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## **Political Taboos and National Trauma in Finland caused by the Civil War 1918**

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## **Introduction**

Soon after declaring independence in 1917, a civil war burst out in Finland. Although the war was relatively short, it was bloody and left bitter memories in many Finns' minds. Finally, at the end of the 1990s, the Finnish government founded a group of researchers to discover and publish information concerning those who died during and after the war. The reasons and means behind many deaths were still questionable. The research involves, in particular, those who died in different retaliatory measures.

Killing outside of actual battle and the use of unnecessary force and violence, in war, gnaw at the minds of people even decades afterwards. It may take a long time, but those deeds can be forgotten if the crimes are published and openly discussed in the society. The crimes of the losing side are always revealed, but the crimes of the winners are often "swept under the rug". Thus the hypothesis of this study is that it is only possible to heal the national trauma if the winners also admit their guilt and part in the war; in addition, the deeds must be published, along with the deeds of the losers.

For example, the mission of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu is to unite the nation after its cruel past. Those who committed political crimes during the earlier regime are guaranteed freedom of consequences if they confess their crimes and apologize to the ones their crimes affected (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2000). This practice seems first like a very easy way for the criminal to get away with the crimes without punishment, but in South Africa it is not. If the criminal publicly confesses the crimes and personally apologizes his/her crimes to the victims, it is considered a very strong sign of concession.

### **1. The Concept of Taboo**

Webster's New World College Dictionary defines taboo as "1) proscribed by society as improper or unacceptable: taboo words, 2) set apart as sacred; forbidden for general use; placed under a prohibition or bar. -n. 3) a prohibition or interdiction of something; exclusion from use or practice, 4) the system or practice of setting things apart as sacred or forbidden for general use, 5) exclusion from social relations; ostracism. -v.t. 6) to put under a taboo; prohibit or forbid, 7) to ostracize. [1770-80; < Tongan tapu or Fijian tabu]." (Agnes; Sparks 1999).

The term 'taboo' entered the English language and soon the whole western world when Captain James Cook introduced it after his visit to Tonga in 1771. The term is of Polynesian origin, and it meant originally the "prohibition of an action or the use of an object based on ritualistic distinctions of them either as being sacred and consecrated or as being dangerous, unclean, and accursed" (Encyclopædia Britannica Online). Taboos included prohibitions on various areas in the society, such as entering certain places, hunting or picking fruits at certain seasons, touching or talking to chiefs or certain other persons.

Generally, the prohibition inherent in a taboo contained the idea that breaking of taboo automatically causes some kind of trouble to the offender, for example, lack of success in hunting or fishing, sickness, or the death of a relative. Usually, these sorts of misfortunes would be considered accidents or bad luck. However, at times the person or society searched for reasons behind the misfortunes, and thus inferred that they in some way had committed a breach of taboo (Encyclopædia Britannica Online).

This definition has very little in common with the way taboo is understood in today's societies. Taboos exist in most different kinds of societies and are visible in different forms. For example, the incest taboo is acknowledged in anthropology as universal. However, it is imposed differently depending on the society and breaking it provokes different reactions depending on the society.

Schröder (1998) defines taboos as ways of acting (what one does not do), no-themes (what one does not talk about), as well as themes that need a special linguistic etiquette (themes about which one can only talk about in a certain way). Although taboos prohibit certain ways of actions, they must not be confused with prohibitions. One may well talk about prohibitions and, for example, question their rational grounds. Taboos, however, cannot be discussed due to their nature (Schröder 1998).

Furthermore, breaking a taboo is not considered to cause misfortune in hunting in today's society. A taboo breach does, however, carry certain consequences. Depending on how big the taboo breach is considered, the other members of the society may punish the breaker of a taboo with isolation and ostracism. In such cases as incest, also legal punishments follow. Even if the taboo break would not cause a strong reaction from the other members, the taboo breaker him/herself may feel guilt, disgust and shame (Schröder 1998).

The Civil War of Finland and the wave of terror after it caused certain themes around the Civil War to be put under a taboo and were simply not talked about for decades. Many Finns still cannot talk about, for example, the "White" terror.

## 2. The Birth of the National Trauma

It is not possible to compare civil wars with other passing incidents. A civil war has stronger ties to the nation because of its nature and leaves usually difficult mental wounds in people's minds. Possibly the biggest reasons for those wounds, which can take decades to heal, are different outrages and atrocities. By them, I mean especially arbitrary (mass) murders, (mass) executions, tortures and other deeds that exceed the unavoidable killings of the war. Killing outside the necessity of the war is something that stays in minds for decades.

As an after effect of the Civil War 1918, a national trauma developed in Finland. Even still today, the Finns have not been able to completely heal this trauma. As for the losers, "the Reds", the trauma has been dealt with since the end of the war e.g. in literature, and the outrages and other crimes the "Reds" committed are known relatively well. The guilty ones have been punished by legal actions and discrimination from the society. The crimes of the winners, "the Whites", have not been talked about. Until the recent years, the "Whites" have systematically denied their participation in the cruelties, and they have only admitted that some wrongdoings occurred. However, the guilty ones have not been known, and the crimes have been said to be single cases. Hence, the large number of "Red" human losses have been explained with e.g. killed in action, died in the prison camps or fled to Russia (Ylikangas 1993, 521). A thorough research of all guilty parts and all human losses of the war has until today not been concluded; not until in 1998, the Finnish Government set up a research group to study the total losses of the Civil War (Valtioneuvosto, 1).

Ylikangas argues that it would have been impossible to hide only the wrongdoings of the Civil War of 1918; the war touched simply too many people and too many different areas of life. Therefore, concealing certain things of the Civil War also required concealing of certain other things. The histories written about the Civil War have indeed almost without exception detracted and concealed the terror committed by the "Whites". At the end of the war, there were retaliation waves in many parts of the country, where surrendered "Red" prisoners were executed without proper trials and often without any special reason.

Henkiinjäämisen ratkaisi se, kellä oli joku arvovaltainen puoltaja ja toisen hengen vei se, kun oli arvovaltainen painostaja. Niin. Muuta ei ollut. Siinä sai kostaa sellaiset henkilökohtaiset pikkuvihat ja riidat, naapurien väliset, kun meni vaan ja sanoi, että se on ollut sellainen ja sellainen punikki, niin silloin se alkoi (Tikka; Arponen 1999, 230).

One's survival was determined by whether one had an authoritative supporter and another one's life was taken, when the one had an authoritative opponent. Yes. There was nothing else. There one could avenge the kinds of small personal fights and quarrels, between neighbors, when one just went and said that the other one had been such and such a Red, and there it began. (Freely translated from the original quote)

In the beginning, the executions were carried out on the basis of officers' commands or their approval. However, according to Tikka and Arponen (1999, 283 and following) the soldiers soon began carrying out executions on their own, trusting they would be accepted. Soon the arbitrariness grew into such measures that it, contrary to assumptions, strengthened the not yet surrendered "Reds'" resistance and blackened at the same time the "Whites'" reputation as slaughterers.

The "White" leadership tried to restrict these arbitrary executions beginning March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1918 without succeeding very well. It was simply too late; for example, in Lappeenranta, the information about the staff's order was systematically concealed for a couple of months, so that the planned executions could still be carried out (Tikka, Arponen 1999, 284). Hence, there was only one possibility left – to try to consistently conceal the atrocities.

The national trauma began to develop from the claim that the "Red" murderers' brutality was something totally indescribable (e.g. Donner etc. 1921, 435, Boström 1927, 647). Ylikangas (1993, 523) argues that the incomprehensible cruel crimes crying of injustice, which the "Reds" practiced and of which even the Germans said they never had seen such brutality anywhere before justified and downright obligated the "Whites" to counter-retaliations. Therefore, retaliation to the "Reds" was fully deserved and just, and the "Whites" did not need to have any bad conscience about it.

When the war was over, this continued in larger scale i.e. in literature. After the war, plenty of literature appeared, which told wild horror stories about the crimes that the rebels had committed. For example, an anonymous work from 1919 "Punainen terrori Suomessa talvella 1917-1918. Kuvia ja kuvauksia" (translates as "Red Terror in Finland during Winter 1917-1918. Pictures and Descriptions"), tells about Vicar Kaarlo Julius Kalpa's death:

Maaliskuun 20 p:nä kun joukkoni olivat edenneet Suodenniemelle, tapasin Suodenniemen pitäjän kirkkoherran murhattuna. Ruumis seisoj alastomana kahden pistimellä varustetun kiväärin tukemana. Pistimet oli tungettu

lapaluiden alle kärkien pistäessä esiin solisluiden kohdalta. Silmät oli puhkottu. Ruumiilla oli silmälasit ja kainalossa raamattu. Kuolleen vaimo oli oman kertomansa mukaan pakotettu tyttärensä kanssa katselemaan murhatyötä. (Ylikangas 1993, 523)

March 20<sup>th</sup>, when my troops had advanced to Suodenniemi, I met the murdered Vicar of the Suodenniemi County. The corpse stood naked supported by two rifles with bayonets. The bayonets had been penetrated under the shoulder blades, heads sticking out close to clavicles. Eyes had been punctured. The corpse wore glasses and it had the Bible under its arm. According to her own story, the wife had been forced to watch the murder with her daughter. (Freely translated from the original)

However, depending on the source, the same story may have different forms – like the following, less dramatic description of the same incident shows.

Esikunnassa tutkittiin ja langetettiin kuolemantuomio. Vietiin heti sen jälkeen parin vahdin seuraamana n. 100 m:n päähän talosta, jossa ampumalla surmattiin. Ruumis ryöstettiin, häpäistiin ja jätettiin hangelle makaamaan. K:n vaimo sai vasta 5 päivän kuluttua tiedon tapahtumasta. (Boström 1927, 268)

It was investigated on the staff and the death warrant was signed. The convict was taken right after that with a couple of guards to about 100 meters from the house, where he was shot to death. The body was robbed, disgraced and left to lie on the crust. The wife was not informed until 5 days after the incident. (Freely translated from the original)

The reason all the books about the incomprehensibility of the “Red” terror were written is not totally clear. As far as I can see, possibly the most important function of the horror stories was not only to gain public support for the extensive retaliatory measures the “White” side practiced near and at the end of the war, but also to strengthen the “Whites” own idea that they were acting legally, morally and justly when punishing the “Reds” for the cruelties they had committed.

Morally, neither side was on a higher level than the other. Both the “Reds” and the “Whites” murdered, shot prisoners, marauded and carried on their own propaganda. Nevertheless, the number of people killed by the “Reds” remained smaller than the number of people killed by the “Whites”. Part of the reason was that the “Reds” were simply able to capture fewer prisoners than the “Whites”. However, more important are the psychological grounds, argues Ylikangas.

Jaakko Paavolainen estimated in the 1960s that the number of people killed by the “Whites” during the war was 8380, and the number killed by “Reds” during the war was 1649. However, these figures should be viewed critically because a large number of people killed were listed as “killed in action”, even if they, in fact, were shot after they had surrendered (Kallio 1996, 1).

Ylikangas (1993, 524-525) states arguments that there was strong doubt in the “Reds” minds about their fighting against the prevailing social order. They felt they were committing a crime and not an acceptable revolution. Ylikangas continues that the “Reds” for this reason felt their actions to be lacking of not only legal, but also ethical and moral justification. This often made them more careful and caused them to often take a more careful stand in their actions against the “White” civilians as well as against the captured prisoners and wounded opponents. The “Whites” most obviously felt that the “Reds” mutiny was a crime that deeply touched the “Whites” and therefore motivated and justified, even sanctified, the severe punishments the “Reds” were sentenced.

Naturally, concealings of the war also include many other things, such as the role of the White Civil Guard (suojeluskuntajoukot), consisting of southern Ostrobothnians. Ylikangas says they did not even know against whom they were fighting; the southern Ostrobothnian soldiers were standing in Vilppula as a stopper thinking they had Russians against them. They remained there long enough for “White” leadership to be able to create a conscription law and collect the army it needed. For this reason, the southern Ostrobothnians were made the celebrated and idealized heroes of the war. Hate against Russians, which continuously was kept alive, plugged up the holes in the structure, and the mistake was soon forgotten (Ylikangas 1993, 525).

How is it possible that so many important events connected to the Civil War have stayed in obscurity in Finland, while many less important ones have been raised into the daylight? Until the recent years, the war has not been studied thoroughly, and the entire course of events in the war is not known even today. For example, the Civil War of Spain and its after effects are known as well as the atrocities of the Nazi Germany. Why are the events of Finland’s Civil War not known? Ylikangas answers that there may be many explanations, but possibly it is because the rule in Finland did not radically change after the Civil War, unlike in Spain after Franco’s system collapsed or when the national socialist system collapsed in Germany. In both of those countries, the

researchers have been able to study the doings of the former rule without its actual presence. In Finland, however, the government is based on the system from the year 1918. For this reason the academic studying of the early phase of the governing has been left aside – even on purpose – argues Ylikangas.

A deep national trauma developed from this silence. The last living “jaeger” Väinö Valve spoke of this decades after:

Se oli vapaussota, mutta valitettavasti siitä tuli myös kansalaissota... Kohtalo ajoi kansamme taisteluun, jossa veli joutui veljeä vastaan tässä alun alkaen vapaussotana alkaneessa kamppailussa. Se, että vapaussotaan sisältyi sisällissodan elementti, on valitettavaa ja se jätti omat haavansa kansakunnan sisimpään (Tikka, Arponen 1999, 137).

It was a War for Freedom, but unfortunately it also became a People's War... The destiny drove our nation into a fight, where brother was driven against brother in this battle, which originally began as War for Freedom. It is regrettable that the element of Civil War was involved in the War for Freedom, and it has left its own wounds in the innermost parts of the nation. (Freely translated from the original)

### **3. Jaeger Movement and the Red Jaegers**

After Russia had tightened its grip on Finland in the beginning of the World War I in 1914, willingness to become independent grew. Student activists tried first to seek help from Sweden and Denmark, which had strong historical ties to Finland. Surprisingly, they received answers to their inquiries from a historically and culturally farther country, Germany, which had an interest in supporting separatist activity and propaganda at the border of its enemy Russia (Lackman 1994, 11, Zetterberg etc. 1987, 581-582).

Negotiations with Germany came so far that Germany promised January 26, 1915 to organize short military trainings for 200 Finns (Keränen etc. 1992, 19). There were finally 1897 Finns enlisted as Jaegers, and the first of them arrived in Hamburg February 1915, the last almost two years later (Lackman 1994, 12). That was how the history of Jaeger movement (jääkäriliike) began.

Politically the jaeger movement was incoherent, and even if all of them from the beginning must have had the idea of helping Finland in its fight for independence against Russia, opinions of the means differed. In traditional history writings the jaegers were in particular the national heroes of the “White” side, and the fact that there were also many workers and socialists in the jaegers, was kept silent.

Many even stormy disagreements have, however, been kept in complete silence, and few jaegers used their original writings’ straightforward comments in their memoirs, which were written later. Lackman argues that despite this, the offered “truth” was often believed because many of the writers were in high positions and successful later in their lives. One-sidedness is emphasized due to the fact that many common jaegers, or those who got in to trouble, did not publish their memoirs (Lackman 1994, 15).

The first big disturbances inside the jaeger battalion occurred already in 1916 and increased during the following year. The fatal impact that led to breaking of uniformity of the jaeger group was a letter sent September 7, 1917 by the Suomen Vapauttamisen Ulkomaanvaltuuskunta (Finland’s Liberation’s Abroad Delegation) to the jaegers. It suggested the possibility that the jaegers could be made commanders of the “White” Civil Guard after they came back to Finland. Already at that time, the Civil Guards were held as “Class Troops” among the workpeople, and the letter worried part of the jaegers from the working class. In the worst case, it might happen that they would be returning to a Finnish Civil War instead of War for Freedom and might have to fight not against Russians, but Finnish workers. The working class jaegers organized and founded the Executive Committee (Toimeenpaneva Komitea; TpK). This committee decided to be loyal to Finland’s Social Democratic Party and follow its directions or even to return to Finland and look at the situation once there.

Soon the working class jaegers’ Executive Committee and the “bourgeois” jaegers drifted to totally different courses, and the Executive Committee’s power to affect the leading of the jaeger group was practically taken away.

When the Civil War began January 28, 1918, and Germany a little later gave the permission to the jaegers to return to Finland to the war, most working class jaegers were given practically two options. Either they had to stay in Germany, in which case they would not be allowed to return to Finland during the war, or they could return to Finland and make a one-year agreement, where they would promise to fight on the “White” side. So, not all the jaegers were allowed to return to Finland; the reason was simply the fear that they would join to the “Red” troops, Lackman says.

It is interesting that the whole existence of “Red” jaegers has in official history writings been kept so silent. In traditional history writings, jaegers were the heroes of the winning side,

active young men fighting for the independence and freedom of the fatherland, who despite the temporary disagreements in Germany, finally returned as a uniform group to liberate Finland and to protect its independence. Lackman states that it has simply been easier to keep silent about the “Red” soldiers, who would taint the Jaeger Movement’s heroic reputation. It has also been held silent that even all the jaegers, who returned to Finland, did not do it voluntarily but only grinding their teeth agreed to sign the agreement with the “White” leadership in order to return to Finland.

#### **4. Why did the War break out?**

Heikki Ylikangas presents three theories about primary causes that led the Civil War to break out. The first theory says that the war broke out as a result of the agitation by the Russian Bolsheviks, and the Finnish socialists allied with them. A second explanation can be found from the inequality of the Finnish society at that time; the Finnish proletariat rose in rebellion to improve their living conditions. The third explanation comes from a vacuum of power. The fall of the Russian Czar (Nikolas II) started also in Finland a competition for power, i.e. who rules Finland, how and with whose support. Sometimes all these explanation models have been tied into one, though this does not remove the different starting-points of the explanations.

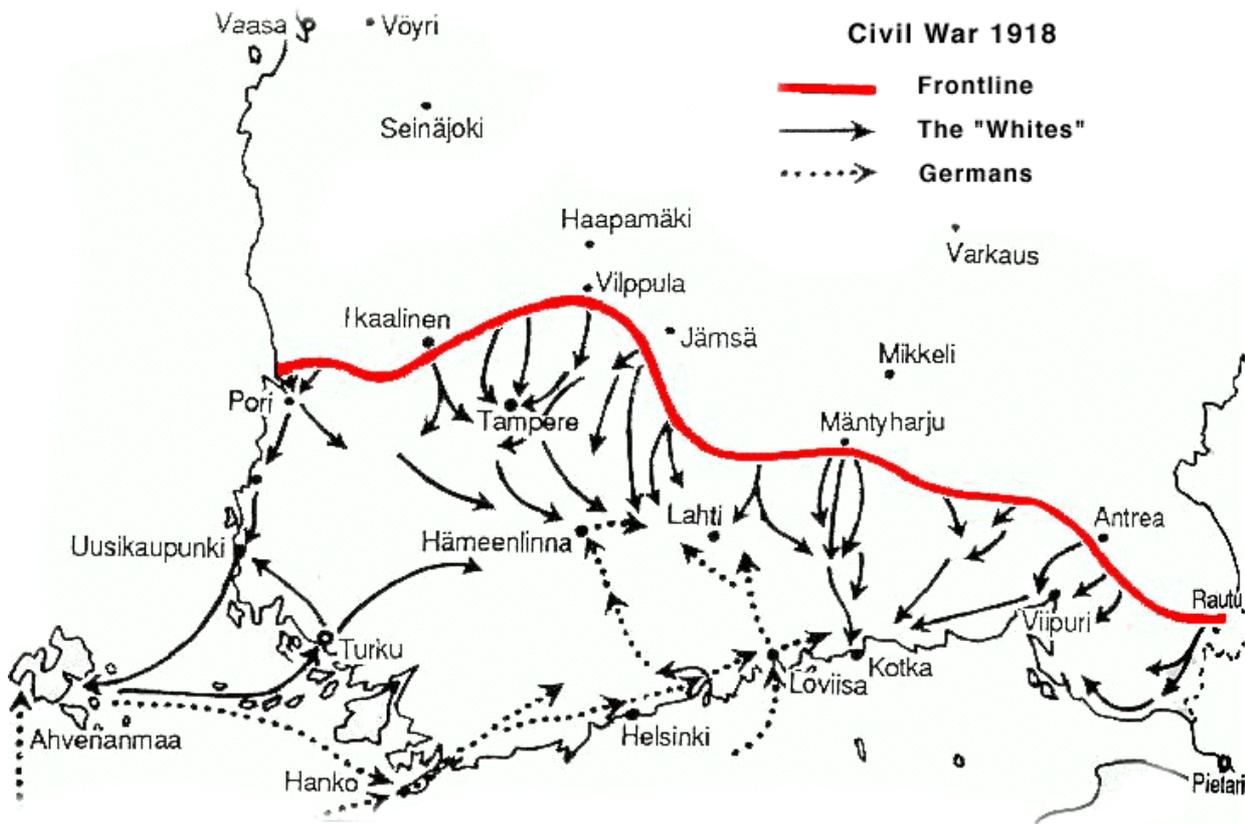
##### **4.1. Agitation Theory**

The agitation theory developed into the dominant explanation on the “White” side already during the war. The “Red” radicals did indeed have connections to the Bolsheviks, and the Bolsheviks urged the Red Civil Guard (punakaarti) to take over the rule in the country. Therefore, it is not surprising that this interpretation has supporters even today. According to them, the inequality of the society could not have been a reason big enough to take up arms.

However, Ylikangas says there are a couple weaknesses in the agitation theory. First, in this type of situation there are always two sides – agitators pro-rebellion and those supporting legal means. In the end, one is more powerful than the other. This is an indication of something more than the agitation itself (Ylikangas 1999, 194).

In addition, the front line between the “Reds” and the “Whites” speaks against the power vacuum theory and the agitation theory; the line went north from Pori and Tampere across Finland. In the east, close to the Russian border, the line between “Reds” and “Whites” went sharply to the south so that there was a shared border of only about 35 km between the “Reds” and Russia. If

agitation was the main reason for the war, why was it not effective north of the border, where also most of the population supported socialists? Why did it not work in Ostrobothnia, where there were already a large number of Russian soldiers ready to take care of the suggested agitation, or in the north, where there were only small-scale maneuvers – for example, in Oulu, a significant industrial city for Finland?



#### 4.2. The Rich against the Poor

The previously described line between the “Reds” and the “Whites” separated Finland into two parts. Practically Finland’s whole industry and also most of the large mansions and family estates were in the “Red” part. This also means that most of the landless working class was in the south. The wealth differences were extremely perceptible in the south; 10 percent of the population ruled half of all income. Due to the large differences in income, the war was also seen as a battle between different language groups. The upper class was still mainly Swedish speaking, and the lower class was Finnish speaking.

In the north, the “White” part of Finland, the situation was different; in the east and in the north there was a large rustic Finland with relatively few mansions and industry. The relatively

small differences in income were also affected by the fact that a large part of the “surplus population” of Ostrobothnia had immigrated to North America (Zetterberg etc. 1987, 588). The money that immigrants sent from North America and the money that remigrants brought back to Finland remarkably improved the economic situation of the Ostrobothnian population. Structurally, Savo, central Finland, and northern Karelia did not belong to “rustic Finland” or to “mansion Finland”.

Ylikangas summarizes the aggravating lack of food and increased rioting as the immediate reasons to the rebellion. Since the fall of 1917 there had been developing groups maintaining the order in urban and rural districts. These groups were independent of the government and replaced the crumbling state system. Later the groups divided into “Red” troops (punakaarti) and “White” troops (suojeluskunta) on the basis of whether the Right or the Left had power in the district. Instability offered a good base also for violent solutions. Thus, the “Red” leadership estimated that they had at least a fairly good chance of winning after the October Revolution in Russia. The “Red” troops took over the power in southern Finland January 27, 1918. At the same time the Ostrobothnian “White” troops, under Mannerheim’s leadership, disarmed the Russian troops in Ostrobothnia.

### **4.3. Ostrobothnians against the Russians**

Civil War began for the Ostrobothnians with disarmament of the Russian soldiers in Ostrobothnia. At that point, it was still a War for Freedom, not a Civil War. The Ostrobothnians had not been too enthusiastic over voluntarily joining the “White” troops before the disarmament of the Russians, but the successful operation inspired them to join the war in great numbers. The war was getting by itself a characteristic of a War for Freedom against the Russians. Of course, it is understandable that in those circumstances it was easier to accept Russians as the main enemy instead of Finnish socialists. Against the Finnish socialists, it was not quite as easy to start fighting. Mannerheim understood this fact very well (Ylikangas 1999, 206). Fighting against Russians brought the war an honorable characteristic, which lasted until the end of the war. According to Ylikangas (1999, 207), most of the Ostrobothnians did not even know they were fighting the Finnish workpeople, although in the beginning, the Ostrobothnians were, in fact, recruited to suppress the rebellion and restore the order in southern Finland.

The Ostrobothnians found out that the ones they were fighting were mainly Finns, and not Russians, no later than the fights in Vilppula. When this was discovered, the justification of the war started without doubt to fret many minds. For example, the Ylihärmä Company of “White” troops,

after having lost a battle in Ruovesi March 15, 1918, tried to go home on its own March 18, 1918. However, they were not successful (Ylikangas 1999, 209).

At this point, the “White” leadership was already strong and had enacted a conscription law. In the beginning the “White” soldiers were assured that they were fighting the Russians and Finnish-speaking enemies were exceptions. Mannerheim himself said to have regretted that ”oman hyvän kansamme keskuudessa löytyi hairahtuneita yksilöitä” (among our good people, there were errant individuals) (Ylikangas 1999, 210).

## 5. Red Orphans

The Civil War of Finland left behind some 20,000 children called “Red orphans” (punaorvot). The hatred towards the “Reds” during and after the war also applied to children. Children were taken from their mothers to the orphanages partly by force, and siblings were separated from each other, so that the younger siblings did not even necessarily know about their biological relatives. Jarmo Jääskeläinen’s and Iikka Vehkalahti’s documentary *Punaorvot valkoisessa Suomessa* (“Red Orphans” in “White” Finland) shows that many of the orphans, who are now already elderly people, still have a strong feeling that they were hated when they were children and that they were treated as outcasts. The events became even more traumatic because often either the father or both of the children’s parents just disappeared and even later were not heard from. For some of the “Red orphans”, the only picture they can remember of their parents is father, walking as captive between “White” Civil Guard members and mother, who stayed crying outside the orphanage when children were taken into custody by force to receive a “decent upbringing”.

The reason for forced custody was partly financial; “Red” widows were not given any financial support, and “Red orphans” were left dependent on municipal social security. Jääskeläinen and Vehkalahti argue that the reasons might, however, mostly have been ideological.

Köyhäinhoitolehti: vielä on suuri vaara punaisten naisissa. Suurelta osin noitten naisten kodit ja niissä annettu kasvatus on syynä hirvittävän kauheaan sisällissotaamme. Punaisten raakuuksissa ennenkaikkea paljastui punaisten kotien ja näitten naisten raakuus, mikä hirvittävässä julmuudessaan hakee vertaa. Yhteiskuntamme ehdoton velvollisuus tästä lähtien on oleva, etteivät tällaiset hirviöt saa enää lapsiaan kasvattaa ja niihin istuttaa julkeaa raakuuttaan sekä kalvavaa vihaansa, joka saastuttaa

lapsen koko sielunelämän. Tässä täytyy tulla luja kontrolli ja vähänkin arveluttavissa tapauksissa on lapset erotettava tällaisista hirviöistä. Tällaisista oloista ovat lapset siirrettävät hyvien ja ymmärtävien ja heidän parastansa tarkoittavien kasvattajien jatkuvan vaikutuksen alaisiksi. (Jääskeläinen, Vehkalahti 1999)

The “Social Security Magazine” states that: “Red” women are still a great danger. These women’s homes and the upbringing in these homes are a big part of the reason for our grievous and horrible Civil War. The cruelty of the “Reds” most of all revealed the brutality of Red homes and these women, which in its horrible ferocity is incomparable. The implicit responsibility of our society shall from now on be that these kinds of monsters may no longer raise their children and plant them with their insolent brutality and gnawing hatred, which contaminates the whole mental life of the child. Here must be a strict control and even in slightly suspicious cases the children are to be separated from these monsters. From these conditions the children are to be moved to the continuous influence of good and understanding people, who mean their best. (Freely translated from the original)

Following the suggestion of the “Sosiaalhallitus” (Social Government), between the years 1918 and 1919 600 “Red orphans” were sent to Ostrobothnia to receive decent upbringing. At some point the language in the official writings applying to the children was cleaned up a little bit, and concern of the “Red orphans” future was brought in, although the concern of prevailing social order was still visible as the topmost element. The “Red orphans” were meant to be raised as useful members of the society, who respect the prevailing social order without the fear that they some day might become interested in some kind of revenge or rebellion against the prevailing system. Building and operating orphanages for “Red orphans” were supported. The chief editor Bruno Sarlin of the *Köyhäinhoitolehti* (Social Security Magazine) wrote:

On muistettava, että nyt on kysymys kymmenistätuhansista orvoista. Jos sellainen armeija imee katkeruuden kalkin sieluunsa, on yhteiskunnallinen vaara suuri ja orpojen hyvä kasvatus tulee sittenkin halvemmaksi kuin vankiloitten ylläpito. (Jääskeläinen, Vehkalahti 1999)

It is to be remembered that it is now the question of tens of thousands of orphans. If such an army imbibes the lime of bitterness into its soul, the social danger is great and good raising of the orphans is nevertheless cheaper than maintaining prisons. (Freely translated from the original)

Jääskeläinen and Vehkalahti argue that it seems that the Finnish society of that time saw the returning of “Red orphans” to the right track as an important mission. The orders of Sosiaalhallitus (Social Government) emphasize that the child, when it proves necessary, will be taken away from such homes and surroundings, which spirit, way of thinking and talking influenced “epäedullisesti ja turmelevasti lapsen sielunelämään” (disadvantageously and perniciously the mental life of the child).

The bourgeois care of the “Red orphans” future, however, was not accepted completely criticism-free, and by and by the Left members of the parliament expressed their concern about the places the “Red orphans” were put. According to the Left, children were mainly placed accordingly to the political views. Jääskeläinen and Vehkalahti say the concern seems to have been at least partly justifiable; rage and hatred against the “Reds” was partly so cruel that the hatred was transferred directly to the children, who were discriminated against, maltreated and partly treated as inferior in other ways. However, it has to be remembered that there were also foster families that tried to create “Red orphans” a pleasant life and future.

## 6. Traumas in the Families

In the Civil War many atrocities happened, which have haunted the whole society and single families since the war like nightmares. Those traumas have often been so strong that they received the nature of a taboo; things that happened in the war and right after it were simply not discussed<sup>1</sup>.

Heikki Ylikangas tells in his book *Väkivallasta sanan valtaan; suomalaista menneisyyttä keskiajalta nykypäiviin* about how he was attacked in columns and newspaper articles of an Ostrobothnian newspaper even as late as in the late 1990s because of his research concerning the Civil War. Marko Tikka and Antti Arponen tell how they experienced even more severe threats, due

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<sup>1</sup> My personal experience about this comes from my mother’s father’s side. It was totally unimaginable to ask him anything about the Civil War. In 1996 Unto Ruokolainen published his book *Mäntän sankarit* about the casualties of the Civil War in Mänttä. The book revealed that, for example, two uncles of my grandfather had enthusiastically taken part in executions, murders and torturing the “Red” prisoners (Ruokolainen 1996, 46, 51, 78). No doubt that these kinds of happenings are nightmares rather to families from the “White” than the “Red” side.

to their research *Koston kevät; Lappeenrannan teloitukset 1918*. They even received phone calls with death threats. In my opinion, this shows that certain aspects of the Civil War are still very difficult subjects for some Finns, although the overall tendency has become more open.

## 7. Writers and the Civil War

Shortly after the Civil war, plenty of literature praising the heroism of “Whites” was written and published. Especially poet V.A. Koskenniemi, but also former radical L. Onerva praised the “White” ideology and heroism in their writings after the war. Sometimes those books branded “Reds” as a lower human race; some even demanded that all the “Reds” be exterminated. For example, Ilmari Kianto and Eino Leino wrote these kinds of thoughts. However, many of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Finnish writers considered themselves as somewhat liberals and some of them even felt sympathy toward the leftist values. For them, the Civil War was a great disappointment; the homogenous Finnish nation Runeberg had described, proved to be nothing but a myth, when the whole nation during the war showed its brutality and equally committed crimes against other Finns.

### 7.1. Writers before Linna

In the beginning of 1918, Juhani Aho still held the possibility of a revolution to be realistic. He often mentioned in his diary *Hajamietteitä kapinaviikoilta*, which was published after the war, that he was a “little bit red”. In his diary, Aho thought about how the ideologies from his youth now were about to be realized by the socialists. However, he strongly disagreed with the fact that the ideas would be carried through with force. Hence, he did not participate on either of the battling sides. In spring 1918 Aho said, however, that if the “Red” rule became good he might still accept it, despite the condemnable course of action.

After the war, Aho condemned the “White” terror as strictly as he had condemned the revolutionary measures the “Reds” had used. He even said it would be unbearable for him to live in Finland the rest of his life. At the end of the war Aho even planned to publicly speak out against the “White” terror, but ended up not doing so. The rest of his life Aho suffered of lack of productivity and began to write almost only about past times. He died in 1921.

The Civil War also affected Eino Leino seriously and badly destroyed his creativity. In early summer 1918 Leino sometimes cursed the whole labor movement; however, at other times he grieved for the Finland that in his eyes had changed into a country of prison camps. In 1919 Leino

sometimes praised the “White” army and European counter-revolutions; other times he wrote rather leftist texts. In 1921 Leino started writing poems in the *Suomen Sosiaalidemokraatti* (a social democrat magazine) aiming at the amnesty of “Red” prisoners; he also dreamed about forming a “neo-communist” party.

F.E. Sillanpää’s Nobel rewarded *Hurskas kurjuus*, which was published already in 1919, showed sympathy toward the “Reds”. Its main character Juha Toivola is an inefficient tenant farmer, who from his birth on is drifting towards failure. The social democratic newspapers thanked the book for the justness it showed to the “Reds”. However, the bourgeois newspaper Uusi Suomi noted that an incapable and dull good-for-nothing fellow could not revolutionize the social order. It also estimated that the “Red” Finland would never recognize Juha as its representative.

Nurmio (1998, 2) says Uusi Suomi had estimated correctly. As soon as the majority of the “Red” prisoners were released, the criticizing of Sillanpää began. The leftist critics were disappointed at how Sillanpää, who came from the working class, could describe “Reds” as such “half idiots”. However, the readers were mostly “Whites”, who saw the writer’s sympathy to be clearly on the side of the losers. V.A. Koskenniemi even described the book as far as to be “Red agitation”. Nurmio points out that this is pretty hard to understand considering how unsympathetic the main character and how hopeless the lives of the proletariat are told to be throughout the book. Nevertheless, *Hurskas kurjuus* is to be credited because it not only describes the severe living conditions of the proletariat, but also the inequalities of the society.

Lauri Viita, who also came from the working class, published his novel *Moreeni* in 1950. Even if Viita’s views may be considered as overall leftists, he never joined a leftist party because he considered it repulsive to bind himself to a mass movement. Nurmio notes that in Viita’s opinion, a creative writer has to be individualistic. Therefore, he also was not interested in writing about ideologies or people as supporters of ideologies. *Moreeni*, however, was a new kind of description of the Civil War. It looks at the workers of Pispala from inside and among themselves. Viita told he had felt many of the previous descriptions of folk, for example, Juhani Aho’s *Rautatie*, F.E. Sillanpää’s *Hurskas kurjuus*, and Joel Lehtonen’s *Putkinotko*, unjust for the workers because the workers were usually described to be weak-minded and stupid. Nurmio says Viita wanted a novel to describe typical people instead of exceptions.

The leftists criticized Viita for exactly what he had been aiming at; *Moreeni*’s family Nieminen was too exemplary a worker-family and good folk. They were not even interested in social change.

## 7.2. Väinö Linna

Väinö Linna is probably the one of Finnish writers who has most helped the Finns reach a more peaceful and many-sided view about what happened in 1918. Especially important has been the second part of his trilogy *Täällä Pohjantähden alla* (Here Beneath the North Star) that was published in 1960. At first it received surprisingly positive reviews, suspiciously positive Nurmio points out. The reviewers recognized the artistic value of the book as well as its objectivity in describing the Finnish society of that time. In fact, the book began to wake up much more discussion not until it was published in Sweden.

In November 1960 the Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter published an interview with Linna under the headline “Väinö Linna About the White Lie of Finland”. In the interview, Linna says that the official truth about the Civil War was a distortion of the truth. Linna said the most dangerous part was the way the “White” bourgeois side had gotten its one-sided views concerning the war accepted. He said the public life of independent Finland was built on a lie. As “White” lies Linna defined the underestimated number of victims of “White” terror and that the Russian revolution was said to be the most important reason behind the war instead of the social inequalities. Also, the Finnish Social Democrats were claimed to oppose the Finnish independency. However, according to Linna, this was one of the few things the “Whites” and the “Reds” agreed.

A little later in November 1960, the Finnish newspaper Hufvudstadsbladet published the results of its questionnaire among researchers of history and political science concerning Linna’s work. It clearly showed there was not any unanimity about the Civil War. The results also showed that Linna’s ideas had reached a number of supporters in the academic world.

It was understandable that the “White” side distorted the truth; the “Red” side would equally have developed its own lie had it won, Linna noted. However, feelings, primitive reactions had to be taken into account when writing history, he emphasized. Linna says he always took into account human feelings; it was in his opinion just the question of whether the Finnish working people of that time should be held only as fully unemotional mass.

## 8. Conclusion

The Civil War and especially the terror during and after it caused difficult traumas that developed into taboos in Finland. Those taboos have haunted the Finnish society until today and have prevented the nation from having the kind of open and public discussion that in my opinion would

be necessary when trying to reach reconciliation. Since about mid 1990's, the atmosphere in Finland has, however, become more open toward such a discussion and numerous new studies have been written about the Civil War and the wrongdoings in the war and after it. Earlier it would have been impossible to publish many of these studies in Finland.

Despite the more open atmosphere and new studies, the Finns still have much to deal with concerning the Civil War. There are still many Finns for whom it is still too difficult to talk about the Civil War without getting strongly emotionally involved. Therefore, many open discussions and numerous new studies are still needed before one can talk about a complete reconciliation in Finland. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the Finnish society is now closer to reconciliation than ever after 1918.

## **9. Abstract (in Finnish)**

Suomen sisällissota 1918 jätti jälkeensä paitsi kymmeniätuhansia kuolleita, myös vaikeita traumoja, joista ei yhteiskunnassa ole vielä kukaan käydy avointa ja keskustelua. Mieliin jääneet traumat saivat pian sodan jälkeen tabun luonteen. Tämä mielestäni selittää sen, miksi joillekin ihmisille on edelleen vaikeaa ellei suorastaan mahdotonta puhua tietyistä sisällissotaan liittyvistä tapahtumista, vaikka sota loppuikin jo 1918.

Traumat ja niistä kehittyneet tabut juontavat juurensa Suomen sisällissodan valkoiseen ja punaiseen terroriin, joukkomurhiin, teloituksiin, kidutuksiin ja kostoiskuihin, joilla ei varsinaisesti ollut mitään tekemistä sodan kanssa. Sodan hävinneen puolen, punaisten, tappamiset ja hirmuteot on selvitetty melko tarkkaan muutamaa tapausta lukuunottamatta, mutta raakuuksista joihin voittajat, valkoiset, syyllistyivät ei ole viimevuosiin asti puhuttu.

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on ollut selvittää syitä sisällissotaan liittyviin traumoihin, mutta myös siihen, kuinka näitä traumoja on pyritty hoitamaan ja tabuja purkamaan. Tutkimukseni hypoteesina on ollut, ettei täydellistä kansallista yhtenäisyyttä de vielä kukaan voitu saavuttaa, koska osaa sodanaikaisesta ja sen jälkeisestä, lähinnä valkoisen puolen terrorista ei vielä kukaan ole selvitetty ja tuotu julkisuuteen. Mielestäni molemminpuolinen anteeksianto on mahdollista vain, kun molempien puolten raakuudet on selvitetty ja niistä on käydy avointa julkista keskustelua.

Suomalainen yhteiskunta on kuitenkin avautunut 1990-luvun puolivälin jälkeen ja lukuisia uusia tutkimuksia on kirjoitettu sisällissodan aikaisista väärinkäytöksistä. Monia näistä tutkimuksista ei varmastikaan olisi voitu julkaista aiemmin. Mielestäni suomalainen yhteiskunta on nyt lähempänä kansallisen sovinnon saavuttamista kuin koskaan aiemmin vuoden 1918 jälkeen.

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