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## Girls and Boys in the Finnish Voluntary Defence Movement

In the 1920s and 1930s, Civil Guards held a dominant position in Finnish society. The organisation was established in 1917 and represented the winners of the Civil War of 1918.<sup>1</sup> The group organised their own patriotic women's association- Lotta Svärd. Originally they were auxiliaries to the Civil Guards and their main task was "to second the Civil Guards in protecting the home and fatherland."<sup>2</sup> The future of these organisations was considered important, which is why the parent organisation established two juvenile organisations - the Civil Guard for Boys and Little Lottas. In this article I will study the role of the juvenile organisations within the Finnish Voluntary Defence Movement.

In the post-civil war situation, when the voluntary defence movement was born, a common objective was to build a new kind of Finnish nation and a new type of society. One of the main arguments in this "defence-orientated thinking" was the crucial role of the home and the nuclear family at the heart of society, in which individuals would become patriotic and upstanding citizens.<sup>3</sup> This kind of thinking was neither new nor specifically Finnish. In nationalistic thinking, the common perception of a nation has been constructed upon the idea of a heterosexual family, a nuclear unit of the state and a place where new citizens were brought up.<sup>4</sup> In comparison to "national awakening" at the end of the nineteenth century, the nuclear family thinking of the 1920's and 1930's was more patriotic. It was also important to convince the majority of Finns of its salience. The voluntary defence organisations were instrumental in this process.<sup>5</sup>

The Civil Guards were portrayed as forming one big home and an "extended family" that represented the whole of Finnish society. The defence organisations

wanted to represent a nation in miniature. Their ideology was rooted in a nationalistic and heterosexual family ideal. Consequently, their recruitment was family based. By the beginning of the 1930s, new youth organisations for boys and girls (aged between 8 to 16) had emerged. Now, there was an organisation for each member of the family under the umbrella of the Civil Guards. This ideology materialised because very often all members of a nuclear family as well as a network of extended relatives, joined these organisations.<sup>6</sup> This segregation of the voluntary defence movement along gender and generational lines will be referred to in this article as a defence family.

In Finland, as in all western countries, the length of adolescence had extended towards the end of the nineteenth century, thus forming a specific phase of life.<sup>7</sup> An example of this development was the foundation of numerous youth organisations in the 1920's.<sup>8</sup> The juvenile organisations of the defence movement- the Civil Guard for Boys (Suojeluskuntapojat) and Little Lottas (Pikkulotat)- were among the most visible. They played an important role in the lives of tens of thousands of Finnish children in the 1930's and 1940's. Their ideology was strongly intertwined with their respective adult organisations. The activities of the juvenile organisations were supported by parents, relatives, teachers and indeed by the whole of the nationalistic and bourgeois sections of Finnish society.. The children also perceived the overt militarism and nationalism as being fashionable.. Similar trends were evident across Europe in the 1930's.<sup>9</sup>

In more specific terms, it is important to investigate the role of the youth organisations inside this construction of a defence family. Were they merely miniature copies of the adult organisations, or did they represent something new and different? After the youth organisations of the Civil Guards were founded, two different generations became involved in the voluntary defence movement. In addition, the youthful tendencies inside the defence family were strongly gendered. Feminist scholars have argued that the use of the family metaphor naturalizes power relations and gender hierarchies, leading to the subordination of women to men and children to adults in a nation.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the meaning of adolescence is

generally perceived as gendered, with boys and girls being assigned different roles. Furthermore, the concept of "youth" also held deep cultural meaning, which was seen as an important symbolic resource during the early years of the Finnish nation.<sup>11</sup> In this article my aim is to discuss how gender was constructed in the youth organisations. I will also explore questions of power between different generations in the defence family.<sup>12</sup>

## Sport, Action and the Training of Soldiers

The youth organisations in Finland were introduced soon after the formation of the Lotta Svärd. A Civil Guard organisation for boys had already been established at the turn of 1920's, but the original plan to train the boys as little soldiers did not last. During this phase, the boys in the so-called squirrel companies (oravakomppaniat) were given military education identical to the adult Civil Guards.<sup>13</sup> In 1928, the youth organisation officially received a new orientation, in which various sporting activities were given a key role. The idea was that with the help of exercise and games boys would acquire skills useful for soldiering. Military education remained the main objective, but the means were geared more to the interests of the young boys.<sup>14</sup>

Although physical activity formed an essential part of the youth organisation, it was also important to mould them into "proper citizens". The goal was to make Finnish boys physically strong, decent and dutiful. The ideal upbringing projected by the voluntary defence organisations was relatively similar to the ideals of other middle-class youth organisations. In the 1930's, the youth organisations of the labour movement and the Scout Association shared similar ideals, but they lacked an emphasis on nationalism. During the inter-war period, the majority of Finns lived in the countryside. It was therefore essential to activate as many rural boys as possible. Furthermore, it was also thought that children in the countryside were "naturally" more energetic than the urban youth. Thus, rural boys were perceived to be ideal candidates for the organisation.<sup>15</sup>

The Civil Guard for Boys had competition, as the Scout Association had been founded about ten years earlier. It was thought to serve as an example for the Civil Guard for Boys, but it was mainly active in larger towns at that time. Later, the rival organisations competed with each other for the same potential members.<sup>16</sup> However, the patriotic emphasis in the Civil Guard boy organisation was much more pronounced, compared with other youth organisations at that time. Its values stressed national defence, whereas the Scout Association lacked the militarism dominant in the nationalistic atmosphere prevalent in Finland during the 1920's and 1930's.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the boys' activities served the military objectives of the organisation. This is thought to be one of the main reasons why youngsters joined the Civil Guard for Boys in such great numbers.<sup>18</sup> The boys were also given patriotic-religious education, in the form of lectures and recommended reading, but the focus in their socialisation was on physical activities.<sup>19</sup>

The Civil Guard for Boys encouraged its members to join the Civil Guards when they were old enough to do so. About 70 per cent of the Civil Guard boys joined the adult organisation after the age of 17.<sup>20</sup> Boys from the urban middle- and upper-classes were keen on joining the youth organisation. Nevertheless, the Civil Guard for Boys was first and foremost a fellowship of agrarian youngsters. The historian Erkki Vasara explains that this was an important reason why the Civil Guard for Boys was more successful than the Scout Association, which did not gain support among young people in the Finnish countryside.

The Civil Guards and the Lotta Svärd organisation became extremely popular in the 1930's. In the same way, the Civil Guard for Boys became one of the largest and most important youth organisations. Especially after the Winter War of 1939-1940, its membership increased significantly. By the end of 1939 it had about 32,000 members and four years later this had risen to over 70,000.<sup>21</sup> In 1941, the youth organisation officially became an independent organisation. At the same time, the name of the organisation was changed to Soldier Boys (Sotilaspojat). The age limit for joining the voluntary defence organisation was lowered from 12 to 10.<sup>22</sup>

During World War II, the nature of the organisation became more serious and work-oriented. Like many other youth organisations, the Soldier Boys took part in voluntary work and undertook labour on farms and in war-time hospitals.<sup>23</sup> The tasks performed by the boys were similar to those performed by soldiers at the home front. During the latter stages of the Continuation War, the Soldier Boys also took a notable step towards military action when they were employed as air raid defence operators in the Finnish Army.<sup>24</sup> In effect the boys who took part in these activities were soldiers.

### Little Lottas - Caring Female Citizens

Plans had already been formulated to establish an organisation for girls in the beginning of the 1920's, although these were only realised in 1931. In this interim period, activities at a local level had been organised for girls.<sup>25</sup> The main idea of the Little Lottas was to develop a sister organisation to the Civil Guard for Boys and one that was also similar to Lotta Svärd. The main duty of the girls was to maintain and support the Civil Guard for Boys. For example, they collected money in order to fund supplies for the boys' summer camps. Furthermore, the name of their organisation- "Little Lottas"- suggested the nature of their activities.<sup>26</sup> Unlike the Civil Guard for Boys, the Little Lottas were never officially independent of Lotta Svärd. However, the Little Lotta organisation was assigned a crucial role as a guardian of moral standards within the defence family. This explains why the Lotta Svärd organisation wanted to subject the girls to close educational and moral guidance. The boys, on the other hand, were thought to need more independence in order to train them for their future roles as soldiers.

The girls learned from the Lotta Svärd organisation that it was a woman's role to assist their male counterparts. Thus, they supported the Civil Guard for Boys as Lotta Svärd did for the Civil Guards. Religious and patriotic education was considered more important for the girls than for the boys in the voluntary defence

movement. Consequently, they studied history, geography and religion with more of a nationalistic emphasis. Elementary school teachers typically led the Little Lottas- especially at the local level- and even the leader of the national Lotta Svärd organisation, Fanni Luukkonen, was a teacher by profession.<sup>27</sup> This is probably why an educational emphasis was placed on the socialisation of the Little Lottas. It was thought more important to install correct moral values to girls and to lead them towards the "right way". After all, they would one day become the mothers of the next generation of the Civil Guard family.

However, the activities of the youth organisation also consisted of plays, choirs, games and summer camps, especially before the war. In addition, members of the Little Lotta organisation were given the opportunity to undertake physical exercise, such as cross-country skiing, orienteering and gymnastics. The Lotta Svärd organisation emphasised sporting activities, although it was important that the types of exercise were appropriate for girls and women and enabled them to do well in their overall supportive duties.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, becoming a Little Lotta opened up interesting new avenues for rural girls. Whilst there had previously been sporting, religious and temperance organisations and many other civic organisations since the end of the nineteenth century, ordinary girls in the countryside could now for the first time have a leisure-time activity outside the direct control of their parents.

One of the reasons for the relatively late commencement of organised activities for girls in the voluntary defence movement was the existence of the Girl Scout Association. The Lotta Svärd leaders thought that the Girl Scout Association had similar values and ways of acting, and thus they did not want to compete with it. However, the Girl Scout Association was not active in the countryside. This explains why little girls living in the countryside were particularly encouraged to join local lotta activities. Like the Civil Guard for Boys, the Little Lotta organisation became particularly popular among rural girls.<sup>29</sup>

It was possible to join the Little Lotta organisation at the age of eight, which was a lower age limit than the boys ever had. However, the approval of a guardian

(usually the mother or the father) was needed. The age limit for joining Lotta Svärd was seventeen- the same as the male equivalent. The Little Lotta organisation became very popular among Finnish girls, and by the end of the year 1943 it had nearly 50,000 members.

Educating prospective members of Lotta Svärd was one of the main aims of the Little Lotta organisation. On this count the founders of the organisation succeeded very well, as by the end of 1930's the majority of new Lotta Svärd members had previously belonged to the Little Lotta movement. This was important because the girls were thought to have absorbed the "lotta ideology" during their time in the juvenile organisation, and therefore they were assumed to be trustworthy and decent members. These long-time members were particularly valuable to the voluntary defence movement because the reputation of the organisation rested on the moral character of its members. New recruits who joined the expanding Lotta Svärd during the war years did not receive the education given to members of the organisation during the 1930's. This was a problem for the voluntary defence movement during the war years, when the sexual morals of women, in general and at the front, were strongly controlled.<sup>30</sup> On the whole, there was an effort to control women's sexuality, which constituted one of the key issues in both military and nationalistic organisations. In times of heightened nationalistic conflict, the morals of women received particular attention, with authorities often trying to exert direct control over women's bodies.<sup>31</sup> This was certainly the case inside the Finnish voluntary defence movement, where girls - as mothers-to-be - were thought to need a strict moral code.

During the war years, the character of the Little Lotta organisation changed considerably. The name of the organisation changed from Little Lottas to Lotta Girls (*Lottatyöt*)<sup>32</sup> in order to emphasise the role and work of the older girls (aged between 14 to 16). The activities of the Lotta Girls became more work-oriented and their main assignment was to serve at the home front. They were to take up tasks from members of Lotta Svärd, who were serving in greater numbers closer to the

front and in military hospitals. Ideological education, however, still remained important.<sup>33</sup>

## Generation, gender and power

In explicit terms, the Finnish voluntary defence movement consisted of a two-generation dyad, but implicitly it included a third generation: grandparents. In this study, the term "generation" consists of different age groups, cohorts and "generation units"<sup>34</sup>, but it also has connections to kinship (descent) on both a symbolic and concrete level. When studying the "generations" of the defence movement, as well as the, adult and youth organisations, it is easy to discern the continuation of traditional values. However, one also encounters experiences that are unique to each generation.

Generational conflict often involves new generations challenging the norms and values of previous generations. Yet, inside the defence family no significant conflict existed. These two (or three) different generations of the movement were shaped by a particular historical context. These cohorts became generations through the social significance of the periods in which they lived. Generational consciousness emerged through a shared experience of a traumatic historical event, such as a war.<sup>35</sup> The grandparents and parents of the older generations of the voluntary defence movement were influenced by the years of oppression<sup>36</sup>, independence and the Civil War, whilst the younger generation were especially affected by the outbreak of the Winter War. Crucially, the social significance of these events was different in Finnish society.

Gender is also a strong defining element within each generation<sup>37</sup>. The basis for constructing gender was similar to that found within the Finnish school system, where boys and girls envisaged as growing into separate female and male citizens with different duties and spheres of influence.<sup>38</sup> Social motherhood was the main objective when educating girls (and women) during the inter-war period. Taking care of the home and family were the main tasks for girls, but they were also



expected to perform the same caring tasks in the public sphere. Thus, these caring tasks transcended the boundary between the private and public spheres.<sup>39</sup> The voluntary defence movement educated girls with very similar objectives in mind. Members of the Civil Guard for Boys were trained to become civil guard soldiers, by undertaking sporting and military activities that supposedly inspired the youth. In the Western world on the whole, nationalism became more militarized and ideal notions of masculinity stressed self-control, physical power and toughness after World War I.<sup>40</sup> This was also obvious in the politically divided atmosphere of 1920's and 1930's Finland, where the ideal man was perceived to be a determined warrior.<sup>41</sup> Members of the Civil Guard for Boys were small soldiers who needed to be ready to step up and face the ultimate sacrifice to protect their families and the nation.

It is difficult to find generational conflict in the voluntary defence movement. Therefore, I am interested in the power relationship between the adults and youth inside the movement. If one only undertakes a superficial exploration of the question of power, the adult subordination of children is clearly evident in the Finnish Defence family. Young girls and boys typically joined the voluntary defence movement because they followed the example of their own family members and other relatives. Parents supported their activities and thus reinforced the ideal of the defence family. In the 1930's, the activities of girls and boys in the voluntary defence movement were very clearly controlled by adults, that is, the older generation. They planned the kind of activities that were aimed to attract young people and to be useful for the future of the defence family. However, the general salient point in organisational activities is to assure the continuity and this was the case in the voluntary defence movement. Hence, youth also exercised power. If the Civil Guard for Boys and the "little lotta" girls had not been enthusiastic about the ideology and activities of the voluntary defence movement, the organisation would have disintegrated. However, during the 1920's to 1940's there was no fear of this because both the Little Lotta movement and the Civil Guard for Boys were among the most popular youth organisations in the country.<sup>42</sup>

As mentioned above, Finnish society was deeply divided after the Civil War of 1918. For many Finns, the Civil Guards and Lotta Svärd were significant agents in this division, which made it impossible for many men and women to join them. Nor did the organisations want reds to join them. The youth organisations, however, were founded at a time when national healing had begun and young girls and boys were encouraged to think about the future. For the Civil Guards, the youth organisations were a channel that helped to diffuse their ideology among children raised by their political opponents. It was not uncommon for workers' children to join the Civil Guard for Boys or the Little Lotta movement, even if their parents were against the idea and were not members of a voluntary defence organisation.<sup>43</sup> In this sense, members of the younger generation exercised power and the future of the movement rested on their shoulders.

During the war years the defence family was re-negotiated on organisational and individual levels. The significance of the Civil Guards diminished during the Second World War because of the crucial role of the Finnish National Army. At this juncture in Finnish history, the younger generation- members of the Little Lotta and Soldier Boys movements- received significant positions within the defence family. At this stage, their responsibilities grew substantially and they exercised power. When the name of the organisation for boys was changed to Soldier Boys (Sotilaspojat), the main idea was to soften the direct connection to the Civil Guards and its political implications, while also recruiting more members to the voluntary defence movement.

Although lotta-mothers were central figures and held the most power in keeping the defence family alive during the war years, they also received support from soldier boys who assumed many of the tasks that their fathers had carried out within each defence family. Older girls were supposed to both support the army and replace men at the home front. Taking care of homes and families was left to the "older" women, with the help of lotta girls and soldier boys in the family. Young and single women could carry out support services outside the home. Many

worked close to the front and thus acted as a vital support of the national army in the defence of the nation.<sup>44</sup>

In conclusion, how can one summarise the role of the younger generation in the voluntary defence movement? In brief, their role was crucial. In the early stages of the movement's history, children were thought to be miniature copies of the adult lottas and civil guards. However, the voluntary defence movement soon realised that the younger generation needed new and attractive forms of activity in order to continue their patriotic ideals. The defence family was created because all members were needed. Girls and boys also represented a new era with the "right" moral values. Moreover, the younger generation managed to draw all aspects of Finnish society within their ranks, which was something the adult organisations failed to do.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Civil Guards and the Lotta Svärd organisations were closed in the autumn of 1944.

<sup>2</sup> "Lotta Svärd" - yhdistyksen säännöt. Hamina 1921- The Rules of Lotta Svärd 1921.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Helén 1997, pp. 203-204.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Yuval-Davis 1997, p. 43, 66; Sluga 1998, p. 98.

<sup>5</sup> Kettunen 1998, pp. 283-285.

<sup>6</sup> Nevala 2002, pp. 93-114.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Aapola & Kaarninen 2003 p. 12; Cunningham 2005, pp.171-194.

<sup>8</sup> Siisiäinen 1988, pp. 48-49.

<sup>9</sup> Taskinen 1992, pp. 63-70.

<sup>10</sup> McClintock 1993, p. 64; Valenius 2004, p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> Aapola & Kaarninen 2003, pp.12-13.

<sup>12</sup> Michel Foucault has defined the concept of "power" as a productive principle. Domination is not the essence of power nor is plain force. In Foucault's thinking, power basically functions as a concept, which attempts to understand how social practices work. In his word: s"The exercise of power is the way in which certain actions may structure in the field of other possible actions" Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982.

<sup>13</sup> Pirhonen 1977, pp. 81-90; Puranen 2001, pp.102-110.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Aalto 1984, pp. 11-14.

<sup>15</sup> Raikkala 1964, pp. 265-266; Vasara 1997, pp. 539-563.

<sup>16</sup> Aalto 1984, pp. 29-39; Puranen 2001, pp. 164-167.

<sup>17</sup> Vasara 1997, pp.622-624; Puranen 2001, pp. 104, 167.

<sup>18</sup> Aalto 1984, pp. 29-39.

<sup>19</sup> Vasara 1998, pp.134-135; Nevala 2003, p. 347.

<sup>20</sup> Vasara 1997, pp. 595-598.

<sup>21</sup> Raikkala 1966, pp. 415-418.

<sup>22</sup> Raikkala 1966, p. 268, 418.

<sup>23</sup> Pirhonen 1977, pp. 136-274; Puranen 2001, pp.281-453; Hartikainen 2004, pp.25, 29-41.

<sup>24</sup> Aalto 1984, pp. 99-103.

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- <sup>25</sup> Seila 1972, p. 123; Nevala 2001, pp. 98-99.
- <sup>26</sup> Taskinen 1992, p. 19.
- <sup>27</sup> See, for example, Bäckström 1993, pp. 139-142.
- <sup>28</sup> Laine 1992, pp. 203-205; Vasara 1997, pp. 496-502.
- <sup>29</sup> Koskimies 1964, pp. 146-147; Lukkarinen 1981, p. 103; Mustajärvi 1996, pp. 20, 24; Savunen 1999, pp. 62-63.
- <sup>30</sup> Olsson 2005, pp. 135-161.
- <sup>31</sup> Edmunds & Turner 2002, pp. 96-101.
- <sup>32</sup> In this text, I systematically use the term Little Lottas.
- <sup>33</sup> Koskimies 1964, pp. 293-298; Lukkarinen 1981, pp. 105, 160-163; Taskinen 1992, pp. 23, 35-37; Nevala 2003, pp. 348-349.
- <sup>34</sup> The term is taken from Karl Mannheim (1952).
- <sup>35</sup> Virtanen 2001, pp. 33-39.
- <sup>36</sup> The last years under Russian rule (1899-1917) in Finland witnessed substantial weakening of the country's autonomy. The period of oppression during these years is a widely accepted fact in the political history of Finland.
- <sup>37</sup> Edmunds and Turner 2002, pp. 95-98.
- <sup>38</sup> Kaarninen 1995; Tuomaala 2004.
- <sup>39</sup> For example, Sulkunen 1987; Sulkunen 1991.
- <sup>40</sup> Mosse 1996, p. 107.
- <sup>41</sup> Ahlbäck 2004, pp. 152-165.
- <sup>42</sup> For example, Nevala 2003, pp. 349-351.
- <sup>43</sup> For example, Vasara 1997, pp. 590-591; Nevala 2003, pp. 349-351.
- <sup>44</sup> The lotta girls could join the Lotta Svärd organisation at the age of 17. The majority of lotta girls who served close to the front were young and unmarried. At the beginning of the Continuation War (1941-1944), the Finnish authorities imposed a rule stipulating that women under 20 were not allowed to be present at the front. Later this order was rescinded.