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From Silence to Recovery **Traumatic Home Front Memories of the Soviet Partisan** **War in Finland**

Abstract

Paramilitary forces of Soviet partisans attacked villages and remote houses in the Finnish eastern borderlands during the Continuation War of 1941–1944. They burned houses, stole food and cattle, and killed women, children and elderly people. In post-war Finland these actions were not openly discussed before the late 1990s, and the long period of silence served to slow down or prevent recovery from these traumatic experiences. This article discusses the personal narratives of those who experienced the traumatic events of the Soviet Partisan War which took place in the Finnish borderlands, and the process of recovery that spanned the following 70 years. The research material consists of 16 narratives collected in 2017 using oral history interviews. The informants were Finnish civilians who had direct or indirect experience of the actions of Soviet partisans. The research is based on an oral history approach and the multidisciplinary research of trauma narration. It seeks to explore how traumatic experiences of the Soviet Partisan War are expressed in the personal oral history narratives, and how signals of trauma and recovery occur. Especially, the article points out the role of both remembering and narrating in the process of recovering from painful and traumatic experiences.

Keywords: Soviet Partisan War, oral history, trauma narration

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In war, civilians behind the front lines are supposed to be safe and shielded from violent battles. However, the reality is often different. In times of war, normal social rules and moral standards tend to fragment during a state of emergency and this constitutes form of violence (Rupesinghe 1994, 16; Tepora 2015). It is a traumatic experience to be confronted with violence and killing, especially when the immediate victims are oneself, or other close relatives or friends. Physical and mental violence is dehumanizing and painful not only for the victims, but also for other members of society. An example of this process can be shown in the actions of the paramilitary Soviet partisans who attacked Finnish civilian villages during the Continuation War (1941–1944) between Finland and the Soviet Union. The attacks concentrated on the eastern borderland areas of Finland, particularly Northeastern Lapland, Kainuu and North Karelia. These attacks resulted in dozens of orphaned children who were wounded physically and/or mentally. The events were especially traumatic for children and adolescents who managed to survive the Soviet attacks, but who have had to continue their lives with horrific memories.

In this article I focus on personal recollections and narratives of the Soviet partisan attacks in the Finnish borderlands, and the emergence of trauma and recovery they express. The narratives are told today, over 70 years after the war, by civilians who have had personal, mostly traumatic experiences of the Soviet partisan actions, or who have heard about them since childhood. The post-war generation formed their understanding about the Partisan War mostly on the basis of how their relatives or other villagers on eastern borderland discussed it among their families. The memories discussed were usually filled with fear and other repressed negative emotions, and as such they were transmitted to next generations. (Laurén 2017, 54–56.) The research questions for this study are: How are the traumatic experiences and memories of Soviet partisan attacks expressed in the personal narratives? What signals of trauma and recovery emerge from the narratives? The topic of the study and the research questions are relevant in the context of the studies emerged during the last decades that examine the memories of war with perspectives of personal narratives and various groups of civil society, that have long been excluded from standard historical memory (Misztal 2003, 127). The research is based on an oral history approach and the multidisciplinary research of trauma narration. By studying narratives of personal memories, the analysis reveals the interplay between private and public memory and reminiscing, which are intrinsic elements in oral history narratives and essential in the process of trauma and recovery.

Facing sudden, catastrophic or overwhelming events such as experiences of war, natural disasters, violence, rape or serious illness can unsettle the mental

balance of an individual and cause trauma. It is obvious that the Soviet partisan attacks of the war were mostly traumatic for the narrators of this research – so traumatic that the memories are still, over 70 years later, sometimes hard for them to recount. Most of them entailed violent events that left lifelong marks such as nightmares, fears, shame, anger and distress (cf. Tuomaala 2008, 231–233). A traumatized person usually has difficulties in dealing with feelings related to the events or the things that caused their trauma. Thus, trauma narratives are also challenging to understand and analyze because trauma has an impact on the process of remembering and forgetting, and accordingly in their narrations, survivors and eyewitnesses are likely to have difficulties in expressing themselves explicitly and their stories can contain fragmented, disjointed, imaginary or symbolic elements (Leydesdorff et al. 1999, 1).

As Kim Etherington (2003, 9) notes: “Making a coherent narrative out of experiences of childhood trauma is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks we can set ourselves”. Previous studies have shown that it is usual that traumatized people come to develop a narrative of their trauma over time, and after they become aware of the various elements of the traumatic experience, they construct a narrative that explains what happened to them (Van der Kolk 1996, 287–289). Consequently, it is quite usual that the narrative of traumatic experience continues to develop and change its meanings over time and experience (BenEzer 1999, 29; Rose 1999, 164). The informants of this study mainly experienced the traumatic events of the Soviet Partisan War decades ago when they were children. Therefore, they have had time to construct quite a coherent narrative of the shocking events that took place. The younger generation, on the other hand, had formed their impressions of the past events on the basis of what they have heard from others, read from books or other sources during their life.

Recovering from a trauma is part of the personal trauma narrative; at its best it is the end and closure, if a person has managed to recover. However, it does not mean that the memories of the devastating experiences have passed away. Instead, the traumatic memories no longer continuously interfere with the individual’s everyday life, and they are able to live a full life once more. (Gow 2011, 6.) Giving voice to the different experiences of the past traumas of war or other incidents and recognizing them as part of the individual’s history is necessary for recovery to take place (Misztal 2003, 141). People have different ways to recover from their traumas. The survivors of the Soviet partisan attacks emphasized that breaking the public silence was an important step in the process of their recovery.

The atrocities committed by Soviet partisans in Finland are quite well documented and therefore the purpose of this research is not to re-investigate

what happened, but instead to point out how these events have affected the local people and how they recovered from the painful and traumatic conflicts that took place in their home villages (cf. Peltonen 2006, 6). Even though the villagers have shared many of their difficult memories over the past 70 years, they still narrate their traumatic experiences in a unique way that differs from the everyday (see BenEzer 1999; Abrams 2010, 94), and their narration of recovering from their difficult childhood memories forms part of their trauma narrative. To demonstrate this, I have sought out the elements of trauma and recovery that lie within the personal narratives of these border people. In so doing, my intention is to emphasize the strong impact these shocking and often traumatic events of the war had on individuals, and also on local communities. Additionally, the study illuminates the role of social and collective remembering in the subjective and social process of recovering from traumatic experiences.

War and the Soviet partisans in Finnish borderlands

The Continuation War (1941–1944) between Finland and Soviet Union started on 25 June 1941 when the Finnish Army along with Germany attacked the Soviet Union. Within a few months, the Finnish and German allies had reconquered the territories annexed by the Soviet Union after the Winter War.¹ The Finnish Army then continued the offensive, crossing the old border of 1939 and occupying large areas of Soviet territory for almost three years during 1941–1944. (Lähteenmäki 2006, 82, 88.) With the permission of the Finnish Government, the province of Lapland and northern parts of the Oulu County had temporarily become German military administration districts. The local residents who lived near the border area were not moved away. Only at the end of the Continuation War in 1944 was there a wider evacuation. (Lähteenmäki 1999, 143–144.)

Finland lost the Continuation War and was forced to cede East Karelia to the Soviet Union. Finland made peace with the Soviet Union and Karelia was never regained. However, the war was not over, and the Lapland War (September 1944 to April 1945) between Finland and Germany commenced, in compliance with Soviet demands that German troops had to be expelled from Finland. The war took place in the northernmost province of Finnish Lapland where most of the population were evacuated to Southern and Western Fin-

1 This was a different situation from the Winter War (1939–1940) that began with the attack of the Soviet Union on Finland. The Winter War ended in defeat for Finland, requiring them to cede East Karelia, parts of north-eastern Salla, the Kuusamo and Petsamo regions, together with the outer archipelago of the Gulf of Finland to the Soviet Union.

land and partly to Sweden. As a reprisal against their former brothers in arms, the Germans burned as many houses and bridges as possible, and also mined the area's roads. (Virrankoski 2001, 928–929; see also Koskinen-Koivisto & Thomas 2018.)

Several countries (for example France, Italy, Belgium and the Philippines) had their own paramilitary resistance movements during WWII, but the Soviet Partisan Movement was the largest, having approximately half a million active participants (Grenkevich 1999, 5–6; Brakel 2010, 80). The movement was not part of the Soviet Red Army but was still coordinated and controlled by the Soviet government. The Soviet Partisan Movement was comprised of voluntary men and women who had received special training in guerrilla warfare. The mission of Soviet partisan units located deep in enemy territory was to slow down the Nazi attacks in all German-occupied territories. Their primary objective was to cause damage and create unbearable circumstances for the enemy and its partners, to spy, to conduct surprise attacks on important military targets, to destroy roads and railways, and to arouse horror and fear. (Grenkevich 1999, 13–14, 77; Stepakov et al. 2005, 46–59.)

In 1940s, civilian houses in the Finnish eastern borderlands were mainly located in the middle of forests and mires, and were many kilometers apart from each other. People were mostly small farmers who made their living by smallholding and keeping domestic animals. They used to move around a lot in the course of a day and thus had a thorough knowledge of their natural environment. Therefore, they quickly noticed if something unusual was happening. Soviet partisan attacks occurred throughout the Continuation War. The first signs of Soviet partisans were typically their campfires and food caches in forests or mires, cigarette butts and the smell of Soviet cigarettes. Villagers living in the borderlands heard about the signs of the Soviet partisans, and were therefore on guard, especially when they moved alone in the forests and on the remote roads (see also Martikainen 1998, 30–32; Tallavaara 2016, 52). Soviet partisans and Soviet *desants*² roamed the nearby forests, and dogs tried to warn families of their presence by howling sometimes for many days before the partisan attacks took place. Families became aware of being in danger as soon as the first partisan attacks occurred, and had to be prepared for sudden attacks during the whole of the Continuation War. During the war, attacks of Soviet partisans were reported in the local newspapers, but were given a low profile, so as not to create fear among the people of the Finnish borderlands (Pulkkinen 2013).

2 A *Desant* was a member of the Russian Airborne Troops, especially one who worked as a spy or saboteur behind enemy lines during the Second World War.

In Finland, the Soviet partisans had 35 units with 20–200 fighters in each, and they conducted around fifty attacks on military and civilian targets. The partisans were instructed and trained to combat fascists ‘by fair means or foul’, and for them, all Finns (no matter if they were soldiers or civilians) were fascists. Consequently, this meant that unarmed civilians were also included as legitimate targets, and Soviet partisans torched the houses of villagers, stole food and cattle, kidnapped children and adults, and killed a total of 180 people, mostly women, children and the elderly. (Erkkilä 1998, 28–31; Lähteenmäki 1999, 132; Lähteenmäki 2017.)

Period of silence

When the Continuation War ended in 1944 and the Finns that were evacuated to Western Finland returned to their home districts in eastern borderlands, there was hardly anything left; homes were ruined and burned and everything had to be started again from scratch. Under these circumstances, the difficult memories and traumas of the war remained in the background: effectually, there was no time for them because family lives and the societal infrastructure (e.g. cities, villages, towns and buildings) had to be rebuilt, and understandably the gaze was directed towards the future.

In the post-war period that followed, the actions of Soviet partisans in Finnish eastern villages were seen as a politically sensitive topic and it was deemed inappropriate to speak publicly about what had occurred. Finns had to construct friendly relations with their erstwhile Soviet enemy, however, Finland’s geopolitical position was uncertain, the political climate was unsafe, and relations between Finland and the Soviet Union were strained and continued to be so until the end of 1980s. (Kinnunen & Jokisipilä 2012, 435–436; Meinander 2012, 49–50.) As losers of the war, co-operation between Finland and Germany was also felt to be an awkward topic, and it was felt that Finland had failed to protect its own civilians on the eastern borderlands (Lähteenmäki 2017; Tuominen 2003, 105). Therefore, neither the Soviet Partisan War nor the war in general were discussed in public. The narrators of this research talk about ‘silenced memories’ by which they refer to the memories that were not allowed to be talked or memorized publicly for decades. This collective social silence was coerced. This coercion was a result of political silence that was imposed by political authorities who decided how to speak about the past (see e.g. Vinitzky-Seroussi & Teeger 2010, 1107). People discussed their memories mostly in private with those who had shared the same experience. Otherwise the memories were kept silent. In addition to political and social reasons, the individuals kept silent about their experiences because their memories were

too difficult and painful (see Abrams 2010, 93). Silence protected them from their pain, as the following quote of an interviewee from Lapland illustrates:

N: When the time came that we wanted to talk about them [the partisan memories] it was not allowed. We had to keep quiet about them [in public].

K: How the silencing took place, did you still talk about them at home?

N: Well, of course talking about them [the partisan attacks] was allowed at home, but it must have been so terrible for our parents as well. When our evacuation was over and we were allowed to return home, everything was gone. It must have been so hard for our parents that they did not want to talk about them [the partisan attacks], and the memories were repressed. (I6 2017)

After the war people felt that they had to be simply grateful for being alive and show respect for those who had defended their native country. In these times, it was considered honorable not to complain about private affairs, so instead of discussing traumatic memories, it was seen as more important to reconstruct society and to work hard. (Kirves 2008, 417; Tuominen 2003, 117–118.) Accordingly, the memories of Soviet partisan attacks remained silent for many decades.

Discussions about the actions of Soviet partisans in Finland began decades after the war in historical fiction and war novels, which contained documentary elements of the Soviet partisan attacks which took place in the Finnish borderlands (e.g. Aapa 1968; Viheriävaara 1982; Tikkanen 1971; 1998). These works of fiction made possible to give information and discuss politically sensitive issues that were still seen as inappropriate to speak of in public (see Marsh 1995, 198–199; Kurki 2018, 305–306). Furthermore, at the turn of the 21st century, several documentary non-fiction books emerged (e.g. Erkkilä 1998; 2011; Martikainen 1998; 2011; Oksanen & Martikainen 1998) that highlighted the eyewitness testimonies of partisan actions in Finland. These entered the mass media, and revealed the silenced war memories to a wider community, therefore starting the process of confronting the past (see Marsh 1995, 199). The non-fiction books on Soviet partisan attacks in Finland arose in the context of compensation claims and the trial of war criminals. Therefore, they had similar goals to many of the studies conducted in other countries during the second part of the twentieth century, which investigated the silenced, hidden and traumatic memories of WWII, such as Nazi atrocities and the Holocaust. In these investigations, people were finally given a public space in which to retrieve their traumatic memories that were kept out of public view for decades by a form of socially organized forgetting – exclusion,

suppression, and repression. (Burke 1989, 108; Danziger 2008, 209; Misztal 2003, 132, 142; Wingfield 2000.)

Personal oral history narratives

The primary empirical sources of the article consist of interviews conducted in 2017. At the beginning of 2017, some newspapers in Lapland, Kainuu and North Karelia published a feature where I described my research on the memories of Soviet partisan attacks in the Finnish-Russian borderlands and their impacts on local people. I asked people to write about their memories or to contact me for an interview. Specifically, I asked: *Do you have personal experiences of the attacks of Soviet partisans? Have you heard about the partisans and their actions from your relatives or friends? Are the acts of Soviet partisans still narrated? Would you like to tell about them?*³

People from Lapland, Kainuu and North Karelia contacted me by phone or email and offered to be interviewed. They also gave me indications of other possible informants who they thought may have something to say about Soviet partisans. When arranging the interviews, I told the informants about my ongoing research of the memories of the Soviet Partisan War on the home front of the Finnish borderlands. Because of the sensitivity of the research topic, I detailed what I was going to do with the interviews, and also that all of the interviews would be archived solely for research purposes.

In total I interviewed 16 people; 11 from the Lapland, Kainuu and Northern Ostrobothnia regions, and five from North Karelia, (seven women and nine men).⁴ Most were born in the 1930s and all but one were pensioners – the oldest interviewee was born in 1927 and the youngest in 1960. Accordingly, most were children or teenagers during the Continuation War. However, some were not alive during that time or because they were so small they had no direct memories of the events, but had heard about them since they were very young. The interviews were recorded and lasted between 45 and 120 minutes. I have anonymized the informants, and in this article I refer to the interviews with the capital letter I, number and year (e.g. I2 2017). In excerpts taken from the narratives I refer to narrators with the capital letter N (narrator) and to myself as an interviewer with the capital letter K (the initial letter of my first name).

3 In addition, a Lapland radio station broadcasted two short radio programs about my ongoing research.

4 I also received 11 written memories by mail and email, mostly from Lapland, Kainuu and North Karelia. The writers offered mainly transgenerational memories, and recounted their influence on themselves or their relatives. I have discussed these writings in my previous published research (Laurén 2017).

This study is based on an oral history approach, thus, I was not trying to access only the information, but also to ascertain the significance, interpretation and meaning of the past events and memories (Abrams 2010, 2, 38). Therefore, in order to find relationships between the past and the present and to uncover links between the narrated events, I adopted a thematic life history approach. For people with fearful or traumatic memories, a life history interview can offer them a possibility to reflect on their experiences. From a therapeutic perspective, talking to an interviewer can also start a process for them to find their way towards recovery and to help preserve a socially important fact of local history. However, the aim of a therapeutic discussion differs from a qualitative life history interview, and a life history interview is not a therapeutic treatment and its purpose is not to replace it, even though it can have positive impacts. (Abrams 2010, 93–94; Strandén-Backa 2013, 87.) Importantly, however, the life history narration enables interviewees to share their traumatic and other intimate and difficult experiences, and to reflect on their meanings for themselves and for others involved (BenEzer 1999, 29).

I conducted the interviews in the informants' homes where I felt I was warmly welcomed. During the interviews, we usually sat round the kitchen table drinking coffee, or on a couch in the living room. Before I started the interview, I reiterated the purpose of my research to make sure that the informants knew why I was interviewing them, and assured them they would be anonymized in any research publications. No questionnaires were sent before the interviews took place, and although the interviews were based on dialogue between the informants and myself, I mostly tried to concentrate on listening.

At the beginning of the interview, I asked the informants to recount their childhood. If the narrator was born before WWII, I continued by approaching the theme and requested her/him to remember the wartime period and the Soviet partisan attacks. I then moved on by asking what consequences they felt the partisan attacks had had on either themselves or their families. When conducting interviews on such a sensitive topic, it is essential to respect the emotional boundaries of the informants during the interview (BenEzer 1999, 41). Therefore, I often stressed that it was possible to stop the interview if the narration seemed to become emotionally too difficult, and sometimes I had to pause the interview until the narrator contained her/himself and was ready to continue. The interview situations were very emotional and touching, and sometimes I shed tears when listening to the affective stories of the informants.

The personal oral history narratives of the Soviet Partisan War on the home front of the Finnish borderlands are multi-voiced, and as such, offer knowledge other than the official history and memory that usually refers to documented facts, avoids taking moral stances, as well as tending to disregard in-

dividual experiences. The oral history approach concentrates on often silent or silenced knowledge, based on personal experiences that challenge official memory and knowledge. (Peltonen 2006, 8.) These narratives of Soviet partisan attacks are constructed with memories, and are not just a list of events. During their accounts, narrators try to evaluate, give explanations and make sense of the crucial events and experiences, which is characteristic to oral history narration, and it is this added meaning that makes the oral history sources so special and different. (Portelli 1991, 26, 50.)

The signals of trauma in personal narratives

Most of the informants agreed that reminiscing and archiving their memories is an important action, so that future generations can become acquainted with what happened in the past. Among the interviewees were women and men who had previously shared their experiences with journalists, researchers and therapists, but there are also those for whom the interview was the first time they had spoken out. They mentioned that it was in some way easier to speak about their difficult memories to an unfamiliar researcher than to a close family member, however, most of the interviewees had discussed their experiences with family or friends.

The informants related their personal experiences, as well as memories they had heard from relatives, friends or neighbors. Those who had experienced the Soviet partisan attacks first-hand reminisced about their childhood or youth experiences, and their narratives included horrific incidents and painful memories. As such, talking about them aroused strong emotions that manifested both verbally and non-verbally. To understand the narratives of the Soviet partisan attacks and their impacts on individuals, it is important to remember that the informants were very young when the narrated events occurred. Also the younger generation, even though they were born just before or after the war, have heard stories about the Soviet partisan attacks from others since their early childhood. It is characteristic of the partisan attacks and the actions that followed that everything happened unexpectedly, usually by night or early in the morning, and everyone fell into a sense of shock. The children did not always understand clearly what was happening, or were so shocked that they did not entirely remember what had occurred. Consequently, the narrators have supplemented their personal memories with elements stemming from other people's memories, books, news and various other sources.

A woman who was only eight years old when the Soviet partisans attacked her home village, offered a narrative which has several elements of trauma. She managed to escape, but dozens of villagers, including her mother, were killed. She remembered later what other people told her about the attack and

episodes that she had forgotten herself. Thus, the stories of others have later come to substitute missing parts of her memory, and have helped her to reconstruct a coherent narrative of the attacks and her escape. However, the escape and the following events were so shocking that she was not able to feel anything in the immediate aftermath of the events. This comes up in her narration when she describes how she went with adults to see the dead bodies of the villagers in the mortuary. She could not feel anything even though she had heard that her mother had died in a cow shed the partisans had burned down, and her mother's remains had been brought to the mortuary where were also the bodies of the other killed victims:

N: The deceased were not in coffins – instead they were there [on the floor] upside down.

K: You children were taken there [to the mortuary]?

N: Well, I went along, I went along [with others]. Yes, and such... only one man from the villagers had died [in the Soviet partisan attack], an elderly man... his clothes were burned and he was laying just naked, he was burnt brown, look, he was the first there in the morgue [that I saw]...but, I don't know, look, it was not... nothing felt nothing. And there behind the mortuary were the jute sacks in line, next to the back wall... in one of these sacks were the bones of my mother. (18 2017)

The signals of trauma are evident in her narrative. Her narration flows quite naturally until the beginning of the episodes of memory that had shocked her the most; the escape of the Soviet partisans, seeing dead bodies in the mortuary, and understanding that her loving mother was dead. In these episodes, the narration becomes fragmented, her voice quietens down and she starts weeping. Maja Povrzanović Frykman (2016, 89–90) uses the concept of 'affective flashback' referring these kinds of bodily reactions that are beyond a narrator's control when narrating difficult memories. Affective flashback during the narration brings out the revived intensity of the experiences even though the affects may have changed (*ibid.*). As quotation above reveals, as a child the narrator saw things that nobody should see. She had not even recovered from her own escape, but was again in a new confusing situation that was just too much, and too traumatic for a little child. As a coping mechanism, she was forced to distance and isolate herself from the event, which meant emotional numbness (Abrams 1999, 94; BenEzer 2010, 34). Later, after the funeral had taken place, she said that she started to cry and the crying didn't stop. For a long time she suffered nightmares where she tried to escape the Soviets but her legs would not carry her. After the interview, she showed me a photo of her mother, and told that she has missed her love and care throughout her life.

According to the interviews, it seems to be quite easy for the informants to tell what they know about the events, such as what happened, who did what and where it happened. However, it is more difficult for them, especially for the eyewitness interviewees, to tell how the events and the stories they have heard have influenced them, even though for most of them these events have caused significant changes in their life. The impact of the Soviet partisan attacks are usually accompanied by an undercurrent of distressing emotions such as sorrow, grief or mourning. These emotions are hard to verbalize and do not necessarily belong to the 'main story' of the Soviet Partisan War events. (See also BenEzer 1999, 34.) Instead of telling about emotions directly, it is sometimes easier for trauma victims speak of them indirectly, and this also came up in the interview. A man from northern Finland told that he was 10 years old when he saw the bloody bodies of dead children and women as they were carried from the place of killing by truck, and also how he heard macabre stories of the partisan attacks by listening to his parent's discussions of their experiences. During the interview he twice fended off my question of 'how did these events affect you?' by changing the subject. At the end of the interview, I asked my question a third time (although somewhat differently), and this time he answered by telling what the fear caused by the partisan attacks had made him do:

K: How did your own life go after these events?

N: Well, after all this, I sometimes said that 'it is certain that as soon as I can I will move away, I will not live in the borderland'. And I have followed that path here [to North West coast]. I did it just because of that. [...] Because of fear. No need to explain anything else. (I7 2017)

The worst things that happened to children who managed to survive was their escape from the shooting partisans, and seeing the killing and dead bodies. The images of the bodies of those killed have stuck in their minds for the remainder of their lives. The loss of parents and other relatives changed their whole life and caused insecurity. Reminiscing over their painful childhood memories tended to wake up strong feelings and make the narrators cry. It was also usual that their voices deepened or turned quiet, or sometimes speaking became impossible, and the voice ceases to come. (Cf. Povrzanović Frykman 2016, 85–89.) Sometimes it is hard to see or hear any of the typical elements of trauma, but the repetition of certain words, clauses or phrases reveals that the event being discussed has been difficult for the narrator to cope with.

A man from North Karelia recalled that on a summer night in July 1944, Soviet partisans killed 13 civilians in his home district. Most of the Finnish

men were away at war during that time, and therefore young boys had to take care of the dead bodies. The narrator was 16 years old when he and three other boys of the same age were put to collecting the dead bodies with a help of one adult man, a horse and a sleigh:

N: [...] Many of them [those killed] were friends of mine. We started to pick up the dead bodies that were lying there in different positions... It was a weird occasion for us inexperienced young boys. We picked up the bodies and put them in the sleigh. It was a weird experience...The memories returned to haunt me afterwards. [...] They still come in my dreams. (114 2017)

The narrated event was exceptional and must have been devastating for the young boys. The narrator did not discuss his emotions and he did not weep during the interview. Instead, the traumatic elements tend to be signified in different ways, such as the way he repeats how “weird” the occasion was, and how he mentions that the events caused him lifelong nightmares. Almost all of the interviewed informants who were children or teens during the war have suffered from nightmares, and these dreams could be seen as post-traumatic episodes that reflect a preoccupation with unresolved problems (Domhoff 1996). Sleep disturbances and post-traumatic stress disorder have a clear relationship, and nightmares are manifestations of intrusive recollections of a traumatic event. In addition, insomnia, decreased deep sleep and increased spontaneous waking are typical manifestations of post-traumatic stress disorder. The content of the dreams of traumatized people reflects not only their traumatic experiences, but also their emotions in relation to those experiences. (Sacre 2012, 195–197.)

Among the interviewees were also those who were not eyewitness to the partisan war. However, for them the trauma arises from a persisting social condition (Erikson 1994, 228) of living in or near villages where partisans killed civilians. A narrator from the younger generation, born in 1960, tells that she heard the stories of Soviet partisans who attacked the neighboring village for as long as she remembers. Even after a long time elapsing, fearful memories still arose when Russia occupied the Crimean peninsula in 2014:

K: How do you think the events [of the Soviet Partisan War] that you have heard of since you were child have affected you? Do you think they have affected you?

N: Yes, they have indeed [had an impact]. [...] When Crimea was occupied and Putin began to boast in Russia, my fears were activated very badly, sure, because I am still living here on the eastern border [of Finland]. [...] Senseless fears woke, and I wondered

if he [Putin and his troops] would come here, and where I should escape to. Something so irrational... I tried to say to myself that no [this would not happen].

K: Did those thoughts also come into your dreams?

N: Yes, or I could not sleep, I was in panic, I really had to calm myself. I thought about these [things] at night, just at night, and in the evenings. Just absolute panic. Absolutely total, I felt it throughout my body, really, horror and panic. (I5 2017)

This narrative is an example of a collectively shared transgenerational trauma that has had negative impacts. The narrator describes that she panicked and felt 'senseless' fears when she heard the news about Russia's actions in Crimea. Her narration is full of repetition of the description of her negative feelings, which could be interpreted as signals of traumatic memories. However, the essence of her trauma is transgenerational and is based on stories which she heard in her home district and read from books and newspapers, and which have made her afraid of the 'eastern neighbor', previously the Soviet Union and later present-day Russia. Her fears and suspicions concerning the neighboring state reveal old socially shared traumas that come alive when the global political atmosphere tightens, and the leaders of the world's superpowers begin to violate international agreements.

Barriers for recovery

When the political and social atmosphere in Finland opened after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, war memories that until then had been shared mainly in inner family circles were finally able to be related in public (see Savolainen 2017). However, telling about difficult or traumatic experiences was not easy. The more horrific the things that happen, the harder it is to find words and discuss them afterwards. The events that trigger traumatic memories are typically surrounded by secrecy and silence. People need time to be able to speak of their painful experiences, and sometimes they fall silent for a long time, even for decades or for life. But, denying traumatic memories and refusing to speak about them does not serve to eliminate them, and traumas caused by violence will often announce their presence as long as the victims are still able to tell their experiences. (Herman 1992, 1; Kilpy 2007, 10–11; Stroinska, Cecchetto & Szymanski 2014, 13.)

In the interviews, the informants speak about public silence and silencing in regard to the actions of the Soviet partisans in the Finnish borderlands. They reveal that it was not permitted to talk about these events in public until the early 1990's, and convey a sense that their reminiscence and narration was suppressed for decades. People in the borderland villages were aware of the reasons for this social silence, however, regardless of the political climate, people spoke about their fearful past events both at home and with trustwor-

thy friends. But as long as their experiences were not being shared outside their home and local society, on the national level, their experiences were not able to become shared and understood collectively. (Laurén 2017.) In addition, when the silenced historical events remains fearful and repressed and are transmitted to next generations the process of recovering from trauma is delayed.

In 2002, the Finnish society of Civilian Veterans organized an International Reconciliation Seminar in Lapland (see Martikainen 2004), where Soviet partisan veterans and Finnish civilian survivors were invited. The participants were requested to give a speech in the seminar. A man who lost his close relatives in a partisan attack, told that he had prepared carefully to give a speech at the seminar. For him, it has been very hard that the body of his father and sister were never found, consequently he has not been allowed to bury them and say a final good bye. This feeling of incompleteness added to social silence complicated his process of trauma recovery. However, in the seminar he found it impossible to speak or maintain his speech because of the loss of emotional control:

N: [...]... but I could not speak [started to weep, voice almost disappearing]... although I had read and written it [the speech] many times, no... And when it was my turn, I could not speak [he cries]...and I told that my paper was there. And then the chair read it. It was difficult to even to listen to it... [he cries]. (I3 2017)

It was still hard for him to talk about these incidents, and he started to weep and lose his voice when talking about past events and the impact they had on him. The uncertainty about the fate of his close relatives still preys on his mind and he feels bitter because the Finnish authorities have not managed to find out what happened for them: were they really killed or did the partisans take them to the Soviet Union? This uncertainty has slowed down and prevented his trauma recovery. One way to protect ourselves and survive difficult and painful memories is to repress them (Abrams 2010, 93–94) and refuse to share them with anybody. Traumatized people might fear that in telling about their experiences, the emotions connected to the traumatic events could re-surface (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 2003, 337). Some of the interviewees said that it was so hard to remember the painful and traumatic times of the partisan attacks that they have found it better not to speak about them in public, for example to journalists or friends, as the remembrance opens old wounds.

In the interviews, I asked whether the informants thought that the Soviet partisan attacks in Finland had been sufficiently discussed in public – their answers highlighted a long period of political and social silence. In post-war Finland the actions of Soviet partisans were not taught in schools and not

mentioned in history books, even though in the villages that were involved, living witnesses clearly knew what had happened. In recent decades, some television documentaries, printed books and newspaper articles have emerged which focus on the Soviet partisan actions and their consequences on civilians (see Lähteenmäki 2017), however most of the informants felt that so far, these attacks have not been given adequate discussion. Even though those who had been subject to Soviet partisan attacks received a nominal monetary compensation from the state in 2003, it cannot compensate their losses. For those who had lost their closest family members in the attacks and who had been physically or mentally injured for life, it has still been difficult or even impossible to forget the suffering that took place. For them, the partisan attacks do not represent simply a “case” in past history – instead they were so traumatic that they will never have complete closure (cf. Goodrum & Keys 2007, 252).

The socially coerced as well as individually repressed silence surrounding difficult war memories has been the most important factor that has prevented the interviewees from recovering from their painful recollections and traumas. In some cases, the death of family members in the partisan attacks as well as on the battlefields might have been personally so hard and traumatic for the relatives that survived, that they refused anyone the chance to talk about them. One interviewee from North Karelia told that for her mother, the death of her husband (the father of the narrator) on the battlefield and a sudden visit of a Soviet desant to their home during the war were so shocking that she strictly forbade the children any opportunity to either cry or speak about these memories at home:

N: [...] Memories of the war are horrible, especially the bombings. [...] I was so afraid that I had to throw a fit to relieve my fears – I also suffered from bedwetting. And then the nightmares started. Sometimes I still see nightmares [crying]. I was 60 years old [when I first] cried about the death of my father [who died on the battlefield]. During my childhood, it was said: “Quiet! Quiet! Quiet!” Talking [about war memories] was not allowed. But I appreciate how my mother withstood the circumstances. Mother mentioned that she had hardened herself to pull through, and said: “Whatever happened I do not give a toss about it.” She insisted that we all needed to be quiet. (I15 2017)

Boosters for recovery

The establishment of public monuments and the commemoration of the victims of partisan attacks have played an important role in the process of relieving traumatic events and experiences. This kind of public remembering presented a turning point for the border people to start to construct a shared master narrative of what had happened (see Alexander 2004, 12). Almost

every village that faced attacks by Soviet partisans has a monument that recognizes these past monstrosities. Monuments and commemorations serve as indicators of what a society remembers of its past, and also how it is remembered. These commemorations are significant towards remembering the victims involved and also in recognizing that the events actually happened. (Banjeglav 2012, 8–9.) These monuments are very important for the villages, and especially for those who lost relatives and other close people in the partisan attacks. For them, the commemoration is a kind of register of the silenced history that helps them and their society to understand the narratives of the past (Schwartz 1982, 377).

The interviews raised that non-fiction documentary books about the attacks of the Soviet partisans and eyewitness accounts of the civil victims in the Finnish border region were also felt to be important in the process of recovery:

N: It has been very important that he [the author of several documentary books of the Soviet partisan attacks in Finland] has received information about the partisan attacks also from Russia. It has been a very important addition to this issue. (I8 2017)

The most important books were those published at the end of the 1990s and at the beginning of the 2000s (Martikainen 1998; Erkkilä 1998; 2011; Oksanen and Martikainen 1998), and these books opened the public discussion about the consequences of these past events for the people in the Finnish eastern border region. Many also see the books as rejecting the long period of public silence and allowing people to take stock of the wrongs of the past (see e.g. Wandita 2014, xii). Especially, they made possible for the victims to publicly demand recognition of the moral responsibility entailed in the Soviet Partisan War in Finland, and its consequences on the local people.

Among the interviewees were some who had told their traumatic experiences repeatedly, not only in the family circle and with other survivors, but in public in newspaper interviews, commemorative events, and for authors of non-fiction documentary books. This repetition seems to be effective in promoting self-reflection, as well as facilitating distance to the event and sometimes offering different perspectives. In the process of time, repeated narration has been seen to reduce the intensity of emotions. (Asplund Ingemark 2013, 13–14; Pennebaker 1997, 95.) However, despite over 70 years having passed since the events of the war, the telling still makes the narrators cry, although they have found that telling their story helps to recover from traumatic memories:

K: Have you been able to talk about these memories and nightmares with your siblings or other people?

N: Well, not so much. We do talk about somethings, but not so much with those elderly who remember [the actions of the Soviet Partisan War]. Why should they be told anymore? At least for me they are so clear, because I have had to tell them so many times in situations like that.

K: Do you feel that it helps when you tell them repeatedly?

N: Well, yes, yes it relieves somewhat when you can tell [he weeps]... I have been interviewed in the commemorations here [in the home village], and there have been interviewers, journalists and others. (I1 2017.)

Most of the interviewees are today senior citizens. However, feelings of unfairness, anger, hate, sorrow, shame and despair have all had a strong influence on their childhood and adult lives. Their traumatic memories have not disappeared or faded, but the informants have learned to live with and manage them. (See also Erkkilä 1998, 270.) In this process, it has been seen as important to let the past go:

N: I think that [the Soviet Partisan War] talked of more now than before.

K: Is it still necessary to talk about it, what do you think? Or has this matter already been dealt with?

N: Yes, yes, it is necessary. It will never be finished. I think it is so important. Look, I always talk about it to my new acquaintances, I want to tell. (...) Look, I have said in public that I have forgiven. I am not going to hold a grudge, because it prolongs stress infinitely if I hate someone all the time. But I know people from my childhood who have not been able forget the hate. (I8 2017)

However, for her and other informants who have forgiven the past, the forgiving did not happen in the immediate post-war period – it took decades. When I asked what the interviewees think about the Russians today, a typical answer was, that the ordinary people are not guilty for the wars that go on; the leaders of the countries are responsible for them. Overall, the interviewees saw the relationship with present-day Russians as neither particularly close nor particularly bad.

At the end of the interviews, I asked the informants if there was something they would still like to tell. Almost all of them wanted to tell that nowadays they feel empathy for those who are forced to flee from the threat of war and violence, and for the refugees who seek shelter. They can still remember how it was to be scared to death, to see violence and killing, and to lose their home, parents or siblings. They pointed out that in political conflicts and wars, ordinary citizens, especially children are innocent. However, it is often children

that suffer the most. In my view, the emphatic way that the informants looked at the suffering of foreign refugees can be perceived a sign of their own recovery, and now they are able to set their personal past traumas aside in the global context, and consider their past from an outside perspective.

Conclusion

In this research, I have analyzed how the traumatic experiences of the Soviet Partisan War are expressed in personal oral history narratives, and how signals of both trauma and recovery emerged. The interviews revealed that the borderland people still clearly remember the violent and traumatic events that happened in their home region during WWII. However, over the decades, the narrators have complemented their sometimes fragmented childhood memories of Soviet partisan attacks with the aid of other people's memories and other sources. These sources have helped them to construct coherent and tellable stories about the events of the past Soviet Partisan War in the Finnish borderlands.

The narrators emotions connected to the traumatic events of the Soviet partisan attacks are still so strong, that over 70 years later, they find it difficult to tell their stories without a loss of emotional control. Many times during the interviews, when telling about their personal traumatic experiences and memories, the narrators body language changed, their hands started to shake, they started weeping, and their voices deepened, shook or could even disappear. (See also Povrzanović Frykman 2016.) The signals of trauma also emerged verbally, where the narrator could repeat words or clauses that depicted their emotions or important actions, and sometimes the telling became fragmented, as the impacts of their trauma became just too difficult to put into words.

The informants highlighted the central role of public, social and collective remembering in the process of recovering from the traumatic experiences of war on their home front. Remembrance in the form of memorials, commemorations and publications have given them a public space in which to retrieve the past silent and hidden experiences and traumas that were caused by the Soviet Partisan War. However, it is noted that as long as traumas are kept at a personal level and not discussed publicly, then they lack any potential to become collectively shared and recognized. Publicity is also an essential factor, in order that moral responsibility is seen to be taken for the events.

Despite the fact that they have already been discussed at home and in public, the informants still feel that their past experiences of the Soviet partisan attacks are worth remembering and telling. However, it needs to keep in mind that aside from this voluntary group of narrators, there are probably those

who do not want to remember or recount their difficult and perhaps traumatic memories. The Soviet partisan attacks have not been directly traumatic for all of the villagers in the Finnish borderlands, but the stories of these past events have left various negative impressions (like fears and doubts about the Russians) on the lives of both the eyewitnesses and on the next generations.

The process of recovery from the traumatic experiences of the Soviet Partisan War in Finland started from the needs of the victims, in that they had stories that needed to be told (cf. Portelli 2003, 15). The oral history narratives of the partisan actions and the suffering they caused for the civilians in Finnish borderlands illuminates a particular period of the war on the home front, and also the crises that followed. However, they are not to be seen just as stories of injustice, trauma and human suffering, but also as manifestations of survival and recovery.

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SOURCES

Interviews

Interviews in Lapland, Kainuu, Northern Ostrobothnia and North Karelia in 2017. All the 16 interviews were audio taped (45 minutes–2 hours/interview) and will be archived in the Finnish Literature Society's archives at the end of the research. In referring to the interviews and to protect the anonymity of the interviewees, all of the tapes have been coded without names (I = interview, 1–16 = the number of an interview).

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