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Informing as National Indifference? The Case of Finnish Citizens' Collaboration with the Russian Authorities, 1899–1917

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Abstract

Between 1899 and 1917, hundreds of Finnish citizens approached the Russian authorities with letters of denunciation, in which they reported about the anti-government activity of their fellow citizens. These informers caused a public stir in Finland because their activity was associated with the intensifying political surveillance of the imperial security police. Finnish nationalists eagerly labeled informers as Russian-minded traitors, but how did the informers themselves relate to the nation and the empire? This article tackles this question by analyzing the communication of these citizens with the Governor General's Office and the Gendarme Administration and by drawing inspiration from the concept of national indifference, which has gained prominence in nationalism studies in recent years. The article shows the great variation with which informers framed their ideological stance in their letters to the imperial power. Some avoided referring to their Finnishness to emphasize their imperial loyalty, whereas others presented themselves as pro-Finnish and viewed the interests of Finland and Russia as uniform. As a distinctive group of informers, the article examines Orthodox people, whose letters to the imperial authorities highlight experiences of religious discrimination and consequent national ambivalence.

Keywords: denouncers, informers, political surveillance, national indifference, nationalism, Russian Empire, loyalty, orthodoxy

On March 15, 1901, former dairyman Juho Koskela was sitting nervously in the office of the governor general for Finland. He had traveled all the way from Ostrobothnia to meet with Governor General Nikolay Bobrikov, a man who had gained a reputation among many Finns as a steadfast "Russificator" during his term (1898–1904) as the top imperial administrator of the Grand Duchy of Finland. Bobrikov had granted an audience with Koskela on the basis of their earlier meeting and the resulting correspondence (Governor General's Office [GGO], 1901, Fb:39, file 16). In his several letters to the governor general, Koskela had expressed loyalty to the Russian emperor and denounced anti-government activity that, according to him, gained ground in Finland (e.g., GGO 1899, Fa:1796, file package Ib). Pleased by these letters, Bobrikov had even mentioned Koskela to Emperor Nicholas II as an example of a "loyal peasant" from Finland (Polvinen 1995, 90).

Koskela wanted to meet Bobrikov personally because his situation was desperate. The Finnish nationalist press had exposed his communication with the Governor General's Office two years earlier and devoted columns to condemn him as an unpatriotic trai-tor (e.g., "Yhteiskunnan rikkaruohoa," *Wiipurin Sanomat*, March 23, 1899, 2). The press campaign had made Koskela the target of social ostracism and ruined his dairy business ("Suuren adressin" 1939, 47; Suodenjoki 2014b, 283). However, Koskela's attempt to draw Bobrikov's attention to his situation did not work out as he had hoped. Instead of listening to Koskela's presentation, Bobrikov got impatient and cut the meeting short, leaving Koskela bemused (GGO 1901, Special section, file 16). This unsuccessful meeting was engraved in Koskela's memory, but it did not end his communication with the Governor General's Office. In fact, this communication continued up until the end of the imperial administration in Finland in 1917. Later, Koskela justified his interaction with governors general in his memoirs, claiming that he had only sought to create dialogue between the Russian author-ities and the Finns and thereby to protect the nation and its people (Koskela 1919, 4–6). This justification was his attempt to tear off the label of a henchman of the empire that had been stuck on him in Bobrikov's years.

As the "loyal peasant," Juho Koskela became an emblem of a new culture of political informing that took shape and aroused public attention during the last two decades of the imperial era in Finland. Starting from Bobrikov's term, hundreds of citizens across Finland submitted letters of denunciation to the governor general and the Russian gendarmerie, which monitored popular moods and operated as a political police in the grand duchy (see Marina Zagora's article in this issue). The denunciations were nourished by the ongoing imperial integration measures, which were interpreted by many Finns as an attempted Russification and led to the formation of so-called Constitutionalist opposition within the

well-established Finnish national movement. The protagonists of Constitutionalism struggled against imperial policies by variegated means and eagerly condemned those who did not support their agenda as collaborators of the imperial regime. Suspected informers like Koskela became their key targets, as I have shown elsewhere (Suodenjoki 2014a, 152–53). Some Finnish nationalists later addressed informers and denunciations also in their memoirs, which, in turn, contributed to the historiography of the newly independent Finland in framing the last decades of Russian rule in the grand duchy as a period of oppression (Suodenjoki 2016b, 433–36). Nationalist historiographers vigorously depicted the informers of the imperial authorities as corrupt, criminal, and feeble-minded individuals who had failed to develop a national consciousness (e.g., Parmanen 1937).

Figure 1. Juho Koskela's caricature by Alex Federley in Fyren, a Swedish-language satirical magazine, April 8, 1899. The ironic caption reads: "Koskela socializes with fine people! 'Beautiful souls easily find each other!'" The Digital Collection of the National Library of Finland.

In this article, I delve into the collaboration of Finnish citizens with the imperial authorities, especially the Governor General's Office and Gendarme Administration, by using the notion of national indifference as a heuristic device. I ask whether this collaboration, manifested in the sending of political denunciations, can be interpreted as a rejection of the (Finnish) nation and nationalism. My hypothesis is that many of the writers of denunciation letters explicitly expressed antipathy to Finnish nationalists and underlined alternative, non-national loyalties and categories. This assumption leads me to the category of national indifference as a potential factor behind their activity.

The main source material for the article consists of the case registers and case files (dela in Russian, aktit in Finnish) of the Governor General's Office, preserved in the National Archives of Finland. Moreover, the material includes letters to the imperial authorities preserved in the Gendarme Administration's Papers in the Finnish Labor Archives. The letters found in these collections represent many forms of "writing upwards," to use Martyn Lyons's (2015) term, including denunciations, but also petitions, complaints, and even threatening letters. The senders of these writings may be defined as "informers" in a very wide meaning of the word, as their aim was to inform the authorities about various personal, local, or national issues. Besides these archival materials, the sources include writings concerning denunciations and informers in Finnish newspapers and periodicals. To find these writings, I have used the search engine of the Digital Collection of the National Library of Finland.

This article is divided into three sections. The first section serves as a background by linking the recent scholarship on national indifference with the study of denunciations and political informing. The second section moves on to explore the quantity, topics and senders of denunciations that were addressed to the imperial authorities in 1899–1917. Moreover, the section illustrates how collaboration with the imperial authorities was viewed by the contemporary Finnish press, on the one hand, and the collaborators themselves, on the other. As this section shows, Finnish nationalist newspapers associated informing with anti-nationalism, whereas the letters to the governor general imply great variation in how informers related to Finnishness and Finnish nationalism.

The third section shifts the perspective to collaboration and nationhood within the religious minority of Eastern Orthodox people in Finland. Employing citizens' letters to the imperial authorities as evidence, the section indicates how people of the Orthodox faith faced a double pressure from Finnish and Russian nationalists during the period under examination. In circumstances where both Finnish nationalists and the Russian authorities increasingly associated Orthodoxy with Russianness, some Orthodox people turned to the governor general or gendarmes to advance their interests and to condemn Lutheranization

and Finnish nationalism. The case of Johannes Karhapää, an Orthodox teacher, shows that communication with the imperial authorities easily stigmatized a person as a Russian-minded traitor, and this stigma could have serious implications.

National Indifference as a Vehicle for Studying Political Informing

The concept of national indifference has gained ground and provoked discussion among scholars of nationalism and nation-building in recent years (Van Ginderachter and Fox 2019, 1; Miller 2019, 63–65). One of the proponents of the concept has been historian Tara Zahra (2010, 98), who has used it to describe a variety of behaviors and attitudes such as: (1) "national agnosticism" or the absence of national loyalties; (2) nationally ambivalent or opportunist side-switching; or (3) approval of bilingualism and cross-ethnic marriages. National indifference has also been theorized by Fox, Van Ginderachter, and Brophy (2019, 252–53), who make a distinction between national indifference as something people do, on the one hand, and as something people do not do, on the other. The first approach views national indifference as active agency, as a stance or project willfully embraced by people, whereas the second one looks at national indifference as unawareness of or ambivalence toward the nation that takes the form of inaction. In this article, I will contemplate whether some of these interpretations of national indifference serve as a relevant framework for examining the citizens' collaboration with the imperial authorities in the specific context of Finland.

As national indifference has been fit to explain very variegated phenomena, some scholars have criticized the concept for vagueness and opaqueness (e.g., Van Ginderachter and Fox 2019, 7). Recognizing this critique, Russian historian Alexei Miller (2019, 64–65) suggests that the concept works better as a metaphor than as an analytical category. Nevertheless, the notion of national indifference still appears fruitful in that it activates thoughts about the limits of nationalization and of the impact of nationalism in a certain historical context. It also induces us to think about alternative concepts that might better work in that particular context.

Zahra (2010, 104) argues that the coherence of the term "national indifference" rests on the fact nationalists themselves used it to mobilize supporters. National indifference served as an umbrella category for people with diverse motivations and interests who were rallied for the nation but also condemned and ostracized as if they formed one group. Zahra's notion serves as a fruitful starting point for examining Finnish informers to the imperial authorities. I argue that the informers did not form a "single species" in the sense that they had

uniform interests and motives, but they were nevertheless eagerly lumped together and targeted by Finnish nationalists. At the same time, I contemplate whether informers fashioned themselves as nationally indifferent in their messages with the imperial authorities and if not, how they defined their nationhood.

In existing research, national indifference has often been associated with a situation where a nationalist movement struggles to mobilize the masses or where two groups of nationalists are competing, while "ordinary people" are trying to stand apart from this confrontation (Miller 2019, 63–64). Most of this research has focused on the context of the Habsburg Monarchy, but also some scholars working on the Russian Empire have adopted the term. These scholars have centered on the ideas and actions of local elites,[1] noting that studying the national indifference of ordinary people is difficult since these people leave few sources that would elucidate the phenomenon (Miller 2019, 65; Cusco 2019; Brüggemann and Wezel 2019). Some studies of other historical contexts have sought to bypass this difficulty by employing materials that indirectly elucidate popular views, such as police surveillance reports (e.g., Erdeljac 2019; Malešević 2021). There are nevertheless also sources produced by ordinary people themselves that can give valuable insights. For instance, Anna Whittington (2019) has introduced citizens' letters and petitions to Soviet authorities as material that offers a glimpse into the senders' own articulations of national indifference.

Following Whittington's footprints, I employ "writings upwards" to the imperial authorities to explore grassroots-level responses to national categories. These letters show senders fashioning themselves as loyal supporters of the imperial regime for instrumental purposes and using formulaic expressions (Van Ginderachter 2006, 229–30), but even so, they give insight into how the senders parse and interpret their lived experiences (Boddice and Smith 2020, 32–33). Sometimes they also explicitly address questions of national belonging. Hence, they lead us to think about the practice of informing as an articulation of national indifference.

Denunciation and informing feature as the other key concepts in this article. By the term "denunciation," I refer to spontaneous communications from citizens to authorities that contain information about the wrongdoings of other individuals or groups and calls for their punishment. Scholars of police surveillance occasionally separate unprompted denunciations from informing, which implies a more regular relationship with the police authorities and often involves rewards for information (Gellately and Fitzpatrick 1996, 747). However, the distinction between denouncers and informers is often obscure. In many cases, the sources are far too fragmented to unequivocally show what the relationship was between

the person who informed and the official who received the information.

In outlining the role of informers in political surveillance, I draw on a body of research on the operation of the security police in late imperial Russia (Daly 1999, 2004; Baksht and Petin 2015; Baksht 2014). As for the Grand Duchy of Finland, the political surveillance performed by the Russian gendarmerie and the role of informers in it have received sporadic attention in several works, but comprehensive studies are still missing (e.g., Jussila 1994; Zagora's article in this volume). In my previous research on denunciations, I have made some preliminary attempts to shed light on the motives and ideologies of political informers (Suodenjoki 2014a, 2016b). This article extends the existing body of scholarship by introducing the category of national indifference as a vehicle for studying the motivations and stigmatization of citizens who collaborated with the imperial authorities in a heated political atmosphere.

Denunciations and the Rise of Police Surveillance under Nicholas II's rule

Political denunciations made by Finnish citizens to the Russian authorities were linked to the intensifying police surveillance in the Russian Empire during Nicholas II's rule. As previous research has underlined, the imperial security police grew increasingly sophisticated and professional between the 1890s and 1917. The employment of informers became one of the key tools of the security police in political surveillance, and even though the number of informers was relatively small, they proved efficient in combating revolutionary activism (Daly 1999, 217–23). By the early twentieth century, informers and denunciations played a significant role in political surveillance as far as the western borderlands of the empire, including Poland (e.g., the theme number on denunciations in *Przegląd Historyczny* 110[2] in 2019).

In the Grand Duchy of Finland, the duties of the security police were performed by the Gendarme Administration of Finland, which operated under the Russian Ministry of the Interior (Jussila 1994). The gendarmes copied their methods of surveillance from the Russian Okhrana, although the changes lagged behind those in the core regions of Russia. From Bobrikov's term onward, the gendarmerie employed itself increasingly by investigating denunciations that arrived in growing numbers at the Governor General's Office and by searching for informers among Finns. The recruitment of paid informers continued and intensified during F. A. Seyn's term as the governor general (1909–1917), especially under martial law during the First World War (Suodenjoki 2019).

It is difficult to estimate the number of denunciations or informers based on the fragmentary evidence preserved in the documents of the Governor General's Office and the

Gendarme Administration. When civic activists were allowed to delve into these papers after the February Revolution of 1917, they brought to light a few hundred names or pseudonyms of suspected informers. Most of these individuals had operated in the 1910s, when the gendarmes were the most active in recruiting collaborators (Ahti 1999, 33).

One way to quantify the scale of denunciations is to count the cases concerning denunciations that are listed in the case registers (*aktiluettelot* in Finnish, *opisi del* in Russian) of the Governor General's Office. Based on the Finnish-language case registers from the years 1891–1911, as many as 214 case files contain or cover denunciations (GGO, Bj:314–16). The overwhelming majority of these were filed in the years 1900–1904 (170) and 1910–11 (31). The case registers from the period 1912–1917 also include numerous references to denunciations, but I have not counted them. It nevertheless appears that denunciations multiplied during Bobrikov's and Seyn's terms, which are known in Finnish historiography as "periods of oppression" because of the imperial measures to limit civil liberties, intensify political surveillance, and reduce the autonomy of Finland.

The references to denunciations in the case registers must be considered with caution for two reasons. First, the registers do not necessarily indicate whether a case file includes one denunciation letter or many, or whether the file even includes original letters. Second, any attempt to count the number of denunciations faces the difficulty of defining a denunciation. For example, a letter that arrived at the Governor General's Office may be referred to as a "denunciation" (*ilmianto*) in the Finnish-language case register but as a complaint (*zhaloba*), petition (*proshenie*), or report (*donesenie*) in the corresponding Russian-language register (GGO, Bb:66 and Bb:70–71). Moreover, even the scribes of Finnish-language registers were not always consistent, as they may have used different words to describe similar letters. Thus, many letters that include denunciations are classified in the registers as complaints, petitions, or notifications.

Interestingly, the Finnish-language case registers tend to limit the use of the word "denunciation" to accusatory letters of a *political* character and, occasionally, to extend its use to notifications sent by Russian gendarmes. This flexibility related to the fact that the registers were not written by the office staff but by Finnish archivists after the fall of the imperial regime. The changed circumstances allowed the archivists to express their political attitudes toward the fallen regime and use the term "denunciation" as a negative label for a certain type of letter. The Finnish term "ilmianto" carries (and carried a century ago) negative connotations, just like the corresponding concepts for denunciation in many other languages (Gellately 2001, 17). For a researcher interested specifically in political denunciations, the political bias of the Finnish-language registers is beneficial, as it facilitates the

tracing of relevant letters. The original Russian-language case registers written by the governor general's officials are less useful in this respect.

Denunciations provoked considerable attention in the contemporary public sphere, which can be easily confirmed by browsing the Digital Collection of the National Library of Finland.[2] Space does not allow a detailed analysis of the writings to the Finnish press, but even a brief look at the digitized newspapers and periodicals reveals that they often associated the words "ilmianto" and "ilmiantaja" (informer) with political denunciations and, consequently, with betrayal and anti-patriotism. For instance, many writings described the informers of the Russian authorities using such terms as "traitor" or "henchman" (e.g., "Valtiollinen hermostuminen Suomessa," *Vapaita lehtisiä*, September 29, 1903, 3; "Ihmisiksi," *Kansalainen*, June 6, 1904, 2; "Ilmiantovimma," *Vastaisuus*, December 1, 1906, 234-35). Some nationalist commentators to the press also associated denunciations with ignorance and cowardice among the masses (e.g., "Valkeasaaren tapahtuman johdosta," *Vapaita lehtisiä*, December 20, 1902, 2–3). From their perspective, the appearance of informers even in the most developed parts of the country showed that the masses had not internalized nationalism well enough to break loose of naïve monarchism and resist imperial propaganda (Ala 1999, 57–63).

Against this backdrop, it is interesting to explore the social background of the people who operated as informers to the governor general and gendarmes. Based on a sample of letters from the period 1898–1905 and the lists of informers that were published after the fall of the imperial regime (e.g., "Santarmiston apuna," *Työmies*, June 16, 1917, 5), these people represented a wide spectrum of the population. The first thing to note is that they included many current or former civil servants and state employees, especially policemen, post office and railroad employees, and customs officers (Ahti 1999, 33). That these groups were susceptible to collaboration is explained by the relevance of their work for political surveillance.

Informers also included other middle-class professionals such as teachers, journalists, and traders. Some of the latter had a criminal history as swindlers and smugglers, due to which they had drifted into problems with the law. A case in point was the dealer Antti Isak Jokela, who was sentenced for various crimes in the 1910s. To free himself from prison, Jokela turned to all levels of officialdom, including the governor general and the Gendarme Administration (GGO 1911, Fb:602, file 33/65). These contacts eventually led him to collaboration with the gendarmes as an agent, whose tasks included recruiting informers in Oulu. Around the same time, Jokela also changed his surname to Star and converted to Eastern Orthodoxy, which implied a thorough identity change (Suodenjoki 2019). After the February

Revolution of 1917, he disappeared, leaving the Finnish nationalist press to marvel at the scope of his services to the imperial administration ("Santarmiurkkijan jäljet," *Liitto*, May 19, 1917, 2).

Besides the middle-class informers, the Governor General's Office received numerous letters of denunciation from lower-class people, including agricultural and industrial workers, tenant farmers, and rural artisans. Many of them had economic or legal grievances, and they hoped to encourage the intervention of the top imperial official by lacing their appeals with political denunciations (e.g., GGO 1903, Fb:142, file 48). The targets of these denunciations were often local employers, landlords, or other power holders with whom the informers had disputes and who were sometimes actually involved in the nationalist opposition to imperial policies (Suodenjoki 2014b, 284–90). By means of denunciation, the lower-class informers could profile themselves as loyal subjects of the emperor and distance themselves from the prevalent form of Finnish nationalist activism.

The terminology and references to the political situation found in many lower-class people's letters also indicate the influence of imperial propaganda among this segment of the population. During Bobrikov's term in particular, the imperial regime sought to appeal to landless people by representing itself as a defender of the poor against the Finnish elites. Imperial propaganda eagerly represented the lower-class rural inhabitants as the oppressed "Finnish people," who were fundamentally loyal to the emperor but turned against the government by Swedish-speaking elites (Polvinen 1995, 229–32). However, the echoing of this message in the letters does not necessarily mean that the informers actually agreed with the government's propaganda. Some informers may have viewed references to the public discourse of the government just as a useful means to establish credibility with the governor general.

The topics of the accusatory letters varied regionally. The questions of landownership and tenancy manifested themselves particularly in the letters from southwestern Finland. This was not only economically the most developed part of the grand duchy, but also a region where the tensions between landless people and landowners were particularly visible at the beginning of the twentieth century (Suodenjoki 2014a, 148). Another active region of letter writing was the province of Viipuri, where the status of Russian-language and Eastern Orthodox minorities boosted these writings, as I will elaborate in the following section. Nevertheless, the practice of denunciation gained ground in every part of the grand duchy, including the Swedish-speaking Åland Islands (GGO 1903, Fb:142, file 47) and the Sámi community in northernmost Finland (GGO 1905, Fb:258, file 11/41). Moreover, the governor

general received some Finnish-language denunciations from abroad, as the imperial authorities had informers even among the Finnish American community (GGO 1904, Fb:154, file V/2).

The significant political events and threats that affected the relationship between Finland and Russia featured in the material throughout the period under examination. During Bobrikov's term, numerous informers reported co-nationals who agitated young men of conscription age to boycott the drafts to the Russian army (e.g., GGO 1903, Fb:114, file 21). During the First World War, many denunciations concerned the so-called Jäger movement, the activists who encouraged young men to leave for Germany to get military training and to prepare to separate Finland from Russia (Gendarme Administration's Papers, folder 2). Denunciations against people who allegedly spread illegal literature, talked pejoratively about the Russian policies, or who had defamed or threatened to kill the emperor or the governor general were common in the letters all the time (e.g., GGO 1909, Fb:454, file 28; Gendarme Administration's Papers, folder 2). Occasionally, the office also received reports about the failure of local authorities to observe imperial holidays or people disposing of or sabotaging images of the emperor (GGO 1911, Fb:598, file 30/19; GGO 1911, Fb:600, file 31/12). With messages like this, senders expressed a kind of dynastic-based, supranational civic loyalty or imperial patriotism (e.g., Cole and Unowsky 2007), even if most of the letters were also motivated by economic interests or personal revenge.

A curious example of this kind of imperial patriotism is a letter by Wiktor Huusari, an itinerant worker from Oulujoki (GGO 1902, Fb:56, file 56). He complained to Bobrikov about foreign forest companies, which, according to him, were acquiring the possession of all the river mouths and also insidiously infiltrating the government. Huusari warned that these companies were hostile to the government and could, because of their great economic power, undermine the imperial authority. As he stated it, "Niin luulisi että Englanti täällä kansaa hallitsee eikä Keisari" (One might think that it is England and not the Emperor who rules the people here). To correct the situation, Huusari advised the imperial authorities to take the sawmills owned by these companies into pro-government ownership and ensure that the working people would no longer suffer from unemployment due to the owners' decisions. Huusari's complaint was clearly linked with local tensions caused by the growing export of timber, which had drawn foreign sawmill enterprises to the grand duchy. In addition, using his own judicial disputes as proof, Huusari complained that the judicial system was not serving the emperor and the people. To fix this, he urged the government to disband the three Courts of Appeal and move the Supreme Court from Helsinki to Saint Petersburg. It is noteworthy that while Huusari clearly recognized that the grand duchy had its own legal

system, he did not use the word "Finland" even once in his letter. This must have been a deliberate choice to underline his imperial mindset and, more implicitly, national indifference.

Avoidance of the term "Finland" was one strategy used by citizens who wrote to the governor general, but the material also includes plenty of opposite examples. Many senders explicitly talked about "Finland" and "the Finnish people" as entities that were distinctive from "Russia" and "the Russians." In doing so, they viewed Finland as the self-evident field within which they operated. This view of the national as a naturalized framework of everyday life comes close to what John Breuilly (2012) calls "structural nationalism." This type of nationalism was not necessarily in conflict with imperial loyalty, but it could appear in coalition with it in the letters.

Many informers viewed Finland and Russia as having joint interests. As they themselves explained, they wanted to preserve good relations between the Finns and the Russian regime, because the deterioration of these relations would harm both. In other words, these people represented themselves as both Finnish and Russian patriots. A good example was Hjalmar Kortelainen, a sales agent who wrote to the governor general from a provincial prison, where he was serving a sentence for fraud in 1911. In his letter, Kortelainen denounced three people for expressing hostility to the emperor and the Russians and for persecuting him as a "henchman" due to his Russian acquaintances. Kortelainen's denunciation was clearly motivated by personal revenge, as his targets had all contributed to his conviction for fraud. Nevertheless, Kortelainen's letter includes an interesting depiction of his ideological stance:

> Olen aina ollut sitä mieltä että suomi ilman Wenäjän apua ja turvaa ei tule toimeen jonka johdosta meidän suomalaisten ei pitäisi ruveta Ruotsalaisten narriksi vaan olla Hallitsijalle ja hänen käskyläisilleen kuuliain ja katsoa aina Suuren Wenäjän ja pienen Suomen yhteistä etua. (GGO 1911, Fb:602, file 33/64)
>
> (I have always thought that Finland cannot manage without the help and protection of Russia, which is why the Finns should not make themselves fools of the Swedes but remain obedient to the Sovereign and his servants and always look to the common interest of Great Russia and small Finland).

As the quote reveals, Kortelainen employed two strategies that were common of informers who sought to grab the governor general's attention. Not only did he evoke the idea of the joint interests of the empire and the grand duchy, but he also associated opposition to

imperial policies in Finland with Swedish elites who were conspiring against the government. The frequent appearance of these strategies in the material fits poorly with the idea of the letters as articulations of national indifference. Rather, this kind of rhetoric served the informers to portray themselves as patriots who sought to protect the nation and the empire from foreign influence.

Few individuals would embody this idea of informers as self-perceived patriots better than the "loyal peasant" Juho Koskela, whose encounter with Bobrikov was depicted in the introduction. Koskela's writings to the governor general show clearly that he viewed himself as a representative of the Finnish people who sought to preserve the harmonious relationship between Finland and Russia. Koskela also condemned "hot" nationalism that opposed imperial policies, associating it with Swedish-mindedness and viewing it as alien to the Finnish people (GGO 1899, Fa:1791, file package Ib). However, Koskela's stance was different from that of many other informers in that he advised the Russian government to treat the Finnish nationalist opposition mildly. As he stated in one of his letters, "More can be achieved by good than by evil." Koskela argued that overly severe measures against the nationalist opposition would turn the popular attitudes against the government, "as had sometimes already been the case" (GGO 1901, Fb:39, file 16). This was not necessarily a point that Bobrikov welcomed.

Koskela's views, which he fearlessly shared with the governor general, indicate that he was far from being nationally indifferent. Rather, he, and some other informers who expressed themselves in less sophisticated ways, stood for an alternative form of Finnish nationalism. In fact, their stance falls quite close to the Fennoman ideology that had guided the Finnish national movement in the nineteenth century. This ideology emphasized the promotion of the status of the Finnish language vis-à-vis Swedish and the idea of the people as the ultimate source of power (Kurunmäki and Liikanen 2017). At the same time, the Fennomans advocated loyalty to the Russian regime, which they saw as an ally of the people against the Swedish-language elites. When this loyalty to Russian rule started to divide Finnish nationalists at the end of the nineteenth century, those who continued to cherish loyalty to the empire and to prioritize the language struggle between Finnish and Swedish became known as the Compliance Party. Others, who prioritized opposition to imperial integration policies and somewhat downplayed the language struggle between Finnish and Swedish, were named the Constitutionalists. The divide between these two strands of Finnish nationalists played a crucial role in the political life of Finland during the last decades of the imperial era, and this division has dominated historical accounts of the period alongside the right-left divide.

What remains less pronounced in the historiography is the existence of imperial loyalists who drew on Fennoman ideas but were rejected even by the Compliance Party when the Finno-Russian crisis escalated during Bobrikov's term. The loyalty of these people found manifestations in the letters to the governor general and in their collaboration with gendarmes. However, this loyalty did not evolve into a political movement. A key reason for this was the lack of support for this stance in the media. The few organs associated with imperial power had a modest readership, and they were no match for the free Finnish- and Swedish-language press that had mushroomed in the late nineteenth century. The press was divided along political party lines, but all the parties and their organs adopted a strictly critical stance toward collaborators and the practice of denunciation. While the Constitutionalists were eager to also blame the Compliance Party for Russian-mindedness and collaborationism, the Compliance Party made a clear distinction between themselves and those who succumbed to plotting against their co-nationals with the Russian authorities (Suodenjoki 2014a, 152). The socialist press joined the critics of informers and collaborators as well, proclaiming that workers should organize instead of turning to the imperial authorities. In these circumstances, Koskela and his like were left isolated, stigmatized either as insensitive to the national cause or more often as unpatriotic traitors.

Religious Tensions as a Motive for Denunciation

When exploring the practice of denunciation from the perspectives of national belonging and indifference, the case of the Eastern Orthodox people in Finland is particularly interesting, as it brings in religion as an alternative point of loyalty. Eastern Orthodox Christians were the largest religious minority in the predominantly Lutheran grand duchy, forming 1.8 percent of the population in 1905. A great majority of them lived in Karelia, in the provinces of Viipuri and Kuopio. In this region, Orthodox Finns faced the growing pressure of nationalization from two sides from the end of the nineteenth century onward. On the one hand, Finnish nationalists promoted Finnish-language elementary schooling in Karelia to strengthen the Finnish national consciousness among the local Orthodox population (Hämynen 1995, 18–19, 33). On the other hand, beginning with Bobrikov's term, the Russian government also extended its integration policies into the realm of religion in Finland. While the government did not directly attack the Lutheran Church, it sought to strengthen the Orthodox Church, for instance, by building Orthodox churches and schools (Polvinen 1995, 219–24). These policies were further intensified during the terms of Governors General Gerard and Seyn, which saw the establishment of dozens of Russian-language Orthodox schools in Karelia (Hämynen 1995, 67–68; Vituhnovskaja, 1996, 609–10).

The clash between imperial integration policies and Finnish nationalism seems to have fueled religious tensions among Finns. Among the Lutheran population, the extension of the integration policies to the realm of religion strengthened suspicions about the loyalties and patriotism of Finnish Orthodox people. In the contemporary Finnish press, it was common to call Orthodox people "Russian-believers" and thereby to question their national loyalties (e.g., "Valtion voima," *Suomi*, January 3, 1912, 1). Conversely, the Russian authorities and Orthodox clergy were alarmed by the activity of Finnish nationalists and Lutheran organizations in Karelia. To counter this activity, Orthodox clerics launched a missionary organization known as the Karelian Brotherhood, which, starting from 1907, began to strengthen the religious identity among the Orthodox people in Karelia (Hämynen 1995, 63–67).

As an indication of the clash between the two religions, the Governor General's Office received numerous letters of denunciation from Orthodox people in Finland. Many of these were written by Orthodox clerics in the Russian language (e.g., GGO 1911, Fb:594, file 20/2). However, the governor general also received Finnish-language letters from ordinary citizens, reflecting the fact that most Orthodox people in Finland spoke Finnish as their mother tongue. Some of these senders complained about religious or ethnic discrimination in their local communities and denounced Lutheran priests or Finnish nationalists for anti-government activity (e.g., GGO 1905, Fb:259, file 11/109).

One of the denunciations from Orthodox Finns that arrived in the hands of Governor General Bobrikov came from Kovero, located in the province of Kuopio, in 1903. This denunciation was forwarded to the governor general by the Gendarme Administration, implying that the senders had interacted with gendarmes prior to sending the letter. The senders included two Orthodox cottagers and a landowning farmer, but the actual writer of the letter was Johannes Karhapää, a farmer's son from the village of Sonkajanranta (GGO 1903, Fb:103, file 78/4). Karhapää, who was only eighteen years old, had probably been selected to scribe the letter because he mastered the skill of writing better than the other senders. Nevertheless, his later activities imply that he was not only a scribe but actively involved in the senders' cause.

In their letter, the senders targeted Juho Hotinen, a local Lutheran priest, accusing him of inciting Finns against the imperial government. According to the senders, the priest had preached from the pulpit that "ei esivalta ole samaa lihaa ja Werta kuin me Suomalaiset" (the powers that be are not of the same flesh and blood as us Finns) and that "meidän Suomalaisten pojat joutuuvat työjuhtina orjailemaan vieraan Esivallan alla (eli venäjän)" (our

Finnish boys are forced to grovel as workhorses beneath these foreign [that is Russian] authorities). The senders also reported that the preacher had called the Russian authorities "hostile and of another faith," thus implying that Hotinen regarded the Orthodox faith as something non-Finnish.

The letter is distinctive in that the senders did not allude to any personal disputes with the targeted priest. However, considering that the senders were all Orthodox, their denunciation was likely to be at least partly religiously motivated. This assumption is supported by the involvement of Karhapää, who was affiliated with an Orthodox organization known as the Brotherhood of Holy Sergei and Herman, which carried out home mission work in the region (Mäkinen 2019, 112–15). Whatever the case, the denunciation was clearly of interest to the imperial authorities. Otherwise, the Gendarme Administration would have not forwarded it to the governor general and Bobrikov's staff would have not placed the letter in a file, which included gendarme reports on the anti-government activity of priests.

Regardless of what the relationship was between Johannes Karhapää and the Russian officials at this stage, he was to engage in repeated interaction with the governor general in the following years (e.g., GGO 1910, Fb:540, file 3/5). Around 1907, Karhapää also began to operate as a home missionary or agitator of the newly established Karelian Brotherhood, which explicitly opposed the Lutheranization of the Karelians and which was perceived by Finnish nationalists to promote Russification. With the aid of the Brotherhood, Karhapää established an Orthodox church school in Sonkajanranta in 1908. Karhapää's religious activism apparently pleased the imperial government and led him to correspond with Governor General Franz Albert Seyn. Their relationship became so close that the governor general even visited Karhapää's home in Sonkajanranta and donated money to the school in 1912. Two years later, Karhapää pled with the governor general to help build a road to Sonkajanranta, to which Seyn again responded positively (Mäkinen 2019, 112–25; Suodenjoki 2016a, 109–10). All this indicates that Karhapää was very successful in acquiring benefits for his community through his personal relationship with the governor general.

Karhapää's activity and connections to imperial power aroused growing public attention. He made the headlines of Finnish newspapers in 1910 when he appeared at a mass meeting, reading aloud letters from the governor general and presenting a mass petition praising the imperial integration measures (Munter 1910, 3). Thereafter, the press followed Karhapää's undertakings and accused him of being a rabble-rouser and a henchman of the Russian gendarmes. Based on newspaper reports, even some of the Orthodox inhabitants from Karhapää's home region regretted his activism, believing that it had deepened the gulf

between the local Lutherans and the Orthodox ("Johannes Karhapää," *Karjalan Sanomat*, April 3, 1917, 2).

The outcry provoked by Karhapää's activity led to concrete action against him immediately after the February Revolution of 1917. When the emperor abdicated in Russia, people around Finland mobilized to express their anger against the collaborators of the fallen imperial government. This mobilization also reached the rural municipalities of eastern Finland. In a popular meeting held in Ilomantsi on April 14, 1917, the participants denounced the "unpatriotic" activity of Johannes Karhapää and demanded his arrest if he was found to have collaborated with the gendarmes. The meeting also proclaimed Karhapää unsuited for any positions of trust and pushed the local Orthodox clergy to remove him from the church council ("Ilomantsi, Tuupovaara," *Karjalatar*, April 21, 1917, 2). In the following months, Karhapää continued to face various forms of defamation and social ostracism in his home region (e.g., "Opettajiston mielipide," *Wiipuri*, June 9, 1917, 2). In this respect, he shared the fate of numerous individuals exposed as informers or collaborators of the imperial regime in the wake of the February Revolution (Suodenjoki 2019).

Karhapää's story is nevertheless even more dramatic than that of most collaborators. During the Finnish Civil War, the White Civil Guard of Joensuu arrested Karhapää and executed him in March 1918 ("Sortovallan kätyri," *Karjalan Sanomat*, March 12, 1918, 3; Sotasurmasampo 1914–1922). Hence, Karhapää became one of the thirty-eight thousand casualties of the Civil War. The exact grounds for his execution are unclear, but they most certainly related to his religious and political activism. Among local Orthodox people, Karhapää remained a somewhat controversial figure in the following decades, but there also developed a strong memory of him as an Orthodox hero because of his multifaceted religious and civic activity. To commemorate his activity and violent death, the Finnish Orthodox Church ranked him among saints as the Holy Martyr and Confessor John of Sonkajanranta in 2018, making him the second officially acknowledged Finnish martyr (Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko 2018). As for the historical image of Karhapää, he is now remembered most of all as a protagonist of Orthodox people, whereas his interaction with the imperial authorities has been overlooked. These two sides of his activity were intrinsically interlinked, as Karhapää did not hesitate to utilize the benevolence of the imperial power to promote the case of Orthodoxy in the grand duchy.

Based on the traces left by his activity, Karhapää appears to have been nationally indifferent in the sense that he viewed loyalty to the Finnish nation as secondary to loyalties to the Orthodox community and the local community. Like other activists of the Karelian Brotherhood, he also shunned Finnish "hot nationalism" as a threat to Karelian Orthodox

culture, as some recently discovered sources on his local activity appear to confirm (Mäkinen 2019, 131). However, this does not mean that Karhapää completely rejected national categories or identified with the Russian Empire and Russianness instead. In fact, when Karhapää wrote to a bishop in April 1917, he considered his activity to be unjustly labeled by Lutherans as "unnational" and stated: "Olen suomalainen—syntynyt, kasvanut ja toiminut suomalaisena" (I am Finnish—born, grown up and active as a Finn; cited in Mäkinen 2019, 129). Even if this statement was probably affected by the February Revolution and the consequent political shift in Finland, it may also reflect Karhapää's earlier sentiments. Regardless, Karhapää's case serves as an illustrative example of the complex relationship of many Orthodox people with the Finnish nation-in-the-making. For those Orthodox people who spoke Russian as their first language, the question of national belonging was particularly difficult during the late imperial era and the first years of Finland as an independent state.

Conclusion

When one contemplates national indifference as a potential explanation for informing and collaboration, one needs to approach indifference on three levels: as a tool used by the nationalist vanguard to label those who rejected nationalist exhortations, as the self-image of informers, and as a historian's conception of the behavior of the people under examination. The first approach clearly has some relevance, because contemporary nationalists occasionally pointed to a link between informers and the lack of national consciousness among the Finnish population. However, the Finnish nationalists did not actually use the term "national indifference" in this context. Moreover, they often associated collaboration with Russian-mindedness or greediness rather than with national agnosticism or the absence of national loyalties.

As for the self-representations of the collaborators and the historian's interpretation of their behavior, the findings indicate that the informers related to nation and empire in a variety of ways. Some avoided referring to themselves as Finns and even abstained from using the term "Finland" in order to emphasize their imperial loyalty. Others, like Juho Koskela, presented themselves more or less explicitly as loyal Finns who viewed the interests of Finland and Russia as uniform and therefore volunteered to collaborate with the imperial government against its opponents. The latter individuals can hardly be called indifferent to the nation, but they could be viewed as disinclined to the Finnish nationalist movement in its dominant forms. To some degree, the letters of these individuals reflect the idea of Fox, Van Ginderachter, and Brophy (2019) about national indifference as action (rather than as inaction) or even as a political project against nationalist exhortations.

The case of Johannes Karhapää indicates that the question of national belonging was particularly complex for the Orthodox minority of Finland. Orthodox people were confronted by the nationalizing efforts of both Finnish and Russian nationalists, but Finnish nationalists also occasionally associated Orthodoxy with Russian-mindedness. In these circumstances, the engagement of some Orthodox people in collaboration with the Russian authorities could imply that while these people recognized the nation as an available category, they chose to discard it in favor of other categories of belonging. Karhapää's communication with the governor general, taken together with other evidence, suggests that he strongly identified with the Orthodox faith and the local community, whereas his stance toward the nation was marked by strategic flexibility.

All in all, "national indifference" features as a helpful but insufficient category for elucidating the practice of political informing in Finland during the late imperial era. To give a more comprehensive insight into the ideological breeding ground of denunciation letters, one should complement it with terms like "alternative nationalism," "dynastic patriotism," and "imperial loyalty." Through the case studies of very dissimilar informers, the article also highlights the difficulty of grasping the motives and opinions of informers only by qualitatively analyzing their letters to the imperial authorities. Therefore, one needs to look for other sources that would elucidate their life histories and social relations and show how they presented themselves in different arenas and to different audiences. The research could also benefit from combining case studies with quantitative text and content analysis. Quantitative methods would help to analyze how frequently the category of nation appears in the letter material in relation to other social categories such as class, religion, and neighborhood, as well as in what kind of linguistic contexts these categories were used. This kind of approach has already given encouraging results in the analysis of digitized newspapers (e.g., Turunen 2021), and the rapid development of handwritten text recognition is about to enable the use of similar methods in the analysis of citizens' letters to the authorities.

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[1] As for the Grand Duchy of Finland, historians have noted the appearance of national agnosticism or flexibility among the Finnish elites who had close connections to Russia. See, for example, Kalleinen (2001) and Wolff (2016).

[2] For instance, the search term "ilmiannot" and the time frame 1899–1917 gives 727 results from the clippings of the collection, digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/clippings, (accessed February 1, 2023).

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