyday of an aggressive, expansive nationalism that sought to create Greater Finland and abolish 'the eastern threat' for good. For a short period, avenging the Winter War and the emergence of Finnish–German *Waffenbrüderschaft* did reinvigorate the radically Russophobic nationalism of previous decades and charged it with greater prominence than was justified by its actual political support among the population (e.g. Tilli, 2012). More sustainably, under the existential threat to the nation, the inclusive idea of societal consensus that had emerged already at the end of the 1930s and emphasised social and egalitarian dimensions of nationhood became a cornerstone of Finnish

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self-understanding, which would then carry over into the post-war era (Kettunen, 2018: 273–275, 283–285; Kivimäki & Tepora, 2012: 248–253).

In relation to earlier national noncommunities and the practices of othering, the war years represented a dual change. First, there was even less room for being an outsider than in the 1920s and 1930s: political and social deviations from the norms and aims of the war-waging nation could lead to harsh punishments and exclusions, even death sentences. In the wartime rhetoric, everything became national. But second, in addition to control and coercion of communists, pacifists, 'shirkers' and criminals, this accentuation of nationalism was accompanied by a softer invitation to participate in national unity, which downplayed earlier schisms, for example, between Finnish- and Swedish-speakers, political left and right or different social classes (e.g. Kemppainen, 2006; Kivimäki, Hytönen, et al., 2021; Tepora, 2011). Conceptualised in terms of national belonging, the consequences of being in the margins of the nation became more severe, while simultaneously there was a strong tendency to integrate earlier 'noncommunities' back into the nation proper.

The war years also witnessed a development in attitudes towards the nation that can be understood as an emergent resignment and leads to our discussion of the post-war era as an entanglement of national indifference and everyday nationalism. The war's prolongation in 1942–1944 had brought to the surface a loosening of morals and an increase in crime and political dissent. Consequently, the war propaganda took on a more demanding tone in relation to people's behaviour and attitudes; the primacy of the nation and national interests had to be obeyed by every citizen (Kivimäki & Tepora, 2012: 263–264). One can see here a parallel phenomenon to the one that has occupied the scholars of national indifference: The heightened propagation of the nation could actually signal a corrosion in the collective appeal of nationalism (cf. Van Ginderachter & Fox, 2019: 5).

More profoundly than in the form of outright dissent, the symptoms of national indifference began to manifest themselves as general war weariness. Such low-profile, suppressed indifference is more difficult to estimate than open opposition to national values and meanings; it can nevertheless be observed, for instance, by applying new digital humanities methods to 'ordinary people's' wartime correspondences. A recent quantitative analysis of digitised wartime letter collections has shown that the Finns eagerly resorted to patriotic narratives in their private letters during 1939–1940 and still in 1941, yet nationalistic rhetoric all but disappeared in the later war years and did not peak even during the desperate defensive battles of 1944. In short, nationalism exhausted itself as a social means of communicating one's subjective war experiences and of giving them meaning (Taskinen et al., 2022). Despite the continuing propagation of nationalism from above to boost the war effort, in their private lives, people began to distance themselves from the nation. The degrees of national indifference in this distancing varied from active rifts to less-conscious attitudes. Yet under the conditions of wartime public censorship, the true extent of this phenomenon remained, for the most part, hidden.

Nevertheless, the sentiments of dissent and indifference surfaced at the end of the war. In September 1944, after a dramatic summer of heavy fighting and the near-collapse of the country's defences, Finland accepted Soviet peace terms. This meant large territorial losses, heavy economic reparations and several political changes that allowed for the communists' public activity and forbade any 'anti-Soviet' or 'fascist' organisations and political parties, as the Soviets chose to define them. Furthermore, the Finns were expected to turn their weapons against their former 'brothers-in-arms' and drive out the remaining units of the German Army still positioned in Northern Finland. All these stipulations were closely monitored by the Soviet-led Allied Control Commission that remained in Finland until 1947 and had a strong say in Finnish decision-making and politics. After over a quarter of a century of ideological antagonism—and almost 5 years of open hostilities—the Finns had to adjust to a friendly and compliant rhetoric with regard to the Soviet Union (for an English overview, see Meinander, 2012).

Beyond these state-level changes, the long war years and the consequent defeat were a sobering experience for the Finnish population at large. The expectations for a short and victorious war in 1941 had failed, and, in their everyday lives, Finns had to face the hardships of serious economic scarcity, resettlement of 400,000 evacuees and a consequent housing shortage. The army's demobilisation in November 1944 returned half a million men to civil society, many of whom were bitter and exhausted after years spent in the trenches. In a counter-reaction to years of

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restraint and national pathos, the immediate post-war years were characterised by restless turmoil that manifested itself in high crime rates and alcohol-related disturbances. State representatives became the target of recalcitrance: Crimes of insubordination against police and other officials more than doubled from the pre-war era. The prestige of the army was at its lowest point, and army authorities were occasionally subjected to violent assaults in the streets. At the same time, the conflicts regarding economic interests resurfaced. During the war, workers' salaries had been tightly controlled as part of the planned economy and collective war effort. Now, the newly radicalised trade unions challenged the wartime ideology of national consensus and forcefully returned the class-based labour politics to the public arena. There was a powerful surge in union membership and in the number of strikes. (Kivimäki, 2015: 293–6.)

While these phenomena were not directly aimed against the nation as such but reflected a more general defiance towards strict wartime norms and authorities, feelings of national indifference were an important ingredient in the upheaval. In its most conscious political form, national indifference can be seen in the re-emergence of Finnish communism in 1944–1945, after 15 years of underground activity. The communist party was not only an import from Moscow but the movement also enjoyed wide popular support in Finland. In the first post-war elections in March 1945, the communist-led people's democrats received 23.5% of the vote, only narrowly outnumbered by the social democrats as the biggest party. Thus, in a shock to those who cherished the wartime ideals of national consensus, almost a quarter of the Finnish electorate voted for a political force that was affiliated with the former Soviet arch enemy and was the prime national noncommunity of the earlier interwar years. As we will note later, supporting the communists cannot be simply equated with national indifference on a one-to-one basis. Nevertheless, in the context of the immediate post-war situation, voting for the people's democrats (and joining the new Finnish–Soviet friendship associations) certainly demonstrated indifference and resentment to the pre-war and wartime forms of Finnish nationalism (cf. Holmila & Mikkonen, 2015).

Although it is easy to explain the disappearance of ‘hot nationalism’ from Finnish public discourse as a consequence of the new foreign political restraints, it is just as important to understand the experiential basis for this change, be it war weariness, saturation, disillusionment or outright rebellion. This was not only an explicitly political matter, but the politics of indifference were manifested more or less consciously in people's everyday choices, acts and experiences. As in similar cases of ‘cultures of defeat’ elsewhere (Schivelbusch, 2003), people wanted to distance themselves from the all-encompassing collective ethos of a nation at war. Instead of sacrifice and self-denial, individual desires and a zest for life returned to the public sphere.

A concrete example of this is the peculiar dance mania that swept through Finland after the end of the war. Before the war, religious national conservatives had viewed dancing as immoral and campaigned for a ban on dancing at public events. Influenced by these pre-war ideas, wartime Finland witnessed a nation-wide prohibition of dancing validated by claims that it was demoralising and societally dangerous to dance at the same time as soldiers were giving their lives at the front. Therefore, dancing was associated not only with immorality and promiscuity but also with national indifference or disregard for national interests. However, when the war ended, the removal of the restrictions on dancing led to a proliferation of dance events and the building of new open-air dance floors around the country. One notable event was the organisation of the so-called ‘peace dances’ by the left-wing and centre parties in the city centre of Helsinki, a day after the surrender of Nazi Germany on 9 May 1945. The event gathered tens of thousands of people to enjoy modern dance music at the railway square, which was temporarily decorated with the flags of the Allied powers. Some right-wing conservatives viewed the event as a moment of national humiliation, whereas others welcomed it as a sign of a new democratic society and of freedom (Tikka & Nevala, 2020: 214–216, 220–222).

Rebelling against and taking distance from the all-embracing nation is a phenomenon that can be recognised in different post-war contexts. The national indifference that it includes can be manifested both through active doing and in passive inaction (cf. Fox et al., 2019: 252–253). In the Finnish case, the former could be manifested, for instance, through joining the communists, defying the authorities or even in dancing, if this was indeed a conscious protest against wartime nationalism. Yet the example of dancing also points to the methodological problem of

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interpreting national indifference, especially in its passive form (cf. Zahra, 2010: 106). It is quite probable that many people simply enjoyed dancing without any 'antinational' considerations—and returned to their 'nationalist' attitudes afterwards without serious dissonance. Furthermore, whether in dancing or voting for communists, people's identities vis-á-vis the nation should not be seen as fixed or that a person was either a 'nationalist' or 'nationally indifferent.' There was fluidity and situationality in people's attitudes towards the nation, and in the context of a mid-20th century nation state, there was hardly any completely nonnational sphere of life to be found. In the following, we will therefore discuss the complicated entanglement of everyday nationalism and national indifference in the case of post-war Finland.

4 | RENEGOTIATING THE EVERYDAY NATION

In many if not most European countries, the end of the Second World War marked a radical break with pre-war and wartime nationalism. This violent rupture was caused by the experiences of foreign occupation, defeat, regime changes and consequent ideological and political upheavals (see esp. Konrád et al., 2022). While Finland shared many aspects of this break with pre-war nationalism, there was, nevertheless, an important difference to that found in many other post-war countries: Finland was never occupied, and the Finnish political system remained democratic and maintained strong continuity within the civil service and political leadership. This meant that in the Finnish case, despite the external pressure, the change in how the nation was understood was more gradual and endogenic than especially what occurred in the Soviet-dominated parts of Europe—and actually, many forms of nationalism could survive and evolve by taking on new shapes. In line with the countries of Western Europe, nationalism in Finland took banal forms and the nation permeated people's everyday lives and routines in many ways.

The case of Finland in the post-war period shows how even though there was less propagation of nationalism from the state and even though people distanced themselves from the all-embracing nation, there were also many people who actively engaged with the nation and reproduced it in their localised contexts and everyday lives. We argue that this lived nation, and the diversity and variation that it involved, also interacted with the new post-war sentiments of national indifference—and in this already nationalised context, national indifference was reinterpreted as well. In circumstances where the nation was everywhere but where the national fervour had cooled down, it was easier to be indifferent without being labelled as 'the national Other' or as a noncommunity. The simultaneous cooling down of nationalism, evolving everyday nationalism and emergent national indifference, can thus be seen as mutually entangled elements. Various symbols, events and institutions, and the way in which they were experienced and reappropriated for the post-war uses, provide one way to look at this phenomenon.

An obvious point of departure is the Finnish flag. As was noted earlier, in the 1920s and 1930s, the nation's flag could be perceived of as the exclusive symbol of 'White' Finland. Red flags could be torn down and workers' halls and political events could be forcefully flagged with the blue cross to banish 'unpatriotism' and to underline White hegemony. There were campaigns to count the frequency of Finnish flag flying on national holidays in order to reveal the true level of patriotism among local populations. During the war years, the blue-cross flag lost such divisive interpretations and was linked to the shared war effort and sacrifices within all social strata. And in the post-war era, as Tuomas Tepora (2011) has pointed out, it became a pacified, inclusive symbol for every Finn, a flag that flew harmoniously at the head of workers' 1st of May demonstrations and next to its former antipode, the Soviet flag, in official ceremonies. On one interesting occasion, the detectives of the Finnish State Police reported on people's readiness to fly the flag on the day of the Allied Victory in Europe, in May 1945. Between the lines, *a lack of* enthusiasm in this regard was recorded as a sign of true patriotism, whereas the waving blue cross could now symbolise indifference towards the earlier forms of wartime nationalism (Kivimäki, 2015: 312). This was a full reversal of the situation that had prevailed in the 1930s, and even as a single incident, it tells of an ongoing reinterpretation of national symbols.

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A similar reappropriation took place elsewhere. The Finnish leftist youth participated in Soviet-sponsored World Youth Festivals organised in eastern bloc countries in the early 1950s. Whereas the Finnish communist youth had sung 'Free Russia' as their underground anthem in the 1930s, now they appeared as a 'national' delegation and waved Finnish flags in the festival ceremonies. Many of the delegates wore traditional national costumes in order to represent themselves as Finns. These grassroots practices were endorsed by the Finnish leftist youth association and even the Finnish communist party, as they served the need of Finnish communists to express their patriotism in the domestic public sphere. The participation of Finnish youth in the World Youth Festivals was also seen by the Finnish left as a way to strengthen relations with the Soviet Union and thereby create a new identity for Finland as a nation. In the festival atmosphere, however, Finnish delegates did not necessarily feel national pride. Instead, some of them later recollected that they had felt ashamed at representing a capitalist nation amid the majority of festival delegates who came from socialist countries. (Koivunen, 2020: 142–144, 263). Nevertheless, the nation was becoming a self-evident reference point for the left, making it possible to view national symbols as innocuous and compatible with internationalist ideals.

One arena for addressing and practicing the nation in new ways within the post-war context was public history and memory culture, which illustrates the complex interaction of everyday nationalism and national indifference in the context of the 'cooling down' of pre-war nationalism. To provide one example: In the immediate post-war period, several major Finnish cities engaged in organising city jubilees, which involved wide-ranging programmes reflecting on urban past, present and future. On a national scale, the most visible of these jubilees was the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the city of Helsinki in 1950. City jubilee programmes often included signifiers of the nation, such as national flags, national anthems, or even references to patriotic war narratives. Nationalism was also embedded in jubilee programmes and practices in more subtle and banal ways, for example, in the language that was used (Vahtikari, 2019: 337).

There are several ways to interpret these events. Firstly, the local commemorative events provided a suitable setting in which to continue practicing national belonging. In post-war Finland, the state's 'official memory' was adapted to the realpolitik of Finnish–Soviet relations, thus abandoning the earlier, openly nationalist, narratives of the past (Kinnunen & Jokisipilä, 2012: 437–439). City jubilees, as with many other local and unofficial sites of memory production in society, however, allowed continuous, 'safe' and demilitarised expressions of nationalism and the circulation of national affects between people taking part (see also Merriman & Jones, 2017: 602). The nation was still present, but it was contextualised differently.

Secondly, it is possible to link city jubilees and other local commemorative events with the idea of localising national projects of identity and memory in the Nordic countries that dated to the early-20th century (cf. the *Heimat* ideology) (Aronsson et al., 2008). The attachment to the nation was understood to develop through attachment to local everyday environments. This position was still very visible in the post-war period, for example, in the school curricula (Malinen & Vahtikari, 2021). In this sense, post-war localism, too, was ultimately a nationalist category. There was also a direct transition of activists from former (and now forbidden) nationalist organisations to the newly established local history societies, which boomed in Finland in the post-war period: Earlier expansive aspirations were hence transformed into regional 'patriotism' (Turunen, 2004: 15–18.)

Thirdly, the local projects of history and memory should not only be understood within the framework of the construction of a national community. The post-war period saw a strong sense of localism in its own right, and cities and other localities provided alternative sources of identity beyond the nation as crucial sites of reconstruction, citizenship and democracy within Finland and elsewhere in Europe (Vahtikari, 2017; for West-Germany, see DeWaal, 2017). In other words, focusing on local narratives, city jubilees and other similar kinds of events also allowed people to be indifferent about the nation. As Tara Zahra (2010: 96) has noted, in earlier historical research, national indifference has gone by many other names, including localism. The post-war expressions of localism were not a relic of earlier times but something that was defined and practiced for the purposes of contemporary society (Vahtikari, 2017).

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Another local example in the field of memory culture that demonstrates the transformation of nationalism in the post-war period relates to the commemoration of fallen soldiers. At the centre of every Finnish parish could be found the church and the military cemetery next to it where the almost 100,000 fallen soldiers of 1939–1945 had been buried. After the Civil War of 1918, the victorious White side had raised memorials at the cemeteries and town centres: They borrowed their motifs from the classic tradition of martial heroism and sacrifice. The statues raised after the Second World War, however, lacked the aggressive and militant stance of their predecessors from 1918; they now tended to underline piety, sorrow, loss and vulnerability. 'White' warriors with swords were replaced by unarmed male characters taking care of each other, by mourning women, or by children looking towards the future (Kivimäki, 2012: 485–487; Kormano, 2014). After a lost war, the cemeteries for the fallen could have potentially become places of bitterness and resentment at the memory of the wartime nation, but now the content of Finnish nationalism changed to incorporate the volatile war experiences and to give them sustainable national meanings. At the same time, in the spirit of national consensus, the defeated Reds of 1918 got the opportunity to erect their official memorials in public spaces. These shared similar motifs of unaggressive loss and sorrow to those memorials for the fallen of 1939–1945. The balance in the public memory culture of the Civil War was in this way reversed. There had been 370 'White' memorials raised in 1918–1940 and only 15 for the 'Reds'; in 1940–1958, altogether 117 'Red' memorials were erected compared to only a single 'White' memorial (Peltonen, 2003: 294–302).

Schools provide a good example of the entanglement of everyday nationalism and national indifference in Finnish post-war society. The nation was, as it is still today, (re)produced in children's everyday lives through manifold and complex processes, such as language use, values, embodied practices, use of space or daily schedules (Millei, 2019). Children often negotiated their emotional belonging to the nation in subtle responses to the national stocks of experience that were offered to them through educative processes as well as in various everyday (school) practices and material and spatial bodily encounters. Such activities included, for instance, taking excursions to the surrounding environment, writing essays and drawing. These same activities, however, also provided possibilities to be indifferent towards the interwar educational ideals of obedience, national loyalty and patriotism—even of militarism—and to supersede these through the ambition to foster democratic values and inclusive, peace-loving world citizenship. This revision was strongly promoted in the Elementary School Committees and Curriculum work of the post-war era (Malinen & Vahtikari, 2021).

Emphasising a similar opening towards internationalism, the public image of Sweden and people's attitude towards the Nordic dimension witnessed a substantial reversal in the post-war period, which indicates that a change had taken place in how the Finnish nation was framed and defined in relation to other countries. Nordic cooperation had its longer historical roots, but it was only after the Second World War that *Norden* became a politically successful, supranational identity within all Nordic countries. For Finns especially, it was important to emphasise the Westward orientation and the common Nordic roots that distinguished Finland from the politically dangerous reference group of Soviet-dominated 'Eastern Europe' (Auvinen et al., 2015: 228–229; Jalava, 2013). Easing the language disputes of the interwar years became crucial: The good will of the Scandinavian neighbours was understood as being linked to the interests of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland (Majander, 2019). These were state-level political considerations, but through the grassroot organisations such as the Pohjola-Norden Association, the Nordic community was also filtered into people's everyday lives. Swedish and Finnish municipalities established sponsorship relations so that the Swedish locality would aid its Finnish 'twin' with all kinds of material aid, while the Finnish municipality would name a kindergarten after the Swedish donor town, organise a festive week in its honour and invite the Swedes for an official visit—just to name a few examples. Sweden sponsored the building of municipal health centres, which was a major initiative in support of the social state within post-war Finland (Kivimäki, 2019: 371–373, 409–411; Laurent, 2012). In this context, Nordic orientation, emerging welfare state model and internationalism, gained new currency.

To sum up the entanglement of national indifference with everyday nationalism, what we see happening here is a twofold phenomenon. First, although nationalism as an explicit political ideology lost salience in state-level politics, national symbols remained highly visible in public spaces. In fact, they even gained new prominence as they entered

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the sphere of the former national noncommunity of the left-wing labour movement and came to signify such emotionally charged places as the graves of one's fallen relatives. Yet a second vector must also be noted: a simultaneous transformation of nationalism. Exclusive, aggressive nationalism of the pre-war era that was constructed to the detriment of several national noncommunities—both within and outside of Finland—gave way to a reinterpreted, tempered version of nationalism, which was more inclusive in character and less often aimed against others.[ii] This had to do with both the political ramifications of a lost war and the complex war experiences that caused many Finns to distance themselves from national pathos. Nationalism did not simply switch from hot to banal through a change in the political discourse; rather, people's past and present experiences pointed to new interpretations of the reappropriation of national symbols within their everyday contexts.

It is important to note that the new 'pacified' nationalism was still nationalism and that the post-war Finnish society was a nation-state par excellence; in these circumstances, national indifference could rarely mean anything approaching complete ignorance of or total opposition to the nation as it may have meant in some other historical contexts. What it rather indicated was the amalgamation of national identification with categories such as local, regional, supranational and international, which were represented in partially new ways in schools, the media and other institutions and which were given complex meanings against the backdrop of wartime and immediate post-war experiences. National indifference appeared in various forms: not only, or even primarily, as ignorance or apathy towards the nation but also as people's active stances and 'indifference to national labels in favour of wider identities' (see also Fenton, 2007: 328–329).

5 | CONCLUSIONS: NATIONAL INDIFFERENCE AS INTEGRATION

Philosopher Peter Sloterdijk (2008) has drafted a theory of the post-war periods, which he has used to explain the change in Franco–German relations after 1945. The end of the Second World War represented the end of a tragically 'historical' and 'heroic' era of nations, which had started with the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. During this era of roughly 150 years, France and Germany were entangled in a continuous, violent struggle that founded these nations on myths of martial heroism and sacrifice. In a chain of aggressions, defeats, revanches and feuds, the two nations were mutually obsessed with each other. In contrast to this, the peaceful coexistence after 1945 was based on mutual *indifference*; hot national passions were replaced by trade, bureaucratic communiqués, school excursions and other 'nonevents' in the national-historical sense that paved the way for European integration.

We have played with a Finnish variation on the same theme. In this case, the cooling down of national fervour was not only visible in relation to neighbouring countries—Sweden and the Soviet Union—but also in relation to former national noncommunities within Finland, most notably the left-wing working class. And whereas Sloterdijk's theory deals with abstract inter-state cultures, we have looked rather at the historically changing experience of the nation in the post-war context. Nationalism did not disappear after 1944–1945 but even gained new ground among those Finns who had formerly been pushed to the margins of the nation. And even though many people identified with nonnational communities and categories of belonging in post-war Finland, it did not mean 'national agnosticism' or a 'complete absence of national loyalties' (Zahra, 2008: 4). What happened, instead, was the transformation of nationalism, from exclusive and aggressive pathos to a tempered and relatively inclusive version.

In what ways does national indifference fit into all of this? First of all, the concept has clearly had heuristic use for us, guiding our attention to a historical moment when the nation seemed to 'lose its salience' (Fox et al., 2019: 253) and which has, therefore, in Finnish historiography rarely been studied from the perspective of nationalism studies. Moreover, we have drafted a model for understanding the mutually dependent change in the contents of national indifference and nationalism extending from the interwar into the post-war period. In the 1920s and 1930s, nationalists had labelled national noncommunities as enemies and outsiders. During and especially immediately after the Second World War, in a counter-reaction to the heightened nationalist propagation and as a consequence of

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sobering war experiences, many Finns distanced themselves from the nation in acts that involved different degrees of national indifference. In the third stage, the Finnish post-war nationalism itself changed, pushing aside the aggressive elements of earlier hot nationalism and thus incorporating some of the critique included in the demonstrations of national indifference.

We recognise that this is a complex process, and how it happened in practice and affected people's everyday lives will require a more detailed historicization than we can provide here. Yet we want to underline a thesis for further analysis: There existed simultaneously more and less nationalism in the post-war era—and the changed meanings of national indifference must be understood within this historical setting.

The history of nationalism has not involved a straightforward, determinist development but has rather been composed of ‘contingent events.’ On a similar note, national indifference should not only be seen as a 19th century pre-stage to widespread nationalism. It ‘persisted well into the interwar period’ (Fox et al., 2019: 249–251; Zahra, 2010: 98–99), and, as our article suggests, it could well emerge in the post-war period, too. The case of Finland in the aftermath of the Second World War demonstrates that just as nationalism changed its shape over time, becoming more and more subtly embedded in mundane expressions and encounters, so did national indifference. Thus, it warrants arguing with regard to the post-war period that everyday nationalism and national indifference were both true simultaneously. In this historical context, national indifference becomes an entangled category that cannot be clearly attributed to a specific group of people but which meant rather a gradual change in subjective attitudes and consciousness. Similarly, being considered indifferent did not have the same consequences as in the 1930s, when it could lead to violent exclusions. It may thus be argued that the melting of rigid national dichotomies—and the degree of national indifference that it allowed—actually fostered integration of the former national noncommunities into the nation-state.

In a nutshell, even though explicit ideological nationalism disappeared from most political programmes and the public rhetoric, nationalism permeated the everyday spheres of life in post-war Finland to a great extent. Yet the intensity and quality of post-war nationalism was different: It was not constructed as an ontological, binary juxtaposition to national ‘others’ or noncommunities but had a more integrating and open character. Such nationalism was not indifference per se, but it allowed for more looseness, variation and situational choice in connecting to the nation in people's everyday lives—or for not connecting, for that matter. Thus, we argue that national indifference was both a factor and an outcome of this development. Yet in the Finnish context of the late 1940s and early 1950s, national indifference was not really an explicit political programme, not even among the communists. Nevertheless, as a study of the post-war transformation of nationalism, our article points to future applications of the concept: In the youth radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s, in Finland and elsewhere, national indifference did, indeed, become a conscious agenda.

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ORCID

Tanja Vahtikari https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2474-7689

ENDNOTES

[i] The terms have been traced here with a keyword search from the corpus of Finnish newspapers and periodicals published between 1918 and 1939, archived in the Digital Collections of the National Library of Finland (n.d.).

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[ii] 'Inclusive' is a term that easily connotes the present-day values of liberal democracy, whereas post-war Finland remained exclusive with regard to the ethnic Sámi and Roma minorities, for instance, and both laws and informal attitudes towards marginalised groups and individuals were strictly normative. What we mean by inclusion, nevertheless, is the gradual expansion of 'Finnishness' to include the former national noncommunities, in this first instance the socialists and members of the working class.

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