

Between defeat and victory: Finnish memory culture of the Second World War

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Abstract:

The article focuses on five essential phenomena in the Finnish memory culture of the three Finnish wars fought in 1939–45, namely, 1) the memory of the fallen; 2) the influential work by author Väinö Linna; 3) the contested memory politics and veteran cultures in the 1960s and 1970s; 4) Germany and the Holocaust in the Finnish memory culture; 5) and the ‘neo-patriotic’ turn in the commemoration of the wars from the end of the 1980s onwards. The Finnish memory culture of 1939–45 presents an interesting case of how the de facto lost wars against the Soviet Union have been shaped into cornerstones of national history and identity that continue to have significance even today. Using the growing research literature on the various aspects of the Finnish war memories and memory politics, the article aims, first, at outlining a synthesis of the memory culture’s central features and, second, at challenging the common contemporary conception, according to which the Finnish war veterans would have been forgotten, neglected and even disgraced during the post-war decades to be ‘rehabilitated’ only from the end of the 1980s onwards.

Keywords:

war (the Second World War); Finland; memory; commemoration; war veterans; war memorials; war fiction; the Holocaust; finlandisation

Between defeat and victory

Finnish memory culture of the Second World War¹

1. Historical context of the Finnish memory culture of war

As in many other European countries, there is a keen interest in the memory and commemoration of the Second World War in Finland. In addition to academic works, the memory boom of war entails a variety of popular and personal reminiscences, in which groups and individuals narrate their war-related memories. Often these reminiscences have an explicit aim to gain collective recognition for ‘forgotten’ or even ‘silenced’ experiences. Along with war veterans, active memory communities in Finland include war orphans, Karelian evacuees, children who were sent to Sweden, women on the home front and the former members of the women’s national defence organisation, Lotta Svärd.²

In such a short presentation it would be impossible to summarise all the above-mentioned perspectives. Thus, this paper will mostly concentrate on the meaning and position of soldiers and war veterans in the Finnish memory culture of the Second World War and on the historical changes in this regard. The Nordic narratives of 1939–45, especially academic historiographies, have recently been studied from a

¹ **The article is based on a presentation at the colloquium ‘Erfahrungen der Ostfront in Erinnerung und Verarbeitung vom Kalten Krieg bis zum post-kommunistischen Europa: Fallstudien’ at the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies, Germany, in October 2009. An earlier version of the article has been published in Spanish: Ville Kivimäki, ‘Entre la victoria y la derrota: La memoria de la II Guerra Mundial en Finlandia’, *Historia Social* 2011: 71, 41–58. I would like to thank Prof. Gustavo Corni and Prof. Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas for their comments and helpfulness.**

² For a general overview on the Finnish memory cultures of war in German, see Kinnunen, ‘Finnische Kriegserinnerung’; also Rautkallio, ‘Politik und Volk’. Parallel and interlinked with the finishing of this article a concise English presentation on the Finnish memory culture of war has been written by Tiina Kinnunen and Markku Jokisipilä, ‘Shifting Images of “Our Wars”’.

comparative perspective with a main focus on the relation between the history writing and the foreign political solutions and alternatives of each Nordic country.³ This approach is most fruitful regarding the professional, academic historiographies of war and the instrumental use of history and memory politics by politicians and other high-profile public commentators. In the following presentation I will, nevertheless, mostly leave aside the actual historiography of the Finnish wars of 1939–45, as academic discussions have only a limited relevance to the wider audience and they have recently been studied in great detail.⁴ **Using the growing research literature on the various aspects of the Finnish war memories and memory politics, the article aims, first, at outlining a synthesis of the memory culture’s central features and, second, at challenging the common contemporary conception, according to which the Finnish war veterans would have been forgotten, neglected and even disgraced during the post-war decades to be ‘rehabilitated’ only from the end of the 1980s onwards.**

Between 1939 and 1945 Finland fought three different wars: the Winter War against the Soviet invasion, from November 1939 to March 1940; the so-called Continuation War from June 1941 to September 1944, fought with Nazi Germany as an officially unallied ‘brother-in-arms’ against the Soviet Union; the Lapland War between September 1944 and April 1945, the aim of which was to drive out the German troops in Northern Finland.⁵ The focus of this article is on the Winter War and the Continuation War, whereas the Lapland War is discussed only briefly. This reflects the Finnish memory culture of three wars in general, in which the Lapland War has only a rather marginal place.

Some opening remarks must be made to contextualise the Finnish case of remembering the Second World War. First of all, one should be aware of the Civil War

³ Stenius, Österberg and Östling, *Nordic Narratives*.

⁴ See Jokisipilä, ‘Finnish History Culture’; Meinander, ‘A Separate Story?’; Kivimäki, ‘Three Wars and Their Epitaphs’.

⁵ During the Continuation War, Finland occupied large areas of Soviet Eastern Karelia. Whereas the Winter War and the Continuation War were full-scale conflicts, the Lapland War against Germany was largely fought with reduced conscript units after the army was demobilised in November 1944. For concise English overviews on the political and military history of Finland in 1939–45, see Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*; Kinnunen and Kivimäki, *Finland in World War II*.

of 1918 to understand some of the most important meanings given to the Finnish war experience of 1939–45. Finland declared independence on 6 December 1917, and the following Civil War from January to May 1918 resulted in the victory of the ‘White’ government troops over the insurgent ‘Reds’ of the socialist side. Despite its relative shortness, the conflict was extremely brutal: out of a population of three million, ca. 37,000 Finns died because of the war. To make its memory even more painful, the largest share of casualties was caused by the so-called ‘White terror’, in which about 20,000 Reds were executed or starved to death in prison camps.⁶ The Civil War with its acts of terror and retribution on both sides poisoned the political atmosphere for much of the 1920s and 1930s. In the aftermath of the war, the Finnish workers’ movement was split into revisionist social democrats, who pursued a parliamentary road to power, and the Moscow-based Communist Party, which remained illegal in Finland until the autumn of 1944.⁷

Quite exceptionally among the war-waging European countries, Finland was never occupied by either the Soviet or the German Army in 1939–45. In both March 1940 and September 1944, the Red Army had been stopped short of reaching its objectives in the Finnish heartland. The Finnish Army remained a coherent, even if to some extent fatigued, fighting force. In both cases the peace terms were harsh, but a lesser evil than the harshness of unconditional surrender and occupation.⁸ As it became clear in the summer of 1944 that Finland might disengage itself from the war, Hitler and German military officials contemplated on organising a coup to install a new Finnish government or junta that would continue the fight on the German side. As the case of Hungary demonstrates, such an operation would have meant de facto German

⁶ For the distribution of casualties of 1918 in English, see the Finnish National Archives website ‘War Victims in Finland, 1914–1922’, <http://vesta.narc.fi/cgi-bin/db2www/sotasurmaetusivu/stat2> (accessed 8 January 2010).

⁷ Here and hereafter, for the general political history of Finland in English, please consult Jussila, Hentilä and Nevakivi, *From Grand Duchy*; Kirby, *Concise History of Finland*.

⁸ The most important peace terms of 1944 included the Soviet annexation of some ten percent of the Finnish territory, war reparations worth 300 million US dollars, the obligation to drive out the German troops in Northern Finland and the renting of a military base to the Soviet Union in the immediate vicinity of Helsinki.

occupation. These plans never materialised: there would not have been any significant support for the coup among the Finnish population or the military, and the German Army in the north was much too weak to occupy Southern Finland.⁹ Thus, as Finns are keen to underline, Helsinki, Moscow and London were the only unoccupied capitals in war-waging Europe in 1939–45.

Avoiding unconditional surrender and occupation had important consequences for the Finnish war experience, and further, for the memory culture of the war. First of all, the Finnish Army was demobilised straight home from the front. Unlike any other army fighting on the German side, for a vast majority of Finnish soldiers the war did not end in Soviet or Allied captivity: in 1941–44, out of an army of over 600,000 soldiers, only about 3500 men had become prisoners-of-war.¹⁰ Thus, the Finnish collective experience of war was not branded by the image of defeated POWs marching to or returning from foreign captivity. The traumatic experience of POWs in Soviet camps remained a marginal issue in Finland.

Secondly, the Finnish civilian population was spared the hardships of occupation and experienced a relatively ‘conventional’ war. Practically all the areas occupied by the Red Army had been evacuated. Soviet bombing raids brought havoc also to the home front, but, in the end, these damages were of rather limited scale. The Finns experienced considerable losses in the war: altogether around 96,000 human lives between 1939–45, or about 2.5 % of a population of 3.8 million. Nevertheless, civilian casualties numbered less than 2500 persons.¹¹ Untypically in the age of total war, a clear distinction could be upheld between the front and the home front. In this respect, the Finnish war experience comes closer to that of Great Britain than to the evident countries of comparison in continental Europe.

The third consequence was the continuity of the Finnish political system from the pre-war to the post-war era. During the Second World War, Finland remained a parliamentary democracy and was governed by a broad coalition. As the largest party, the social democrats had an important position in the government for the whole of

⁹ Ahto, *Aseveljet vastakkain*, 49–51; Jokisipilä, *Aseveljiä vai liittolaisia*, 359–61.

¹⁰ Malmi, ‘Jatkosodan suomalaiset sotavangit’, 1028.

¹¹ Kurenmaa and Lentilä, ‘Sodan tappiot’, 1150–5. Military casualties of the Winter War, Continuation War and Lapland War were, respectively, ca. 27,000; 63,000; and 3000 men.

1939–45. This is a unique case, when one considers Finland's close ties with Germany in 1941–44. The small fascist party IKL, with a support of 6.6 % in the 1939 elections, was also in the coalition from January 1941 until March 1943. Important political changes did, however, take place in 1944–45, and it is commonplace to understand the end of the Continuation War as the beginning of Finland's 'Second Republic'. The Communist Party was legalised; organisations which the Soviets considered 'fascist' or 'Hitlerite' were forbidden;¹² and openly anti-Soviet sentiments were replaced by the official policy of friendly coexistence. Under heavy Soviet pressure, former president Risto Ryti and seven prominent wartime politicians were deemed responsible for the outbreak of the Continuation War in June 1941 and given prison sentences in the so-called 'War Guilt Trials' in 1946. But this remained a symbolic gesture to meet the minimum demands of the Soviet authorities; nothing similar to real political purges or Nuremberg-style sentences ensued. The continuity of wartime state and military authority in post-war Finland was most vividly depicted by the totemic image of Marshall C.G.E. Mannerheim, wartime commander-in-chief of the army, who was elected president in August 1944 and was buried with great national honours in 1951. Although seriously compromised by the outcome of war, hegemonic wartime values and ideologies were never completely discredited.¹³

That the Second World War in Finland did not end in an unconditional defeat – and even less so in a clear-cut victory – has allowed considerable variation in interpreting the war and its outcome. The meaning and position given to the front experience and to the Finnish soldiers and war veterans have also changed accordingly, as I attempt to show in the following. I have focused my presentation on those memory trends and phenomena which I have considered most essential for the Finnish memory culture at large; namely, on 1) the memory of the fallen, 2) the influential work of

¹² Some of these, such as the IKL party, were truly fascist, while some, such as the academic AKS society, were at least chauvinistic. But the ban also included war veteran and national defence organisations, which most Finns could hardly see as fascist, and which would be better labelled as 'national conservative', at best.

¹³ Marshal Mannerheim, who had also been the commander-in-chief of the White troops in 1918, remained, of course, a highly controversial figure for many Finns. Yet his hero-worship reached a high peak in the 1950s and the early 1960s; Peltonen, 'Yhdistävä ja erottava sankaruus', 94–8.

author Väinö Linna, 3) the contested memory politics and veteran cultures in the 1960s and 1970s, 4) the place of Germany, Germans and the Holocaust in the Finnish memory culture and 5) the ‘neo-patriotic’ turn in the war’s commemoration from the end of the 1980s onwards. Finally, I will briefly discuss the Finnish obsession with the war in its present-day form.

I understand the methodological problems in applying such a broad term as ‘memory culture’ to define certain memory elements as public or even collective – an issue which has been discussed in a rich array of methodological contributions. As the aim of this article is not to develop the methodology of memory studies but to present the case of Finland, I have been using the term in a rather relaxed manner. The central aspect of ‘memory culture’ (or ‘collective memory’) is that it is social remembering in the public sphere and thus different from the individual memories, although naturally connected to the latter.¹⁴ I am not, of course, claiming that all Finns took part in this memory culture or that the issues I have chosen to discuss were the most central ones for everyone at the given time. Yet I do see all the five topics named above as deeply linked to the shared identities and ideas of ‘Finnishness’ and thus more public and collective matters than many other issues of war memories.

2. Stones of memory: Consigning meaning to loss and defeat

During the Second World War, whenever possible, all the fallen Finnish soldiers were evacuated from the front and buried in the ‘Hero’s Cemeteries’ (*sankarihautausmaa*) in their home parishes. This exceptional practice of the Finnish military has shaped the memory culture of the war in very concrete ways.¹⁵ Most importantly, it created a site of memory at the centre of practically every locality. There exist over 600 Hero’s Cemeteries in Finland, and they are still used as sites for public rituals to commemorate the war and to honour the fallen as well as for personal mourning and remembering. Indeed, a crucial aspect of Hero’s Cemeteries is that they act as an intersection of the national, local and personal meanings and emotions attached to the war. Ideally, they

¹⁴ See, e.g., Winter and Sivan, ‘Setting the Framework’, 6–10; for a comprehensive discussion, see Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*.

¹⁵ Kemppainen, *Isänmaan uhrit*, 65–82.

are sites where different layers of war memories mould into one: personal losses are given collective meaning, national history acquires a local character and ‘the sacrifice for the nation’ is personalised by the names inscribed on the gravestones. Ritual commemorations at the Hero’s Cemeteries take place at least on the Remembrance Day for the Fallen (third Sunday in May), the Flag Day of the Defence Forces (4 June) and Independence Day (6 December), and often on the Remembrance Day for the End of the Winter War (13 March), on Christmas and on All Saints’ Day.

Nevertheless, it would be too easy to consider Hero’s Cemeteries as wholly unproblematic and apolitical sites of memory. The discrepancy between the nation’s demands for sacrifice and the severity of personal losses created the potential for conflict. Although most Finns who had lost their loved ones in the war were ready to take comfort in the patriotic significance of their losses, some resisted by emphasising their individual grief and even anger over the collective rhetoric of selfless, willing sacrifice. For the relatives and friends of the fallen, Hero’s Cemeteries could remain controversial sites of both deeply felt patriotism and an undefined feeling of bitterness.¹⁶

Anxiety over the meaning of the sacrifices was accentuated by the outcome of the war. The final peace terms in the autumn of 1944 were in sharp contrast to the popular and official expectations in 1941, and still in 1942–44. Despite the preservation of national sovereignty, the common experience was that of defeat. Had all the sacrifices been meaningless?

This question was confronted when erecting war memorials in the Hero’s Cemeteries. Riitta Kormano has analysed the memory politics of these monuments: the post-war situation made too much pathos or aggressive nationalism impossible, and yet, depicting Finnish soldiers as passive or weak might have eroded the collective meaning of the sacrifices and ‘the manly heroism’ demonstrated in the war. The dilemma was commonly solved by emphasising the Christian basis of (soldiers’) martyrdom, brotherhood(-in-arms) and (national) resurrection. Finnish war memorials represented soldiers in brotherly union, underlining care-taking and even tenderness among men.¹⁷

¹⁶ Kivimäki and Tepora, ‘För krig och kärlek’, 445–8; Kempainen, *Isänmaan uhrin*, 156–72, 243–5.

¹⁷ Cf. West German post-war soldier themes in Kühne, *Kameradschaft*, 209 ff.

Wounds and destruction could be shown, but martial aggression and violence were hidden. Soldier figures were almost always without weapons, and a popular theme was to depict them in white snow camouflage, which had a strong connotation of the ‘good and morally pure’ Winter War, as well as of personal innocence and purity.¹⁸ The Christian narrative of sacrifice helped to embed positive meanings in the war experience, to preserve the national narrative of the war and to omit its political, and thus, ‘unholy’ and troublesome nature.

Another positive aspect constructed on the war experience was the unmaking of the fratricidal violence of the Civil War in 1918. As a response to the Soviet invasion in 1939–40, the sudden and elevated national unity which transcended earlier class boundaries and political struggles has grown to mythical dimensions to become ‘the Spirit of the Winter War’. This mythic memory of boundless unity, however, was indeed based on many true experiences and acts during the war. As Tuomas Tepora has observed in his study on Finnish national symbols, the Second World War in general and the Winter War especially led to a symbolic reorganisation by integrating the working class and the social democrats – ‘the treacherous Reds’ of 1918 – back into the national collective. In this spirit of reconciliation, communists were further marginalised and the social democrats were eager to demonstrate their patriotic loyalty.¹⁹

This symbolic reorganisation was given a concrete manifestation in Finnish cemeteries during and after the Second World War. For the first time, public ceremonies were organised and memorials were erected on the mass graves of those Reds who had perished in 1918. As Kormano has shown, the war memorials of 1918 and 1939–45 borrowed motifs from each other, although in most aspects they remained distinctively different. In any case, following the war experience of 1939–44, the traumatic memory of the defeated Reds in 1918 was now incorporated into the public memory culture, as it was no longer seen as a threat to national unity. Ideally speaking, in the wartime

¹⁸ Kormano, ‘Amputoidun maan pirstoutuneet puut’.

¹⁹ Tepora, *Lippu, uhri, kansakunta*; in English, Tepora, ‘Redirecting Violence’; see also Kivimäki and Tepora, ‘För krig och kärlek’.

atmosphere of collective sacrifice and common struggle, the earlier class dichotomies, political divisions and violent memories were symbolically overcome.²⁰

As seemingly apolitical sites of worship, commemoration and mourning, Hero's Cemeteries and their war memorials have been elementary in establishing *longue durée* Finnish mentalities regarding the wars of 1939–45. Although these patriotic symbols have not been shared by all citizens, and in fact have remained irrelevant for many, the above-mentioned Christian themes have resonated widely among large segments of the Finnish population. The central function of Hero's Cemeteries has been to stress the sacrifices made for national independence and unity, or as usually inscribed more poetically, for 'the Freedom of the Fatherland', and to delegate this heritage to future generations. As such, they have been sites for 'cemented memories'; places where long-lasting collective and religious meanings have overshadowed the politically, socially and morally problematic issues relating to the wars. These questions were left to be solved elsewhere.

3. Canonised war experience: Väinö Linna's *The Unknown Soldier*

In the immediate post-war era, the Finnish relation to war can be described as very divided. According to the new foreign policy of 'Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Aid' with the Soviet Union, the sharpest right-wing rhetoric and chauvinism were (self-)censored from publicity. But under the politically correct surface, many of the old pre-war and wartime attitudes had survived, most importantly conservative nationalism and fervent anti-communism, which were the key ethos of the major body of Finnish academia, the Lutheran clergy, officer corps, teachers and civil servants. Yet at the same time, the war experience of many soldiers and civilians alike had produced widespread disillusionment with these very same ideas of religious patriotism and sacrifice cherished by the Finnish Establishment. The contrast between the zeal to conquer 'Greater Finland' in 1941–42 – not uncommon among many officers and army chaplains – and the harsh realities of the front had led many soldiers to experience the

²⁰ Tepora, 'Redirecting Violence', 165; Kormano, 'Amputoidun maan pirstoutuneet puut', 280–1; Peltonen, *Muistin paikat*, 226–8, 258.

war as a shipwreck of earlier values and politics.²¹ There was clearly a great need for a Finnish war narrative which would give voice to ordinary soldiers and which would thus reinterpret the meaning and nature of the war from a new angle.

This is the mental background for the phenomenal success of Väinö Linna's novel *Tuntematon sotilas* ('The Unknown Soldier', 1954). Linna (1920–1992) had served in the Continuation War as a non-commissioned officer in a machine-gun company. His book was not the first Finnish war novel in the post-war era, but very soon it became the most influential one, an unavoidable point of comparison and reference for all the others. Part of its success is explained by Edvin Laine's motion picture of the novel; it was filmed soon after the book was published in 1955, and it reached vast audiences. Together, the novel and the film marked a turning point in the Finnish memory culture of the war: many earlier taboos were openly discussed and front-line soldiers were given human faces instead of idealised images, which seemed to be much more realistic and acceptable to the soldiers themselves.

One can see *The Unknown Soldier* as a decisive rupture in depicting Finnish soldiers and the whole Finnish nation. The old national romantic myth of soldiers' selfless sacrifice for the nation, dating from the nineteenth century and common in the wartime rhetoric, was replaced by the reckless, reluctant and cursing group of soldiers – many of whom then died in utter vain.²² Correspondingly, Linna represented a counter image for the paternal ideal of the Finnish elite: many of his officers are depicted as repulsively militant or as plain foolish. It is not surprising that some of the most heated protest against the novel arose among the Finnish officer corps.²³

Nevertheless, in retrospect, the lasting meaning of *The Unknown Soldier* for the Finnish memory culture lies not in its tearing down of the myths of war, but in its ability to construct new meanings, even new myths. First of all, by showing the brutality of war and the emptiness of high-minded patriotic pathos, Linna emphasised the human heroism of the common soldiers in the midst of violent circumstances. His boyish

²¹ This is best demonstrated by the landslide victory of the people's democrats in the first post-war elections in March 1945. The Finnish People's Democratic League, including the Communist Party candidates, received 23.5 % of the vote and became the second largest party after the Social Democratic Party.

²² Niemi, *Viime sotien kirjat*, 125–33; cf. Jokinen, 'Myytti sodan palveluksessa', 141–3.

²³ Varpio, *Väinö Linnan elämä*, 352–5.

conscripts grew into men, who, in the end, did their best and carried the true burden of the war. In this respect Linna was indebted to Erich Maria Remarque, whose *Im Westen nichts Neues* was among his key inspirations. The underlying current in both novels was to describe the wretchedness of war and, at the same time, to paint a highly sympathetic picture of the front-line soldiers' mutual solidarity and fundamental 'purity'. Thus, for the majority of Finnish war veterans Linna created a positive and seemingly realistic gallery of figures to identify with. In the end, he did not question the core of the war's national importance, either. As the last pages of the novel make clear, the Continuation War did end in defeat in 1944, but Finland remained independent thanks to the soldiers at the front.²⁴

The second important influence of Linna's work, related to the theme of brotherhood-in-arms, was the inclusion of the Reds and the working class in the narrative of the war. A central protagonist in *The Unknown Soldier*, Lieutenant Vilho Koskela, who dies in the last stages of the war, is still today a mythic figure for a stereotypic understanding of Finnish masculinity. This mythic dimension of Koskela's personality was Linna's intention, too. As a contrast to most of the other officers, Linna wanted to create a character who personified 'all the good qualities he saw in Finnish people': a sense of responsibility, down-to-earth clear-mindedness and unpretentious bravery.²⁵ Thus, it is even more remarkable that Koskela was described as coming from a modest social background of tenant farmers, and that his young uncles serving in the Red Guards had been executed by the White troops in 1918. Another important figure in the novel, non-commissioned officer Lahtinen, was a communist from a very poor single-mother family. He, too, dies heroically when refusing to leave his position, thus protecting the retreat of others. In Linna's narrative, Koskela and Lahtinen become martyrs who redeem a place for the working class and the socialists in the national

²⁴ Niemi, *Viime sotien kirjat*, 130–3; Varpio, *Väinö Linnan elämä*, 271, 301–17, 375; this national meaning of the war is emphasised in Edvin Laine's film, which ends with Finnish soldiers burying their comrade, with the *Finlandia* hymn by Jean Sibelius playing in the background. According to Yrjö Varpio and contrary to popular beliefs, Linna himself accepted this idea and it was not 'a nationalistic retouch' of his novel by Laine.

²⁵ Varpio, *Väinö Linnan elämä*, 340; Raittila, 'Jätkäpojan linja', 10–1.

collective and who, indeed, redeem national independence from the hands of the fanciful 'Greater Finland' idealists and militarists.

Linna was very aware of his attack against the nationalist interpretation of the war, and he received his share of criticism in the literary war that ensued. One of the bitterest responses was caused by the claim that Linna's novel disgraced the members of the women's Lotta Svärd organisation. Lotta Svärd was the women's national defence organisation, banned in 1944, which had a crucial role, for instance, in the wartime army's supply and medical services. Furthermore, the organisation and its members also had a strong symbolic meaning as the model examples of Finnish womanhood and as the bearers of national decency and moral purity. Tiina Kinnunen has written a thorough analysis of this Lotta-debate sparked off by Linna: in *The Unknown Soldier*, Linna chose a 'spoiled' member of the Lotta Svärd as his instrument to depict the moral bankruptcy of national romantic ideals. Whether this was Linna's conscious intention or not, he managed to hit a sensitive spot in the nationalist understanding of the war, in which the image of *lotta* was tightly connected to the Finnish national pride. As Kinnunen has shown, many former *lottas* experienced Linna's promiscuous depiction of them as a symbolic rape.²⁶

Despite these controversies, in the course of time *The Unknown Soldier* has become the canonised version of the Finnish soldiers' war experience. Today, as a collective ritual, Edvin Laine's film of the novel is shown on television every Independence Day.²⁷ The strength of Linna's narrative lies in its seeming realism and in its ability to suit such different purposes, from patriotism to pacifism. One peculiar feature of the novel is that it has blurred the boundary of history and fiction. It has been commonplace to read *The Unknown Soldier* as a war documentary or as a history book rather than as a work of art. Many of the book's events and characters have made their way into 'true' war reminiscences – indeed, in his later days Linna himself seemed to confuse his own real war experiences with the fiction he had created.

²⁶ Kinnunen, 'Gender and Politics', 193–5.

²⁷ In 1985, director Rauni Mollberg filmed a new version of *The Unknown Soldier*, the spirit of which is much more strongly anti-war, and which emphasises the futility of soldiers' sacrifices. It is telling that this film is rarely shown on television, and the Independence Day spectacle is reserved for Edvin Laine's less violent and more patriotic version.

Thus, *The Unknown Soldier* has started to live a life of its own, and, as an epic tale of Finnish men at war, it has itself become a myth-building novel; some of Linna's most popular characters are actually classic war heroes, who single-handedly destroy enemy tanks and whole platoons.²⁸ Linna's original intentions of stripping the war of its glory and his aim of criticising the nationalistic pathos are already largely forgotten. Recently, Pauli Kettunen has written about *The Unknown Soldier* in the modern era of capitalist meritocracy: business consultants boosting corporate and national efficiency are using Linna's fictional characters as schoolbook examples of behaviour and leadership under pressure. Quite an ironic turn for a book that started its career as a critique of a nation demanding sacrifices and as a defence of the common man.²⁹

4. 'Finlandisation', youth radicalism and veteran cultures in the 1960s and 1970s

The official Finnish post-war foreign policy took a path that cherished warm relations with the Soviet Union more strongly than other Western European states. A personification of this trend was President Urho Kekkonen, ruling from 1956 to 1982, and in the heyday of this policy in the 1970s it became to be known abroad as 'finlandisation'. The term refers to a political practice which adopted the rhetoric of friendly coexistence between Finland and the Soviet Union as the official truth of past and present, and by which Finnish politicians sought to appease and please their Soviet colleagues. It also meant political self-censorship inside Finland and, for instance, emphasising the role of Lenin in 'giving' Finland its independence in 1917. In short, finlandisation was a milder Finnish version of the political dogma and mantra which dominated in the Central and Eastern European people's democracies. What made finlandisation special was that it took place in a democratic, Western-oriented society. Today this trend, most powerful in the 1970s, is an easy target for moralising and ridicule – yet, many contemporary witnesses have explained finlandisation as the necessary political realism of the time.

The atmosphere of finlandisation had an effect on the Finnish memory culture of the war, at least on the official level. Certain topics and memories were considered

²⁸ Varpio, *Väinö Linnan elämä*, 294, 640–6; on the myth of war experience and Finnish masculinity, see Ahlbäck and Kivimäki, 'Masculinities at War', 126–7.

²⁹ Kettunen, 'Tuntematon sotilas', 119.

politically ‘unpleasant’ and were not willingly recognised. They included, for instance, the treatment of Finnish POWs in Soviet captivity, the civilian victims of the Soviet bombing raids and partisan attacks and, in general, the true nature of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the aggressive Soviet invasion, which started the Winter War in November 1939.³⁰ An often-cited record low point of finlandisation is credited to a Centre Party politician (and war veteran) Eino Uusitalo, who expressed a wish to make the anniversary of the end of the Continuation War a new Finnish independence day, as it marked a turn to peaceful Soviet-Finnish relations. What is often forgotten is that this initiative raised angry response, and Uusitalo soon apologised for his carelessness – finlandisation had its limits, too.³¹ For many Finns, this day meant something quite different: a bitter experience of war and personal losses, an unjust national defeat by the Stalinist regime or losing their homes in the territories annexed by the Soviet Union.

It is not surprising that many war veterans experienced the 1960s and the 1970s as a humiliation of their wartime efforts.³² Besides the foreign political tiptoeing, this experience was deepened by the seeming ingratitude shown by the contemporary youth, and this generational conflict was probably experienced much more personally and painfully than the high-level political finlandisation.³³ Marja Tuominen has written a history of Finnish youth radicalism and the underground art movement in the 1960s. Her analysis of the baby boomers’ revolt against the conservative values of their parents is well articulated. To gain lasting meaning and compensation for their losses and hardships in 1939–45, many of the wartime generation delegated to their children the massive task of cherishing this patriotic heritage. Instead of accepting this legacy, a large number of the baby boomers challenged their parents’ generational hegemony and refused to carry on the heritage of ‘Home, Religion and Fatherland’, the common crystallisation of traditional Finnish conservative patriotism.³⁴ This revolt, of course,

³⁰ See Kinnunen and Jokisipilä, ‘Shifting Images’, 447–8.

³¹ Vihavainen, *Kansakunta rähmälläin*, 222–5.

³² See, e.g., Juujärvi, Pessa and Salin, *Sotiemme veteraanien identiteetti*, 26–32, 75–9.

³³ Cf. Kinnunen and Jokisipilä, ‘Shifting Images’, 446–50.

³⁴ Tuominen, ‘*Me kaikki ollaan sotilaitten lapsia*’, 73–8, 125–8, 388; **on the youth revolt as a symbolic patricide, see also Siltala, ‘Isien teot, Hamletin sanat’**. At the same time in the 1960s, the above-mentioned Lotta-debate was also revisited, as the

was not a uniquely Finnish case, but part of the Western phenomenon of the '68ers and the new youth culture.³⁵ A special feature of Finnish youth radicalism, however, was that in the 1970s so many of its prominent figures joined the hardcore minority wing of the Finnish Communist Party. All in all, many war veterans did sense a lack of respect and even open hostility in the public atmosphere of finlandisation and youth radicalism.³⁶ A common anecdote among the veterans is that their demands for better recognition and social benefits were met with an unfriendly comment: 'Well, why did you go to war in the first place?'³⁷

Nevertheless, although the above-mentioned tendencies certainly existed, in my opinion they have also been exaggerated and politicised in the present-day trend of 'neo-patriotism'.³⁸ This issue is still to be studied in detail, but it has become a sort of popular cliché to define the 1960s and 1970s as a period of total humiliation of 'patriotic values' in general, and of the war veterans in particular. Many historical facts speak to the contrary. It was also during this time that war veterans themselves played an active and strong role in Finnish politics, and that veterans' social benefits, pensions and physical rehabilitation system were established. It is true that on the highest state level the wars of 1939–45 were commemorated cautiously. Yet the membership in war veteran organisations boomed in the 1960s and reached its peak in the early 1980s: official and unofficial veteran reunions to commemorate the war and to recall past memories took place constantly.³⁹ The Finnish youth activists were certainly loud and visible with their new radical opinions, but in the bigger picture they were always a small minority among their own generation. Furthermore, instead of focusing on the history-political debates on Finland in the Second World War or on blaming the war veterans, they had more topical questions on their agenda: the Vietnam War, third world issues, the Prague Spring, pacifism and the many social, political and cultural topics in

novel *Sissiluutnantti* (1963) by Paavo Rintala again raised questions of *lottas* reputation and honour; Kinnunen, 'Gender and Politics', 193–5.

³⁵ See, e.g., Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*.

³⁶ Sulamaa, "'Himmetä ei muistot koskaan saa'", 297–311.

³⁷ Ukkola, *Sodan jälkeen*, 35.

³⁸ On the term 'neo-patriotism' in this context, see Vares, 'Kuitenkin me voitimme!'.

³⁹ Sulamaa, *Veteraania ei jätetä*, 43–63; Tuomisto, *Etulinjassa*, 100–40.

the Finnish society of the 1960s and 1970s. Many of the ‘radicals’ were not political at all, but rather lifestyle hippies, rockers and popsters.⁴⁰

One important arena for war veterans’ reminiscences was the monthly magazine *Kansa taisteli* (‘The People Fought’), a Finnish version of the German *Landserheft*. Published from 1957 until 1986 with a top circulation of 70,000 copies, the magazine was a major effort to uphold the veteran culture. It was also an instrument to shape a ‘correct’ version of war memories. With an editorial staff of many high-ranking wartime officers, the magazine was an explicitly apolitical publication for ‘the common Finnish front soldier’, but its implicit policy was bound to a kind of matter-of-fact patriotism. It does not appear to have published texts openly criticising the wartime leadership or containing details that were embarrassing to the Finnish Army.⁴¹ With approximately 350 issues, 3500 articles and over 10,000 pages of rather spirited war reminiscences published between 1957–86,⁴² the voice of Finnish war veterans can hardly be described as totally silenced. The same can be said on the basis of war literature, which has remained one of the most bestselling genres on the Finnish book market from the 1950s.⁴³ The continuous popularity of war novels, although of course not exclusively written by veterans, tells of a lasting interest in veterans’ experiences – and often also of a lasting admiration of them. Thus, the extent of the 1960s and 1970s challenging radicalism regarding the memory culture of the war should be viewed critically.

One more remark must be made in this respect. Today, the ‘national heritage’ of the war veterans is commonly understood as a monolithic set of ‘patriotic values’ emphasising conservatism, national defence and religion – values which were considered discredited in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet it seems that the wartime generation of Finns, including the war veterans, has been among the most left-leaning generations

⁴⁰ Miettunen, *Menneisyys ja historiakuva*, passim.

⁴¹ Apparently, the Soviet authorities considered the magazine as ‘revanchist’, but this did not disturb its publication: Rautkallio, ‘Politik und Volk’, 206.

⁴² Sulamaa, ‘Himmetä ei muistot koskaan saa’, 302–3; editorial, *Kansa taisteli*, 5/1986, 147.

⁴³ On the Finnish readership of war literature until the end of 1980s, Niemi, *Viime sotien kirjat*, 194–203.

in Finnish history.⁴⁴ The veterans were not a united group with the same values and attitudes; instead, they were often divided politically and ideologically. Consequently, because they were unable to organise themselves into one national organisation, two competing veteran unions emerged. One of the most important divisive factors was the different meaning given to the war experience and its memory: the more ‘conservative’ of the unions emphasised national unity and was more popular among the officers, whereas the more ‘centrist’ of the unions wished to reserve veteran status for only the real front-line soldiers, not those on the home front or staff officers.⁴⁵ **Regarding the Finnish foreign policy in the 1970s, now often dismissed as shameful ‘finlandization’, many of its central agents were actually war veterans, who had personally experienced the hardships of war at the front and took the key lesson of 1941–44 to be the primacy of friendly relations with Finland’s mighty eastern neighbour.**⁴⁶

It is evident that there was a real generational value conflict in Finland in the 1960s and 1970s, but it would be wrong to simplify it as a political conflict between the ‘right-wing’ wartime generation and the ‘left-wing’ baby boomers.⁴⁷ In recent

⁴⁴ From 1945 until the 1970s, the social democrats and the people’s democrats gained about 45 % of the vote in national elections; today, the comparable share of the left is less than 30 %.

⁴⁵ A division into ‘bourgeois’ and ‘working-class’ unions would only be true as a general characterisation. In practice, both unions tended to lean towards the centre and the local differences between the unions were often quite unclear and complicated, cf. Sulamaa, *Veteraania ei jätetä*, 40–2, 191–9; Tuomisto, *Etulinjassa*, 83–8, 113–7.

⁴⁶ **These key war veteran figures close to President Kekkonen and active in the Finnish foreign policy of the 1970s included, for instance, long-time prime and foreign minister Ahti Karjalainen, two-time prime minister and later president Mauno Koivisto, and foreign minister (albeit rather shortly) Väinö Leskinen.**

⁴⁷ The complexity of the issue can be illustrated by the fact that probably the two most despised Finnish politicians among the hardcore communist youth radicals of the 1970s were indeed war veterans: Aarne Saarinen and Ele Alenius, but Saarinen also happened to be the chairman of the Finnish Communist Party and Alenius the leader of the people’s democrats. **Furthermore, Eino S. Repo, the head of the Finnish**

interviews, many of the war veterans have considered the 1960s and 1970s as the *general* low point of their societal esteem; yet at the same the most veterans have told that *personally* they have never experienced any lack of appreciation.⁴⁸

5. Memories of the German *Waffenbruderschaft*, the Lapland War and the Holocaust

The most heated of Finnish history debates has centred on the political and military relationship between Germany and Finland before and during the Continuation War of 1941–44. Did Finland fight a separate war of its own against the Soviet Union only as a *Waffenbruder* of Germany or was Finland allied to Germany and closely bound to Germany's war aims in the East? Such a debate may seem awkward to a foreign observer. Even though there was no official political alliance between Finland and Germany, the Finnish leadership was well informed of the planning of Operation Barbarossa; the Finnish Army had an active role in the offensive of 1941; Finland in 1941–44 was fully dependent on German economic support and a large German army of over 200,000 soldiers was deployed in Northern Finland. The key motive of the debate, however, has been to distance wartime Finland from national socialist Germany as far as possible and to see the Continuation War as an understandable, legitimate *continuation* of 'Finland's own' Winter War. Nevertheless, historians today have largely dismissed this thesis of a separate war.⁴⁹

Despite or because of this tendency to emphasise Finnish political and military autonomy in contrast to the 'German satellites', one exceptional feature in the Finnish memory culture of the war has been the relatively neutral or even positive role given to Germans. This does not mean that the crimes of national socialist Germany would be ignored in Finland. It is more appropriate to say that Finns tend to make a somewhat hypocritical difference between 'the good Germans' fighting alongside the Finnish

Broadcasting Company in 1960s and allegedly responsible for its 'radicalization', was a front-line officer.

⁴⁸ Juujärvi, Pessa and Salin, *Sotiemme veteraanien identiteetti*, 84–6.

⁴⁹ Jokisipilä, "Kappas vaan, saksalaisia"; this debate is so long-lasting and nuanced that it is not fruitful to describe it here in detail – for summaries in German and English, see Kinnunen, 'Finnische Kriegserinnerung'; Meinander, 'A Separate Story'; Jokisipilä, 'Finnish History Culture'; Kivimäki, 'Three Wars and Their Epitaphs'.

Army in the North and ‘the evil Nazis’ responsible for crimes elsewhere. Regarding the Finnish war experience this distinction is not completely ahistorical: as Marianne Junila has shown in her dissertation, German troops deployed in Northern Finland did indeed behave well towards the Finnish population and the German military officials stressed their role as equal *Waffenbrüder*, not as occupiers. Accordingly, civilians in Northern Finland had a rather positive image of the German soldiers. The commander of the German forces in Finland, General Eduard Dietl, has even become a kind of popular model for ‘the good German’ among many northern Finns.⁵⁰ Dietl, who was also a dedicated member of the NSDAP, died in a plane crash in June 1944, and was succeeded by General Lothar Rendulic.

Another reason for the Germans’ relatively good reputation in Finland is the experiences of Finnish soldiers in the summer of 1944. The German emergency deliveries of anti-tank weapons, assault guns, air support, troops and ammunition were important, if not crucial, in halting the Soviet offensive in June and July 1944.⁵¹ Whatever their political stand or attitude towards Germans in general, a large number of Finnish soldiers experienced German military support concretely and positively. German tourists visiting Finland may be puzzled by the positive attitude that is still occasionally shown because of this wartime help – not a common German experience in other European countries.

Consequently, the Lapland War of 1944–45 to drive out the German troops in Northern Finland remains a marginal and controversial issue in the Finnish memory culture of the war. It does not have the same collective meaning in ‘our national struggle for survival’ as the wars against the Soviet Union, and in the Great Story of the war, it exists as a sub-plot or as a curious endnote. Certainly, the German scorched earth tactics and industrious mine laying produced deep bitterness among many Finns. Nevertheless, it is telling that a common Finnish perception of the Lapland War blames ‘the bad Nazi’, General Rendulic, and small bands of SS-units for the worst devastations, whereas ‘good’ Dietl and ‘the real *Waffenbrüder*’ are spared of such responsibility. Historically, this is inaccurate.⁵²

⁵⁰ Junila, *Kotirintaman aseveljeyttä*, 31–2, 82, 136–46, 286–304.

⁵¹ Jokisipilä, *Aseveljiä vai liittolaisia*, 361–6.

⁵² Ahto, *Aseveljet vastakkain*, 67, 215–26; Junila, *Kotirintaman aseveljeyttä*, 62–3, 82.

The triviality of the Lapland War is, of course, partly explained by its short duration and the low number of casualties when compared to the Winter War and the Continuation War. Yet there is also something tragic in the common Finnish understanding of the Lapland War in the sense that the war is understood as an unnecessary, regrettable conflict between old friends.⁵³ There is no real anti-fascist tradition of commemorating the wars in Finland – unlike, for instance, in Italy.⁵⁴ In the 1980s, President Mauno Koivisto gave a speech in which he linked the Lapland War to the wider European context of the struggle against fascism during the Second World War. The initiative was met with little response.⁵⁵

Related to the above-mentioned themes, the Holocaust also has an exceptional place in the Finnish memory culture. The historicity and the terrible scale of the Holocaust are not denied in Finland – it has a central place, also in the mainstream Finnish view of the Second World War in Europe. Nevertheless, it is seen as a phenomenon that took place outside Finland, and which is thus not directly linked to the Finnish history of 1939–45. Finnish Jews have always been a very small minority; there have been no pogroms nor has there been widespread anti-Semitism in Finland. In 1942, on the initiative of the Finnish security police, a total of eight emigrant Jews were handed over to the Germans. This produced protest among leading politicians, and further deportations were forbidden. In one of the odd twists of the Second World War, during the Continuation War, Finnish Jews found themselves fighting side by side with Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union.⁵⁶

⁵³ As described in the above-referred title of Sampo Ahto's history of the Lapland War, *Aseveljet vastakkain*, which translates as 'brothers-in-arms against each other'.

⁵⁴ This is also true regarding the wartime resistance movement: during the Continuation War, a few Finnish communists did organise some minor sabotages, but they remained practically irrelevant.

⁵⁵ Vares, 'Kuitenkin me voitimme', 184.

⁵⁶ Rautkallio, 'Politik und Volk', 214–7. Some Finnish Jews who served in contact with German troops were even awarded the Iron Cross, and the German military was surprised to learn that the Finnish Army in Eastern Karelia had established a field synagogue for its Jewish soldiers. – For an updated view on the issue, see Holmila, 'Finland and the Holocaust'.

In recent research, the nearly spotless Finnish past regarding the Holocaust has been partly compromised. Oula Silvennoinen's dissertation on the relations of Finnish and German security officials has shown that Finns cooperated closely with the German security police in Northern Finland, and that about 500 Soviet communist prisoners-of-war were handed over to the Germans, some of them Jews.⁵⁷ It is still too early to say whether these findings will have an effect on the Finnish memory culture of the war. The recent Finnish understanding of the Holocaust in its relation to Finland's own history of 1939–45 is well described by Petri J. Raivo as 'oblivion without guilt'.⁵⁸

6. Victory, after all: Neo-patriotic memory trends in the 1990s

The pressure of finlandisation was most intensive in the 1970s, and the mid-1980s policies of Glasnost and Perestroika in the Soviet Union eased the political and cultural atmosphere in Finland as well. Even more importantly, any domestic threat of coup organized by the Finnish communists had practically disappeared; the popular support for people's democrats and communists had declined, **they had mostly abandoned the revolutionary road to power** and their own political divisions and intrigues burdened them.⁵⁹ Although the 1980s saw a critical turn in the Finnish historiography of war, bringing new focus on issues such as the Finnish occupation policies in the Soviet Eastern Karelia and the Finnish-German cooperation in 1941–44,⁶⁰ it seems that in the general memory culture of the war the formerly influential leftist and communist counter-narratives were fading away, whereas the more patriotic version of the wars of 1939–44 was passed to new generations of Finns. President Koivisto, a social democrat elected in 1982, was himself a war veteran and he played an important role in bringing a new focus on the veterans and their social esteem. For the first time, war veterans were given a strong symbolic tribute on the highest official level. From 1987 onwards, National Veterans' Day has been celebrated annually.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Silvennoinen, *Salaiset aseveljet*.

⁵⁸ Raivo, 'Oblivion Without Guilt'.

⁵⁹ Cf. Meinander, 'A Separate Story?', 61–7.

⁶⁰ Kivimäki, 'Three Wars and Their Epitaphs', 16–20.

⁶¹ Sulamaa, *Veteraania ei jätetä*, 74–7.

One culmination point for this new Finnish memory culture of the war was the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of the Winter War in 1989. During the post-war decades, the memory culture had been dominated by the Continuation War and especially by its shocking, if not traumatic, last summer and autumn of 1944. The ‘come-back’ of the Winter War in the collective commemorations in 1989 changed the emphasis from the political and moral dilemmas linked with 1941–44 to the national unity and purity of 1939–40. The epic film *Winter War* by director Pekka Parikka premiered on 30 November 1989 and was shown as a TV-series in 1991; both versions gained vast audiences. Finally, the collapse of the Soviet Union made Finland ‘the last man standing’ and released the final barriers from openly celebrating the Second World War as a victory for Finnish independence. In this neo-patriotic trend, the Continuation War was also reinterpreted as a defensive victory, and Finland in 1939–45 could be simultaneously seen as an innocent victim and a victorious survivor of the Second World War.⁶² The nation was re-imagined from this perspective. This can be seen in the boom in war memorials: according to a calculation in 2006, half of the memorials outside Hero’s Cemeteries have been erected after 1975 and about one-third between 1985–95.⁶³

One of the rare explicit studies on the popular meaning of history for Finns is Sirkka Ahonen’s research on the historical basis of identity for Finnish youth in the 1990s. Ahonen’s results are clear: the Finnish youth of the 1990s empathised strongly with the wars of 1939–44 and with their ‘patriotic heritage’; the meaning of the Civil War of 1918 had become practically irrelevant. The most important arenas of the history culture were war movies and Väinö Linna’s *The Unknown Soldier*, but the personal stories of grandparents were also very influential. In the end, the official ‘omission’ of war during the period of finlandisation had not had a lasting effect – in family histories, the war stories and often their patriotic connotations had continued to flourish. In the midst of the deep economic recession and rapid social, cultural and political changes of the 1990s, wartime history offered a narrative of national survival and a basis for fixed national identities. Finnish youth identified strongly with ‘the

⁶² Vares, ‘Kuitenkin me voitimme’, 184–5; Kinnunen, ‘Finnische Kriegserinnerung’, 350–3, 360–5.

⁶³ Raivo, “‘This is where they fought’”, 158.

national project', which was closely linked to the heritage of war and which seemed to give a sense of security and continuity.⁶⁴

Today, the Finnish war veterans of 1939–45 are widely understood as honorary citizens and the greatest generation of Finns. Among veterans, this continuity in cherishing their wartime efforts may have contributed to a relatively low level of post-traumatic stress disorder.⁶⁵ The earlier schisms between the two war veteran unions, partly of a political nature, have now been pushed aside, as the organisations focus more and more on leaving a lasting testament of the memory of the war to future generations. For this purpose, a large heritage foundation has been established to 'cherish the traditions of Finland's wars 1939–45 and their veterans'.⁶⁶ What exactly is understood as such a heritage is yet to be seen; nevertheless, the project demonstrates how important the Second World War still is for Finnish national identities.

In addition to the war veterans, efforts have been made to vindicate the memory of those Finnish wartime politicians who were sentenced to prison in the War Guilt Trials of 1945–46. Also, the national defence organisations banned in 1944, most importantly the Civil Guards and the Lotta Svärd organisation, have gained new, 'rehabilitating' attention. If the official trend in remembering the wars especially in the 1970s often went far to appease the Soviet view, the public atmosphere of the 1990s occasionally went to the other extreme in whitewashing the memory of 1939–45 of any 'unpatriotic' or troublesome features and in returning to the uncompromising nationalist wartime rhetoric.

Still the last-minute homage paid to the aging wartime generation from the 1980s onwards has been a very understandable phenomenon. Nevertheless, it seems that this tribute is also linked to a new politicisation of the memory culture of the war, which is further connected to the current forms of Finnish nationalism and, in its extreme, to open chauvinism and racism. I am referring here to a present *Zeitgeist* which is as yet difficult to crystallise into a simple footnote or conclusion; it is vivid in Internet chat rooms, in daily political discussions and in some populist movements and activities, and often connected to the question of immigration politics and national identity. So far, the

⁶⁴ Ahonen, *Historiaton sukupolvi?*, 67–8, 73–89, 120–32, 169–73.

⁶⁵ Hautamäki and Coleman, 'Explanation for low prevalence of PTSD'.

⁶⁶ For the project's website, see <http://www.tammenlehva.fi> (only available in Finnish and Swedish).

European trend of emerging extreme right-wing groups has been a rather marginal phenomenon in Finland, but some local exceptions include violent skinhead sub-cultures. More importantly, in recent years the heritage of war and war veterans has been used to argue against any form of ‘multiculturalism’ and for the ‘defence’ of an exclusively ‘Finnish’ national identity and pride.⁶⁷

This is a messy field of parallel and entangled trends, and any simple causality between the memory culture of the war and contemporary political and cultural discussions is difficult to construct. Suffice it to say that along with traditional Finnish patriotism and the celebration of classic national champions such as Marshal Mannerheim and General Adolf Ehrnrooth in public commemorations, a more aggressive war hero cult developed in the 1990s. The most prominent cult figure was the hard and militant Mannerheim Cross bearer, Captain Lauri Törni, who had also served in Waffen-SS and was later a Green Beret officer in the US Army, killed in action in Vietnam in 1965. Törni was a tough professional soldier with mercenary-style qualities. He was a devoted anti-communist, who escaped to Germany after the Finnish armistice in the autumn of 1944. He was not unknown in pre-1990 Finland, but in the neo-patriotic boom of the 1990s he was modelled into a new kind of martial war hero, very different from the anti-militarist soldiers of Väinö Linna. A look at the national library catalogue gives support to the cult of Törni. Before 1990, two books had been written on him, one in 1975 and one in 1988; after 1990, at least nine more have appeared in several editions, plus two in which Törni’s role is prominent.

Hardening attitudes and rising militarism in the memory culture of the war are not, of course, the only explanations for such popularity. It is justifiable to say that to a large extent in today’s Finland the wars of 1939–45 have also become pure entertainment devoid of any heavy political and ideological burdens. Seventy years after the first shots were fired, fewer and fewer Finns have any direct personal memory of the war. The distance in time has made it easier to popularise it in a more relaxed fashion and, indeed, to enjoy it as adventure fiction. In addition to movies and novels, the

⁶⁷ **In the recent national elections in 2011, the populist right-wing party Perussuomalaiset (‘True Finns’, as they have chosen to be called in English) got a landslide victory of 19 % of the votes. The connection of the present Finnish memory culture of war to the growing populist right-wing sentiment would definitely require a study of its own.**

Finnish history in the Second World War has inspired comic books, games, trivia and role-playing. War tourism has been a growing industry: battle sites of 1939–45, both in Finland and Russia, are visited by busloads, and various tourist attractions are designed on the theme of war.⁶⁸ The wish to pay tribute to the past wartime efforts is one explanation for this interest; another is mere curiosity and entertainment.

7. Concluding remarks: Obsessed with war?

As we have seen, in present-day Finland the memory of the Second World War has generally positive connotations. It is bound to the popular Finnish understanding of national identity and pride, independence and unity. In this ironic way the former adversaries, Finland and Russia, are similar; in both countries the Second World War is the great patriotic war with lasting meaning and relevance. This may be about to change in Finland in the sense that the widening time gap, the social transformation towards a culturally heterogenic society and globalisation in politics and the media will make the memory of the war irrelevant for future identities or, at best, a curious relic of the past.⁶⁹ For a Western country inside the European Union, where there is a strong attempt to construct a collective European historical identity closely linked to the memory of the Holocaust, it is quite a challenge to cherish the memory of a war which was largely fought side by side with Nazi Germany.

In November 2007, a new version of *The Unknown Soldier* premiered at the Finnish National Theatre. Directed by Kristian Smeds, the play was aimed at the Finnish consensus of cherishing the war's patriotic heritage. It became a major cultural event and raised wide public discussion. In the final scene, Finland was declared dead, as a collection of national icons from General Ehrnrooth to the Moomin trolls were shot on the screen. The unknown soldiers had done their share in constructing Finnish self-understanding and identity in the long post-war period; now the time was over for such an integrated, homogenous national culture and society. The Finnish Great Story had been built on the war experience, but in the present era of global capitalism, the foundations of this national solidarity had become obsolete. It might be symptomatic of a new turn in remembering and discussing the wars that despite some angry comments

⁶⁸ Raivo, 'This is where they fought', 159–63.

⁶⁹ Meinander, *Suomi 1944*, 395–8.

of ‘mocking the war veterans’, Smeds’s critical interpretation received mainly a positive reception.

But both nationalism and the memory of the war with its mythic qualities have proved to be much more resilient factors than has been expected. It may well be that it is too early a prognosis to label the memory of 1939–45 as past history for the Finns of the twenty-first century. In November 2009, the 70th anniversary of the Winter War was celebrated with the usual cavalcade of patriotic commemorations. The newspaper *Aamulehti* repeated the same Gallup on Finnish attitudes towards the Winter War that it had done in 1989. In 20 years, the memory of the Winter War had become even more important for the Finns, and especially for the youth, who considered cherishing the memory of the war most crucial.⁷⁰ Yet at the same time, the Finnish public debates on the wartime past have become growingly grey-shaded so that more and more attention has been paid to the many morally troublesome features of 1939–45; a shift, which Henrik Meinander has called the Finnish version of the moral turn in the European war narratives.⁷¹ Pilvi Torsti, who leads the research project ‘Historical Consciousness in Finland’, has recently emphasized that the contemporary Finnish understanding of the Second World War is more fragmented and nuanced than any stereotypic national war narrative.⁷² Thus, at the moment, two strong tendencies in the Finnish memory culture of the war exist simultaneously: the ‘critical’ and the ‘patriotic’ perspectives. In both, the wars of 1939–45 remain a strong cultural resource, the different interpretations of which serve as instruments in debating and defining the self-image and identities of Finns. Elderly war veterans, the youngest of them born in 1926, have a less and less prominent personal role in these reinterpretations.

The present Finnish memory trends regarding the Second World War are connected to two wider phenomena in the European context of remembering war. First, especially in Western Europe, there is the trend of critically reassessing the wartime past from the moral viewpoint emphasizing human suffering, genocide and the European responsibility to remember the victims of the Holocaust and Nazism.⁷³ Even though I would argue that this current in the European war narratives has had only

⁷⁰ *Aamulehti*, 28 November 2009.

⁷¹ Meinander, ‘A Separate Story?’, 71–4.

⁷² Torsti, ‘Suomalaisten moniulotteiset sotakuvat’.

⁷³ Cf. Stråth, ‘Nordic Foundation Myths’, 164–8.

limited effect on the Finnish memory culture of the war at large, it is nevertheless visible in the current Finnish publicity regarding the memory of the Second World War.⁷⁴ Second, in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the issues of Holocaust and Nazism have been overshadowed by the experiences of Stalinism, Soviet occupation and domestic communist regimes. Against this background there is a continued tendency to uphold the patriotic heritage of the war, to ‘rehabilitate’ the wartime national leaders and figures and to emphasize the victimhood of the small and middle-sized countries between the totalitarian regimes of Hitler and Stalin.⁷⁵

In its most poignant form this trend is often linked with the emerging nationalist and right-wing attitudes. Deemed an ideology of the past in the 1970s and 1980s, nationalism with its many old and new variations has strongly revived in post-Cold War Europe. In the Finnish case the memory culture of 1939–45 has served to funnel patriotic and outright nationalist sentiments into concrete practices of commemoration, whereby the Finnish nation has been seen as the lonely victim of the Second World War; unified and heroic, but suffering from great historical injustice. Clearly, the destabilisation of peoples’ personal and collective identities together with their economic and social insecurities in the era of globalisation have made backward-looking identity politics a tempting option – and an instrument for individuals and groups keen to capitalise upon the situation. **A real danger in the current Finnish memory politics of war lies in deliberate oversimplification of the wartime past, whereby the war generation and its sacrifices are consigned with only monolithically conservative and even militantly nationalist meanings. According to this storyline, these ‘true’ values of the war generation were attacked and tarnished by the ‘radical, leftist’ baby boomers and by the politics of finlandisation in the 1960s and 1970s. As in most myths, there is some factual, experiential basis to such claims, but as I hope this article has shown, as a generalised and exclusive interpretation of history it is indeed a myth: historically false; doing injustice to the great variety of individual experiences, opinions and values among the men**

⁷⁴ On the troubles of including this European memory trend into the Finnish memory culture, see Silvennoinen, ‘Still Under Examination’; Holmila, ‘Varieties of Silence’.

⁷⁵ See, e.g., Bucur, *Heroes and Victims*, passim; Ungváry, *The Siege of Budapest*, 357.

and women of the wartime generation; and reducing these old people, now largely unable to get their own voices heard, to instruments of various political agendas.⁷⁶

The mythical qualities of wartime sacrifices become visible in their usage to define ‘Finnishness’: whereas Väinö Linna in the 1950s used the front-line soldiers’ experiences and hardships to re-write the ‘Red’ working class back to the national collective, in today’s neo-patriotic memory culture the alleged values and attitudes of the wartime generation tend to be used to define exclusive Finnishness, the outsiders varyingly being immigrants, Swedish-speakers, ‘communists’, homosexuals and so on.⁷⁷ Yet it must be noted that for most Finns the present-day tribute paid to the war veterans and the whole war generation is not a political or even a ‘patriotic’ issue at all; it is rather related to the personal motivations of remembering and cherishing one’s own parents’ and grandparents’ generation now passing away.

In many ways, Finland was an exceptional case among the war-waging countries of the Second World War: a Nordic democracy taking part in the Operation Barbarossa; a defeated country, which avoided foreign occupation and large-scale civilian casualties; and finally a post-war Western society, which had perceived and experienced the Stalinist Soviet Union as a much greater evil than Hitler’s Germany, but which nevertheless developed a close and officially even cordial relation to its eastern neighbour. All these aspects influenced the Finnish war experiences and consequently the wartime memories. Just as the Finnish interpretations of the war’s outcome have oscillated between defeat and victory, the Finnish memory culture of the Second World War is situated somewhere between the Western and Eastern European war narratives

⁷⁶ **On the political uses of wartime history and memory, cf. Torsti, ‘Suomalaisten moniulotteiset sotakuvat’, 322–3.**

⁷⁷ **As the war veterans now have a special status as moral authorities, we have already seen individual veteran’s opinions or wholly imagined and generalised ‘veteran opinion’ mobilised to oppose a multitude of issues, such as contemporary art and theatre plays, the selling of land property to Russians, refugee and immigration policies, the compulsory teaching of Swedish language at schools and lately also gays dancing at the president’s annual Independence Day reception, just to name few examples. Furthermore, during the present economic crisis ‘the Spirit of the Winter War’ has been called forth to support national consensus at the face of economic austerity and budget cuts.**

with their many variations, thus demonstrating the challenge of constructing any all-European historical identity based on the years 1939–45.

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