

Thanatos

ISSN 2242-6280, vol.5 1/2016

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https://thanatosjournal.files.wordpress.com/2016/6/koskinen-koivisto_dark_heritage.pdf

Reminder of the Dark Heritage of Humankind – Experiences of Finnish Cemetery Tourists of Visiting the Norvajärvi German Cemetery

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Abstract

In this article I examine the experiences of Finnish people visiting the Norvajärvi German cemetery, located 18 kilometers north of Rovaniemi town center. In the Second World War (WWII), Finland cooperated with Germany allowing German troops to operate against the Soviet Union out of Finnish territory from 1941. As a result of warfare in Northern Finland's frontiers, about 15 000 German soldiers died between 1941 and 1945. Towards the end of WWII, Finland turned against Germany and the so-called Lapland War began between the former brothers-in-arms in 1944 resulting in a relatively low loss of life, but large-scale devastation of northern Finland when German troops resorted to 'burning down Lapland'. These events have left traumatic memories for Lapland residents.

The Norvajärvi cemetery was founded in 1963 and is the only official commemoration site and monument of the WWII German presence in Finnish Lapland. The main research material of this article comes from online media in which visitors, whom I term 'cemetery tourists', introduce and reflect on their experiences of visiting the cemetery, as well as interviews with local agents who take part in conserving the WWII heritage. In addition I have interviewed some of the Rovaniemi-based guides who take tourists to see the site. I ask what motivations drive people to visit the site and how they describe the experience. How do the visitors see and relate to Lapland's German past and its 'dark' heritage? I analyze the blog materials and images as well as my own experiences of visiting the cemetery using a phenomenological framework and paying attention to sensual experiences and reflections. It seems that the cemetery tourists who visit Norvajärvi German cemetery are well aware of the difficult history and the dark heritage of the Lapland War. The visit to the site deepens the visitor's understanding of WWII and results in reflections over the consequences and irrationality of war.

Keywords: Second World War, Lapland War, Dark Heritage, dark tourism, difficult history, cemetery, cemetery tourism, thanatourism, historical consciousness, history hobbyist, experience, phenomenology, sensory ethnography, blog

Introduction

One of the darker chapters in Finnish history is the alliance with Nazi Germany during the Second World War (henceforth WWII). After the Finnish-Soviet 'Winter War' (1939–40), Finland, believing that a new conflict with the

Soviet Union would arise, allied with Germany.¹ As a result, German soldiers and service troops consisting of mostly German and Austrian nationals began arriving in Finland.² Some 200 000 German troops were based in Finland, mostly in the northern parts of the country. The German presence in Finnish Lapland from the end of 1940 lasted until 1944 when, as part of the condition of peace with the Soviet Union, Finland had to take up arms and fight against their former German brothers-in-arms. Withdrawing to Norway, the German army adopted ‘scorched earth’ tactics which led to large-scale devastation of northern Finland along with the necessary mass evacuation of Lapland residents. (Ahto 1980; Kallioniemi 1990; Tuunainen 2012). The scale of destruction was massive and left traumatic and painful memories for many (see e.g. Tuominen 2005 and 2015; Tuomaala 2008; Säskilähti 2013). As a result of warfare, about 15 000 German soldiers died within the northern frontiers. Unlike Finland’s policy throughout WWII, Germany did not bring the bodies of their fallen soldiers back to their home country but buried them on foreign ground. Most of the 15 000 who died in Finland between 1941 and 1945 are buried in the area which is today in Russian territory but there are also two cemeteries for German soldiers in Finland; one in Vantaa and one at Norvajärvi, Lapland. (Der Deutsche Soldatenfriedhof n.d.).

Norvajärvi cemetery is the only official monument commemorating the WWII German military presence in Lapland and its capital, Rovaniemi.³ The surrounding landscapes and nature are still abundant with physical remains of the presence of the German Army. German remains can be found in the area which today is the city’s most popular tourist attraction, the Santa Claus Village (see Herva 2014; Mullins 2014).⁴ Most of the remains here consist of rotten pieces of metal, burned glass and wood, and other ‘war junk’ (e.g. Seitsonen & Herva 2011). Only a few former German sites in Lapland have been turned into unofficial war memorials and/or tourist attractions. These include the ‘War Trail’ at Tankavaara situated on an actual Lapland War battlefield site, the War and Reconstruction Museum in Salla, and Järämä German fortification ”Sturmbock Stellung” in Karesuvanto, Enontekiö.⁵ In addition, there are some trenches in the outdoor museum area of Siida, the National Museum of the Finnish Sámi in Inari, which are, although very much invisible and hidden, part of the museum tour.⁶ Norvajärvi German cemetery is the only German military cemetery in Lapland, situated close to Rovaniemi, the major touristic center, and is therefore a unique memorial in Finnish Lapland.

In this article I scrutinize the motivations which drive Finnish tourists, from nearby areas and other more distant parts of the country, to visit Norvajärvi German cemetery. I ask what kinds of experiences the visit evokes. How do the visitors see and relate to Lapland’s historical past and its ‘dark heritage’ of German military presence? By using the term dark heritage I refer to several related concepts that are connected with dark, macabre, difficult and even painful elements of cultural heritage including *difficult* or *contested heritage*, and *dark tourism* (or *thanatourism*). The concept of difficult heritage relates to aspects of the past that may be difficult or painful to reconcile. According to Sharon Macdonald, it is

¹ Researchers have emphasized the material effects of warfare: When Germany invaded Norway, Britain cut all trade connections to Scandinavia and trade between Finland and Germany became crucial for Finland (see e.g. Vehviläinen 2002).

² In addition to soldiers and service troops, Germans brought along civilians who were obligated to work as well as prisoners of war from other frontiers to Finnish Lapland (Westerlund 2008).

³ There are, however, many memorials for WWII, Lapland War and reconstruction around Lapland and Rovaniemi. For example, in Rovaniemi churchyard there is a hero cemetery commemorating all Finnish soldiers who died in the WWII including a hero monument and another monument for those who died during the evacuation in Sweden. The official monument celebrating the town’s reconstruction is located near the railway station. Information about the monuments in the webpages of Rovaniemi Parish URL: http://www.rovaniemenseurakunta.fi/hautausoimi/patsaat_ja_muistomerkit/ and Art Museum of Rovaniemi URL: <http://julkisetteokset.rovaniemi.fi/teokset/lapinjalleenrakentaminen.htm>.

⁴ This is not indicated anywhere in the area and the former military history of the area is not used in any way in tourism business.

⁵ Järämä War Memorial URL: <http://jaramaeng.blogspot.fi/>.

⁶ The archaeologists of Siida have mapped out the WWII sites of Inari and other Sámi areas. Information of this work is available at URL: <http://tarinasoitin.fi/saamelaismuseosiida> under the title “Traces of war”.

“concerned with histories and pasts that do not easily fit with self-identities of the groups of whose pasts or histories they are part” (McDonald 2008, 9). Thus, difficult heritage can open up social conflicts and controversies.⁷

Similarly, researchers have used the idea of ‘contested heritage’ or landscapes to acknowledge the differing perspectives that can affect different understandings or interpretations of the same event or period in history. This is not uncommon in areas where different communities have a history of conflict and disagreement, as might be seen for example in Northern Ireland (see e.g. Breen, Reid and Hope 2015). In the case of Finland’s WWII legacy, the alliance with Germany and the destruction of Lapland following the period of friendly relations caused trauma and shame to many of the people who had co-operated with and had acquaintance with German soldiers, especially to the women who had relationships with German soldiers and the children resulting from these relationships.⁸ The relationships as well as other memories of Germans were a taboo issue for a long time (Tuominen 2005, 158).

The concept of dark tourism originates from the ideas of Malcolm Foley and J. John Lennon (1996, 195) who recognized the process of visiting, primarily as tourists, heritage sites connected with atrocity, death and suffering. The interest in death, *thanatopsis*, or in the travelling dimension of it, thanatourism, as many researchers (e.g. Seaton 1996; Stone 2006, 147; Venbrux 2010, 41–42) have pointed out, is not a recent phenomenon. Tourism or pilgrimage to burial or death sites and mausoleums has flourished in many parts of the world. Philip Stone (2006) has developed a ‘spectrum’ of dark tourism, in which individual attractions may exhibit different degrees of ‘darkness’. Factors affecting the extent to which a tourist attraction is dark may include such variables as authenticity, and the extent to which the attraction has been commoditized for touristic consumption. The darkest sites are those that have the least tourism infrastructure and the worst atrocities associated with them such as death camps (Stone 2006, 157). The Norvajärvi German cemetery is a military cemetery for fallen soldiers who died in the wide area of Finnish Lapland. It is not constructed on a battlefield site but it is obvious that the soldiers, the majority of whom were young men between 19 and 25 years, faced a violent death. (Der Deutsche Soldatenfriedhof n.d.; Interview with Pajula April 29, 2016.)

It has been argued that the phenomenon of dark tourism and thanatourism could be connected to universal nature of death and the need to reflect on one’s own mortality (e.g. Seaton 1996; Wenbrux 2010). I was curious to see whether similar motivations drive the Finnish people who have visited Norvajärvi and thereby familiarized themselves with local war history. My research material is limited to a group of people that have chosen to reflect on their visit to Norvajärvi in social media. These people, whom I choose to call *cemetery tourists*, seem to share similar kinds of experiences and reflections in these online platforms. It seems that for these people, the visit to the German military cemetery involves a sensual and spiritual dimension and is an encounter with dark heritage which makes them ponder upon the nature of war and humankind.

War Memorials and the WWII Heritage in Finland

Over the past decades, war memorials as well as other war monuments that serve national official histories or contested histories have received attention in a variety of fields including architecture, religious studies, anthropology, sociology

⁷ Sharon MacDonald (2006) has discussed the perceived agency of Nazi architecture which according to her should not be treated as “normal” heritage because it risks revitalizing its agency. On the other hand, it should not be eradicated either.

⁸ Researchers have estimated that the number of children born in Finland to German soldiers and their Finnish spouse/partner was between 1000 and 1300. Marriage between a German man and a Finnish woman was not recommended by German authorities and thus was difficult to arrange due to heavy bureaucracy. Many couples were only engaged. This means that most of the children born from these relationships were born outside of marriage and the total number of these children can only be roughly estimated. (Junila 2000, 263, 268–270 and 2012, 222).

and history. According to Australian cultural historians Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton (2012, 2), “memorials remain amongst the most contested and enduring forms of public history.” When erected in a particular place at a particular time, they cement shared cultural meanings about the past. Research has, however, focused mostly on the institutional history of erecting and conserving war heritage rather than the experiences and interpretations of those who visit the sites and take part in shaping the commemorative practices that evolve around the monuments in different times. Ashton and Hamilton see a need “to understand the shifts in memorialization as a cultural process which yield the ‘cultural forgetting’” (ibid., 3).

This article discusses the experiences of Finnish people who visit to the German cemetery of Norvajärvi which is the most important war memorial of German soldiers who fought in northern frontiers during WWII. Norvajärvi cemetery is located in a scenic spot by a lake on a pine forest cape about 18 kilometers from the center of Rovaniemi and can thus be reached by driving (or biking). The distant location and peace it offered were a wish on the part of Germans who wanted to avoid vandalism caused by assumed hatred towards German soldiers.⁹ Today the mausoleum contains the remains of over 2700 German soldiers who fell on Northern frontiers during WWII (1941–1945). In addition, there is a memorial to the soldiers whose bodies have not been found consisting of a stone and large cross made of iron standing in front of the mausoleum on the cape. The mausoleum is made of granite and designed by German architect Otto Kindt. The architecture is distinctively German: the building is large and simple and reminds us of the German WWI war memorials for unknown soldiers. German hero cemeteries of WWI were placed in forest environments in the middle of the nature and as part of the landscape. Furthermore, the use of natural materials such as carved stone was also advocated. (Mosse 1979, 12).

Although the Norvajärvi cemetery has received many German visitors over 50 years of its existence, the main visitor group consists of Finns. Every year, the site receives about 10 000 visitors. Approximately 20 per cent of them are foreign and only half of these German (Interview with Pajula April 29, 2016). One of the obvious reasons why both Finnish and foreign tourists find their way to the site is that the Rovaniemi tourist office has listed the Norvajärvi cemetery among one of the few recommended history and heritage attractions in their webpages¹⁰ and hence it has become part of the tourism circuit.

To understand Finnish cemetery tourism, it is important to take a brief look at the culture of commemoration of WWII both in Finland and Germany and especially the practices related to honoring fallen soldiers. Commemorating soldiers who died in foreign battlefields took center stage after the great losses of WWI (e.g. Winter 1995; Inglis 2005). This was also the case in Germany. During WWI, fallen German soldiers were buried to large honorary/hero cemeteries located at the battlefield (Mosse 1979). These cemeteries were to be distinguished from other cemeteries in their design, which

⁹ According to historian Marianne Junila (1998) who has examined the responses of local media and local people in Rovaniemi of the 1950s and 1960s, the plans to construct the cemetery caused some reactions from local people, especially among the members of the leftist-oriented political organizations. Despite these conflicting views, the plans to build a cemetery and to move the remains of German soldiers from other graveyards of the North proceeded. In the 1950s, Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (henceforth VDK), a German humanitarian organization charged by the German government with recording, maintaining and caring for the graves of German war casualties abroad, searched for an ideal location for the cemetery close to Rovaniemi which would also be nearby water and hills, but separated from other settlements. Finally, Norvajärvi lakeshore, owned by Rovaniemi municipality was chosen and a bilateral agreement was signed in 1959 giving the VDK the right to use the land without any charges. The cemetery was finally inaugurated in 1963. (Deutsche Soldatenfriedhof n.d.)

¹⁰ URL: <http://www.visitrovaniemi.fi/sights-attractions/sights-attractions#history-heritage>, the same information available in Finnish.

was supposed to be as simple as possible, symbolizing wartime camaraderie but also the new German nation (Ibid., 8). The same practice of burying the fallen soldiers on or nearby the site of death continued during and after WWII.¹¹

Unlike in Germany, the remains of fallen Finnish soldiers were evacuated from the battlefields and when possible, buried in the soldier's home region with honorary rituals in the so called *hero cemeteries* for the fallen which are often located next to the Lutheran churches of town centers (Raivo 2000, 150).¹² These cemeteries and funeral practices are seen to follow the model of the hero cemeteries of the 1918 Civil War by the civil guards (*Suojeluskunnat*) also known as the Whites, the winners of the Civil War. Unknown soldiers were buried in the hero cemeteries located nearby the war zone (Raivo 2000, 150–151; Kempainen 2006, 71, 73).¹³ In the postwar years, the hero cemeteries became important sites for personal mourning and remembrance. Today, the hero cemeteries continue to function as a central ritual arena for traditions which construct the collective and national memory of war. (Raivo 2000, 153–154; Jokisipilä & Kinnunen 2012, 235.) Despite their central role as sites of national memory and mourning, there are very few studies of hero cemeteries as sites of memory, ritual practices, or cemetery tourism to war historical sites in Finland (see Raivo 2000 for an exception).

Norvajärvi German cemetery is linked to heritage which can be regarded as contested or marginal. In Finland, the commemoration of the WWII has long centered on the Winter War against the Soviet Union, the primary enemy, while the interpretations of the Continuation War during which Finland was allied with the Nazi regime are more disputed (Raivo 2000, 157; Kivimäki 2012, 491; Jokisipilä & Kinnunen 2012, 436). The third war Finland fought during the WWII was the Lapland War, the “one against Nazi-Germany” that is also a part of the formation of Finland's national story and identity (Löfström 2011).¹⁴ Over the past years, public discussions have evolved around the Lapland War and its complicated role in Finnish history. It has been claimed that, compared to the Winter and Continuation Wars, the Lapland War occupies only a marginal place in Finland's collective narrative of WWII (Kivimäki 2012, 483; Tuominen 2015). As Herva (2014, 300) commented, Finns have been anxious to distance themselves from the German war efforts ever since the war. However, the Finnish-German relations, especially between Finnish women and German soldiers, have been addressed in the recent popular culture, in fiction as well as in documentaries (e.g. the novel “Midwife” by Katja Kettu in 2011 and a movie based on it in 2015, and documentary “Auf Wiedersehen Finnland” by Virpi Suutari in 2010).¹⁵

In April 2015, at the anniversary of the end of the Lapland War, the Provincial Museum of Lapland in Rovaniemi opened an exhibition regarding the wartime Finnish-German relationship in 1941–1944 *Wir waren Freunde – olimme*

¹¹ German soldiers, who died in Finnish Lapland during 1941–1944 when Finland was still an ally of Germany, were buried in local Finnish honorary cemeteries in 80 different graveyards. In the 1950s, the VDK started organizing the reburial of the remains of Germans in separate graveyards in all Nordic countries (Junila 1998, 403).

¹² In the beginning of the war, there were no clear evacuation plans or guidelines about how to treat the bodies/belongings of the fallen soldiers. A center for the evacuation of fallen soldiers (*Kaatuneiden Evakuoimiskeskus*) was established in January 1940. (Kempainen 2006, 67.) The practice of burying the soldiers to their home parishes was due to both religious and nationalistic reasons: not leaving the bodies of soldiers to the hands of atheist Bolsheviks but burying them to the land of their ancestors, the Lutheran peasants (Raivo 2000, 152).

¹³ The remains of fallen Finnish soldiers that were discovered later in postwar years up until today have been repatriated and buried according to the honorary military protocol. The same applies to the remains of fallen German soldiers that were found later.

¹⁴ In the postwar years Finns wanted to distance themselves from the wartime association with Germany, and adapted a view of the Continuation War as a separate war, a legitimate *continuation* of ‘Finland's own’ Winter War. This was especially important for the official, state-level memory production because the Soviet Union had to be assured of a new future-oriented foreign policy (Raivo 2000; Jokisipilä & Kinnunen 2012, 439). This view of the Continuation War is seemingly no longer held, as historian Pilvi Torsti's (2012) research on Finns' historical consciousness demonstrates.

¹⁵ As pointed out by researchers who have scrutinized memory culture of the Lapland War and reconstruction, these novels represented a new wave of literature addressing the issue which was already taken up in the 1970s and 1980s as well as in the 1990s (see Sääskilähti 2014 and 2015; Arminen 2015).

ystäviä (“We were Friends”). This exhibition, which stayed open until mid-January 2016, became very popular especially among the local people of Lapland and Rovaniemi. The exhibition also attracted attention in both local and national media (see e.g. Forrest 2015).¹⁶ Nevertheless, the exhibition proved successful: in 2015, the museum received much more visitors than in previous years. The research group that I am part of (Lapland’s Dark Heritage, University of Helsinki)¹⁷ collected a visitor survey at the exhibition which received high number of responses (a total number of 480). The results are not yet fully analyzed but preliminary results¹⁸ (after analysis of approximately 75 % of the surveys) it seems that visitors regarded the exhibition mostly positively (notwithstanding a number of more critical and negative comments concerning, for example, a perceived ‘downplaying’ of Nazi atrocities elsewhere). The perspectives it represents, everyday life interactions between Finns and Germans also from a positive viewpoint, was welcomed and appreciated by, in particular, Finnish visitors.

The material of this article, namely blog writings, are produced freely without outside impetus and published on the internet.¹⁹ The written reflections and photos that accompany them provide an interesting window to the commemoration of war and cultural meanings related to death. In Finnish culture, the visits to cemeteries and especially to military cemeteries are often formal, serious and quiet. Honorary commemoration rituals take place at the hero cemeteries on Independence Day and other national and religious holidays. Individual tourists and groups visit cemeteries but generally there are few organized tours that introduce hero cemeteries. However, plenty of information is available about different cemeteries in the forms of books, booklets and internet sites. (Knapas 2005.) Furthermore, there are many websites related to WWII heritage and war history sites, such as specialist sites, map applications and activities based on mobile navigation such as geocaching dedicated to WWII war memorials encouraging independent explorations.²⁰ Many of these websites are produced by local history hobbyists and heritage activists (for discussion of alternative engagements with WWII heritage in Lapland see Herva et al 2016). All this demonstrates that Finnish people continue to be interested in the legacy of WWII.

Research Material and Phenomenological Analysis

The research material consists of blog entries and discussions on specific internet forums in which Finnish people, both tourists and Lapland residents, write about their personal experiences of visiting Norvajärvi German cemetery.²¹ Most of the forums are blogs created around special interests, hobbies and leisure activities which in these cases include outdoor activities, traveling (including motorcycling) and photographing. Many of these hobbyists characterize themselves as nature lovers who either live in Lapland or visit because of the natural beauty of the region (see the

¹⁶ Main reason for the media attention was the marketing material launched by the Provincial museum of Lapland, the matchboxes carrying the name of the exhibition. Some citizens of Rovaniemi found this to be insulting and finally the mayor of Rovaniemi asked the Museum to stop distributing the boxes. (See Rähä 2015; Vesa 2015.)

¹⁷ For more information on the project see URL: <http://blogs.helsinki.fi/lapland-dark-heritage/>.

¹⁸ B.A. Anu Suutari has analyzed 365 survey responses for her Master’s thesis. I thank her and my colleague Suzie Thomas for compiling these preliminary results. Detailed analysis is forthcoming in Suutari’s Master’s thesis and also in planned publications of Lapland’s Dark Heritage research group that will present the survey results.

¹⁹ Blogs are free platforms available to anybody to publish their thoughts. The first blogs that appeared in the mid-1990s were written by male authors who were political reporters looking for platforms to express controversial work. Even after becoming mainstream social media, blogs have remained as forums that are seen spaces where the authors can be themselves, free of constraints. (Reed 2005; Rettberg 2008.)

²⁰ E.g. webpage Finnish War Memorials (*Suomalaiset sotamuistomerkit*) URL: <http://www.sotamuistomerkit.fi/sivu.php?id=1>. or crowdsourcing map produced by the national news YLE URL: http://yle.fi/uutiset/merkitse_kartalle_missa_suomen_sodat_nakyvat/7380825.

²¹ The blogs were found through a Google search in February 2015. All of them are originally written in Finnish and the quotes included here are translated by the author of this article.

description of the blogs in Table 1). Only one of the authors mentions a special interest in historical sites which are somehow unknown or forgotten (blog 2). In some cases, the writers have already been to Norvajärvi cemetery earlier in their life and return there because of the uniqueness of the place (blog 8). The experience has thus been meaningful enough that the writers formulate their thoughts and publish them.

Name	Authors (s) (Gender)	Description	Form
1 Retkipaikka	43 authors/photographers signing with their own name (male and female)	The most popular outdoor and nature tourism	public blog/forum, several authors
2 Luolamiehen blogi	Tuomo Kesäläinen (male)	The aim of the blog is to bring out interesting and forgotten places in nature	blog, single author
3 Esoteerinen maantiede ja periferiaterapia (blog)	Marko Leppänen (male)	Esoteric geography aims at holistic understanding of areas and locations	blog, single author
4 Arctic Avium	3 anonymous (females)	Writings about life and all kinds of things	blog/diary, three authors
5 Syksyisiä tarinoita	Eräskaksikko (female)	Woman who fell in love with Lapland 20 years ago, texts also about home and animals	blog/diary, single author
6 Kukkapilli	Satu (female)	Reflections about life and surrounding world, lots of photos	blog, single author
7 Pihin naisen elämää	Pihi nainen (Leila S.) (female)	Women in her 30s reads and travels in Helsinki region with small budget	
8 Openroads	Motorist Pekka Kemppainen (male)	Travel diary by a man who has always been interested in motorcycles	travel diary, single author
Forum 1: "Cemeteries" and "Ghost stories" discussion chains at murha.info	Several authors, registered with chosen name, many of them with pseudonym (females and males)	Finland's leading crime-related portal	Discussions by pseudonyms (registration required)

Table 1. List of blogs/forums featuring writings about visiting Norvajärvi/Honkanummi German cemeteries.

Only a few of the blogs are either personal or collective diaries featuring regular journaling and/or reflections of meaningful travel experiences. I have also included in the list three entries (blogs 3, 6 and 7) about visiting the other German cemetery, Honkanummi in Vantaa, because these texts either also mention Norvajärvi or the authors have received comments which discuss Norvajärvi cemetery (see Table 2). Some of the comments as well as the discussion chain listed here at the murder discussion forum (Forum 1) relate to the phenomenon of cemetery tourism or thanatourism. There is one particular discussion chain on the forum entitled "cemeteries" started in 2007 which discusses the motivations for visiting cemeteries. The participants of the discussion call themselves cemetery tourists and several of them describe their experience of visiting Norvajärvi German cemetery. The chain is very popular and continues up to twelve pages. The most recent post is from 2014.

The choices related to research ethics of using online materials follow the guidelines given in the Association of Internet Researchers' Code of Ethics (2012) which advise the researcher to consider the nature of the texts and its publicity/privacy. I have considered the blogs and discussion forums in this study as public sites as many of them offer tips for other travelers, nature lovers, Lapland enthusiasts and/or cemetery tourists. However, when contact information was available, the writers were informed about the research. One of the texts I have analyzed cannot be found anymore from the blog archive, although the blog itself continues to be updated.

Blog	Place, time of visit	Comments	Photos	Tags
1 Retkipaikka.fi	Norvajärvi, 8/2013	None	6	historical, war history, Lapland, German soldiers' cemetery, Norvajärvi, Rovaniemi
2 Luolamiehen blogi	Norvajärvi, 1/2011	1, non-related	5	German soldiers' cemetery
3 Esoteerinen maantiede ja periferiaterapia	Honkanummi, 9/2011	5, one addressing Norvajärvi	9	cemeteries, Germany, war history, Second World War, Vantaa
4 Arctic Avium	Norvajärvi 6/2011	2, historical information and reflection	7	travels, culture
5 Kukkapilli	Honkanummi, 11/2014	18 (4 comments addressing German cemeteries)	11	cemeteries, capital city area, urban exploring
6 Syksyisiä tarinoita	Norvajärvi 6/2013	1, reflection	11	Norvajärvi, Rovaniemi, German soldiers' cemetery
7 Pihin naisen blogi	Honkanummi	2 comments (both addressing Norvajärvi)	4	history, trips, free entry
8 Openroads	Norvajärvi, 7/2001	-	8	-

Table 2. Contents of and responses to the blog entries.

All blogs and one journal I analyze contain several photos, some of which also carry captions. Most of the photos are by the authors. The tags of the texts reflect the author's motivations and interests. All the blog texts were originally written in Finnish. I have translated the quotes that I use in this article into English.

In addition to the texts, I have interviewed three local guides who frequently meet visitors of the cemetery. Mr. Eero Pajula is a person who has volunteered to act as the contact person of VDK. He also coordinates the maintenance of the cemetery and acts as a guide for German visitors. Mrs. Marja Jalkanen is a professional guide of Rovaniemi and Mrs. Kaija Sälevä a teacher who also acts as a freelance guide. Together they have created a bus tour about the WWII in Rovaniemi entitled Piippuniemi ("Chimney Cape")²² which was part of the program of the 50th anniversary of Rovaniemi's township in 2010 when the town also served as a UNICEF city.²³ All three interviewees are public figures in the town who actively take part in preserving local history and have expressed their willingness to be addressed by their real name.

²² The latter part of the name of the town of *Rovaniemi* refers to a cape. The title of the tour "Chimney Cape" refers to the landscape over the town right after the war when nearly all the buildings standing on this cape were destroyed and only their chimneys were standing on the smoky ground.

²³ The tour is planned primarily for groups of Finnish tourists. The guides have also given the tour a few times in English. During the tour, the group is taken to various places in Rovaniemi that play a role in wartime (and 'German time') history most of which were destroyed in Lapland War. The tour ends at the Norvajärvi cemetery. (Interview, Jalkanen June 3, 2015.)

I am interested in how people interpret the experience of visiting the cemetery and their encounter with war-related material heritage, the material objects and constructions and other physical elements of the site and the symbolic meanings they attach to them. I approach the blog entries phenomenologically, paying attention to the experiences which arise from the complex web of symbols and meanings given to them.²⁴ I pay attention to the perceptions and sensual experiences of the authors about the presence and environment of the cemetery and the ways in which they interpret them. I will also analyze my own accounts of visiting the cemetery applying the method of sensual ethnography. I visited the cemetery three times during the fieldwork periods I have spent in Rovaniemi in 2015 (February 5, April 29 and June 2) photographing the area and taking notes of my impressions and sensations.²⁵ Although my motivations to visit the site might differ from theirs, some of my experiences seem to resonate with theirs.

Visit to Norvajärvi as a Sensual and Spiritual Experience

The weather is a bit rainy and dusty when I arrive to the gate of the cemetery. Exactly a right kind of weather for a dreary place like this. (Blog 2, January 13, 2011).

The moment of entering the Norvajärvi cemetery is mentioned in the majority of blogs. To get to the cemetery one needs to walk some hundreds of meters from the parking lot into a forest. One does not see the cemetery from the path until one reaches the gate and a fence made of natural stones which surrounds the cemetery. The cemetery tourists seem to be impressed not only about the natural beauty of the place but also its presence which is characterized as either “quiet and peaceful” or “ghostly, dreary and creepy”. One of the visitors noted how the “ascetic beauty of the place silenced me” (Blog 6, October 17, 2013). This entry contained many photos (11) and only a few lines of texts.



Figure 1. Snowy landscape of Norvajärvi. February 5, 2015.
Photo by Suzie Thomas.

My own first visit happened in February. We (the research group) were there alone, but despite the low temperatures and thick layer of snow, it was clear from the path way and footprints that the site was being visited by others, even in the depth of winter. The snow created a complete silence in the area and the frost together with sleeping nature epitomized the eternal sleep of the fallen soldiers. Many of the writers describe their experience of the presence of the cemetery as a different time-space in which time seems to stop. These kinds of places which have been conceptualized as *thick with meaning* often evoke different sensations (see e.g. Kuusisto-Arponen 2008).

²⁴ In phenomenological anthropology, the concept of experience is central in gaining understanding from the studied phenomenon. The experiences consist of perceptions which human beings structure through their consciousness. Thus they are intentional (Laine 2007, 29; Haverinen 2014, 39–40).

²⁵ The visits to the site were made with the company of other members of the Lapland Dark Heritage research group. During the second visit, we were also accompanied by Eero Pajula, the contact person of VDK and official Norvajärvi guide.

Norvajärvi cemetery is a non-religious cemetery. Despite this, there are several religious symbols in the area, which is also noted in the blog texts but not commented on beyond brief, factual description. This might be because Finnish cemetery culture is predominantly Lutheran and therefore its symbolism is familiar to the Finnish visitors. Most of the blog entries include a picture of the large cross of iron on the cape. Both blogs 1 and 2 describe this part of the cemetery carefully and quote the text in the stone in front of the cross which states that this memorial is for those soldiers who have not been found and whom “we bless in the peace of God”. The text mentions God and blessing but none of the authors connect religion to their own reflections in any way.

This, I think is interesting. Australian historian Kenneth Inglis (2005) who studied the process of ANZAC WWI war memorials, also those erected in foreign grounds, points out that to the Imperial Graves Commission, building the monuments for the dead was also a *spiritual* endeavor. In planning the soldiers’ cemeteries the commission followed the principle of uniformity: each headstone was identical in size and shape regardless of the soldier’s rank or religion, which emphasizes the camaraderie and common service that the soldiers were engaged in, as well as the spirit of discipline and order (ibid., 253–254). Interestingly, Inglis suggests that having each name carved in stone was a particularly Protestant habit, and that names in stone could be seen as equivalent to Catholic practices of prayer (ibid., 258). At the Norvajärvi German cemetery, there are no individual graves. The remains of the fallen soldiers are buried under the mausoleum where all their names, military rankings and time and place of death appear carved in the stone.



Figure 2. Norvajärvi Mausoleum. Photo by Erika Koskinen-Koivisto.

In addition to religious and spiritual dimensions, death and thanatourism are often linked to magical thinking. According to archaeologist Vesa-Pekka Herva, a haunting perspective resonates with the historical, cultural and environmental context of Lapland: “Located on the margins of the European world, Lapland has been portrayed as an enchanted land for centuries and is still today known and marketed as an exotic tourist destination which offers untouched wilderness and a sense of northern magic.” (Herva 2014, 96). Adding here the layer of Lapland’s dark history and the presence of Nazis in the area, Lapland’s wilderness which is full of war junk could make it a potential arena for ghost stories and haunting experiences. To my surprise, none of the bloggers mention any specific experiences of haunting or legends related to Norvajärvi cemetery. Neither did the guides of Norvajärvi that I interviewed know of any. However, in the murder discussion forum one visitor to Norvajärvi cemetery describes his experiences of haunting as follows:

I experienced a case of haunting in Rovaniemi in the 1980s. I was visiting Norvajärvi German cemetery with my family. It was a bright summer night. Suddenly, we heard steps approaching us. Nobody appeared there, and during the entire time we walked around at the cemetery, there really was no one else there. (Ghost stories discussion chain, entry by Tapani Koivula April 14, 2007).

Although many of the authors do describe some uncanny sensations at the site, this is the only first-hand haunting experience I found in the online materials. *Hearing* of voices was interpreted as haunting because there was no visual proof of anybody's appearance and thus no logical explanation for them.

There are some written collections of narratives and tales of Lapland available on the internet including ghost stories related to Norvajärvi (e.g. *Aaveriekköja* by Pentti Harjumaa featuring a story of an Edelweiss flower growing in front of the memorial and returning there if displaced). None of the cemetery tourists' blog texts I analyzed mentioned these stories. Neither did they explain their motivation to visit the site by referring to the reputation of the place as haunted (the phenomenon which could be called *legend tripping*, see Ellis 2000). It is difficult to tell whether this is due to lack of interest in the uncanny among the bloggers and commentators, or simply that Norvajärvi German cemetery has not fed many ghost stories. Nevertheless, ghost stories do not circulate in cemetery tourists' blog texts.

Site of Victimhood and Peace

As noted by anthropologists and public historians, cemeteries have a highly symbolic presence (e.g. Francis, Neophytou and Kellaher 2005; Kattago 2008). Military cemeteries and memorials not only honor individual death, but are also constructed to serve as sacred places of *national* honor and mourning. Whether the war memorials commemorate victory or defeat – the emphasis is on a *collective* (national) narrative (Raivo 2000; Kattago 2008). American studies scholar Kristin Ann Hass, who has studied the memorials of the Vietnam War (1955–1975) in the USA (1997, 9) noted how “[t]he deeply controversial nature of the war, its unpopularity, and the reality that it was lost created an enormous void of meaning that compounded the difficult work of memorializing. What it meant to die in this war was as unclear as what it meant to fight in it.” Hass emphasizes that to memorialize the war, to solidify its shape and meaning, the monuments of controversial wars have to bring together diverse experiences and ideologies (ibid., 11). When it comes to German WWII heritage, the commemorations often highlight the victimhood instead of sacrifice or heroism. As historians such as Reinhardt Koselleck (1993, 200–203) has pointed out, the label of collective victimhood which portrays all German people as victims of Dictator Hitler is the only possibility as it erases the horrible complexity of German society during National Socialism as it eases the collective guilt (Kathago 2008).

The idea of collective victimhood and forgiveness is also present at the Norvajärvi German cemetery. One finds very few national symbols at the cemetery, except among the objects brought to the mausoleum by the visitors who honor and commemorate the fallen soldiers: wreaths with ribbons in the color of the German flag. The victimhood is also evident in the aesthetics of the sculpture entitled “Mother and Child” by German sculptor Ursula Querner. The classic *pieta* figure refers to the loss and sacrifice of mothers (and other family members) who lost their sons in the battles (see e.g. Kemppainen 2006). It also emphasizes the suffering and mourning of civilians (Raivo 2000, 153). Many of the cemetery tourists who blog about their experiences have something to say about the sculpture. They either find it touching or somehow disturbing, even creepy. Historian Pierre Nora (1989) who introduced a notion of *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, argued that certain places which become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of a particular community serve the goal of stopping time and blocking the work of forgetting. Death that occurred in war is linked to

collective trauma that concerns people of different nationalities and generations. The sculpture and its iconic image of a mother and her dead son reminds us of death and personal loss, and epitomizes the universal trauma of the WWII. Despite this image, no other element at the cemetery *embodies* the fallen soldiers or the mourning of the loved ones. All the texts at the Norvajärvi cemetery are chosen very carefully so that they would not trigger traumatic memories or offend any of the visitors. The sign inside the mausoleum introducing the place in three languages (Finnish, German, and English) ends with words promoting peace: “The dead of this cemetery are an exhortation to peace.”



Figure 3. The text on the plaque inside the mausoleum. June 2, 2015. Photo by Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto.

Most of the bloggers are in line with the text and see the site as heritage which promotes peace. Among the first-hand reports, there is only one somewhat critical, or rather ironic or dark, text by a male author (blog 2). He begins his text by the following sentence: “Germans loved the city of Rovaniemi so much that they decided to burn it down so that nobody could get to know it after them.” In my interpretation, the author not only demonstrates his awareness of the past and the controversies of war history but actually criticizes the acts of German Army in Finnish Lapland and the very existence of the Norvajärvi memorial. After the critical introduction the author continues by wondering why there are not better signs leading to the site and gives advice on how to find the place. This author’s attitude is clearly different from other blog texts.

Overall, there were surprisingly few references to any bitterness towards Germans in the blog texts. The authors reflected on the consequences of war to all parties, and saw Finns, Germans and even themselves as small figures in history. This attempt to put the historical events on a larger-scale and to promote peace rather than emphasize contradictions creates distance and enables the deconstructions of difficult history. This was also the agenda behind the bus tour Chimney Cape planned by Rovaniemi guides Kaija Sälevä and Marja Jalkanen. Both guides reported that the tour evokes strong feelings among the tourists. The strongest reaction was shown by a local Rovaniemi resident whose father was a German soldier. The visit to the cemetery made her to burst in tears inside the mausoleum and to share the painful childhood experiences and shame she still felt. (Interview with Sälevä, March 22, 2016).

Death as Personal, National, and Universal

Some of the visitors, even Finns, travel to Norvajärvi to commemorate their loved ones. The personal losses and memories are present and visible at the site in the form of flowers and other small items brought to the site of the grave just as in any civil graves (see e.g. Silvén 2003, examples in Figure 4 below).



Figure 4. Flowers spotted on a name carved in stone in the mausoleum. June 2, 2015. Photo by Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto.

Many of the bloggers note this and reflect on the personal losses of the soldiers' families. A travel diary by a Finnish motorist "Open roads" (blog 8) introduces other perspectives to the WWII heritage than his own, describing the behavior of a group of elderly German men:

I walk the distance of couple of hundred meters to the shore of Norvajärvi where the mausoleum is located. This time I am not there alone. About twenty men walk in the chapel with bent backs. Some of them lean on a walking stick, some have somebody assisting them. I hear German words whispered here and there. The men are there as a group, but one can see how each are in their own deep thoughts. One wipes his eye on a handkerchief. It is not difficult to guess who these men are. (Blog 8, July 24, 2001).

The author continues to describe how the group of men found their comrade's name on the carved stone inside the mausoleum. He can hear the men reading the information on the stone, the place and time of death. The motorist remembers that the brother of his mother-in-law had fought in the same battlefield. In his text, he wonders if the brother had

anything to do with death of the German soldiers whose friends are visiting the cemetery and goes through his knowledge of war history and research he has read about it. It also reminds him of his reflections during his visit to The Douaumont ossuary (cemetery for French and German soldiers) in Verdun, France, some years earlier: "if human beings are supposed to be the most intelligent of all the creatures of creation, it does not mean that they would be in any way wise." This kind juxtaposition between a Finnish soldier who fought in WWII and an emotional account of real people's personal grief humanizes the fallen German soldiers whose personal histories remain unknown to the visitors. The humanization and empathy which accompanies it also brings the visitors to understand that these fallen soldiers also had or still have loved ones who miss them.

When I first visited the cemetery in February 2015, there was a woolly hat in the colors of the German flag placed on the head of the sculpture's soldier (Figure 5). On the one hand, this could be seen as a childish gesture of celebrating touristic visit by placing a sign, in this case clothes in national colors familiar to us in souvenirs around the globe. On the other hand, this scene made me sad as the hat could also be interpreted as a sign of care (in the sense of trying to help keep "him" warm, given the cold Lapland winters) on the part of the deceased soldier's family members.



Figure 5. Woolly hat in the colors of a German flag placed on the head of the soldier of the sculpture inside the mausoleum.

Archaeologist Mats Burström (2009) has reflected on the existential dimension of material heritage in his article on the dispute over a car cemetery in Sweden. According to him, the fact that many of the memories and reflections over the ruining of old cars were personal, demonstrates the power of material culture and the material past to affect people (ibid., 140.) Material culture bears witness to the passage of time, perishability of the material world, and the conditions of human existence. Similarly, the material environment of Norvajärvi cemetery can be seen to offer cemetery tourists a framework and a space to reflect over existential questions.

At the end, for the cemetery tourists, death is a universal life event which connects different people of different times and places. Visiting Norvajärvi German cemetery is thus also about facing death and reflecting over one's own mortality:

We left the place in deep thoughts. War historical sites remind us not only of the battles and the sufferings and fear of people who experienced them but also of our own mortality. I therefore sincerely recommend a visit Norvajärvi to all those who venture around Rovaniemi. (Blog 1. February 13, 2014).

The visit to Norvajärvi is thus seldom experienced as an easy or light experience.²⁶ Guide Marja Jalkanen, who has planned the bus tour "Chimney cape", told how she and her colleague decided to conclude the WWII tour at Norvajärvi cemetery which had been a difficult experience for those who took the tour. In order to ease the minds of the

²⁶ One exception to this was blog 4 by a girls' collective that did not know much about local WWII history and did not reflect further on the meaningfulness of the site. Interestingly enough, someone else did so in the entry's comment box: "Amazing place, by the way. Death seems so close and so unnecessary. It is a beautiful and peaceful place. I suppose this is what you mean by describing the place as creepy. Somehow this place makes you silent and to reflect on how peculiar it was that so many came to Finland to die. My father served in Lapland during Lapland War and had acquaintance with Germans. When we visited Norvajärvi years ago he recognized some names in the stones. Men whose destinies were unknown to him before." (Comment by Mixy, 22.7.2014.)

tourists, Jalkanen decided to spend a quiet moment with each group after leaving the cemetery. On the way back to the city, she plays classical music in the bus. She has carefully selected three pieces by two famous Finnish singers:

I realized that Kim Borg was among the first Finnish people who came to Rovaniemi after its destruction in October 1944. So I play two arias performed by him and these songs end the tour. I think they create the impression of peace, forgiveness and ennoblement. (Interview with Jalkanen June 3, 2015).

Peace, forgiveness and ennoblement indeed come close to the experiences of the majority of the cemetery tourists who have written about their experiences of visiting the cemetery in social media.

Conclusions

Based on the online materials the cemetery tourists who visit Norvajärvi German cemetery are well aware of the difficult history and the dark heritage of Lapland War. The visit to the site and engagement with the living past deepens their understanding of WWII. For most of the visitors who later reflect on their experiences in social media, the visit was more than a historical lesson or harmless leisure: it involved sensual and spiritual dimensions which result in descriptions of feelings evoked and deep reflections over the consequences and irrationality of war.

The experiences of visiting Norvajärvi German cemetery described in the blog texts are not always expressed in lengthy words but with few but powerful sentences and many images. Some of the cemetery tourists are impressed by the ascetic architecture as well as the silence and beauty of the site, but others feel that these create a ghostly or creepy atmosphere. None of the bloggers, however, mentioned any experiences of haunting or fear. The experiences were more of a spiritual kind and triggered philosophical reflections about one's own mortality and the meaning of death which are at the core of the phenomenon of thanatourism. It is clear that the darkness of the site is a reason to come there and it is taken seriously and pondered upon.

The Finnish cemetery tourists who have visited Norvajärvi do not portray Germans as enemies or accuse them of WWII events in their writings but rather see them as one of the several groups who were involved in complex world events and who also had to suffer and sacrifice their lives or their loved ones in the battles taking place in Finnish Lapland. This is in line with the texts and figures of the mausoleum and memorials standing on the lake shore emphasizing victimhood and peace. Some of the cemetery tourists link the destinies of the fallen German soldiers to that of Finnish soldiers who fought in the WWII empathizing with their families' losses. This is what many war memorials do: act not only as national but also as universal sites of memory which remind us of the contradictory history of the humankind (Winter 1995, 27–28).

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Abstrakti

Tässä artikkelissa tarkastelen suomalaisten hautausmaaturisteiksi kutsumieni ihmisten kokemuksia vierailusta Norvajärven saksalaisella hautausmaalla, joka sijaitsee 18 kilometrin päässä Rovaniemen keskustasta. Toisen maailmansodan aikana Suomi liittoutui Saksan kanssa sallien Saksan armeijan operoida Pohjois-Suomessa Neuvostoliittoa vastaan 1941. Kaiken kaikkiaan taisteluissa pohjoisilla rintamilla kuoli yhteensä 15 000 saksalaista sotilasta. Suomen rauhansopimus Neuvostoliiton kanssa syyskuussa edellytti, että saksalaiset oli ajettava pois maasta, ja entisten aseveljien välillä puhkesi sota, joka johti maltillisiin miehistötappioihin mutta laajamittaiseen aineelliseen tuhoon kun saksalaiset polttivat vetäytyessään Suomen Lapin. Tuho jätti jälkeensä traumaattisia muistoja alueen asukkaille.

Norvajärven saksalainen hautausmaa perustettiin 1963, ja on ainut virallinen saksalaisten perustama muistomerkki Suomen Lapissa. Aineistoni koostuu internetissä julkaistusta blogikirjoituksista ja keskusteluista, joissa Norvajärven saksalaisella hautausmaalla vierailleet kuvailevat ja pohtivat kokemaansa. Lisäksi olen haastatellut henkilöitä, jotka osallistuvat hautausmaan ylläpitoon ja toimivat oppaina Rovaniemellä. Kysyn, miksi suomalaiset vierailevat hautausmaalla ja millainen kokemus vierailu on. Mitä hautausmaaturistit ajattelevat Lapin sotaan liittyvästä synkästä kulttuuriperinnöstä ja sen roolista osana paikallista ja kansallista historiaa? Analysoin artikkelissani blogikirjoituksia ja kuvia sekä omia kokemuksiani vierailusta saksalaisella hautausmaalla. Käytän fenomenologista viitekehystä ja kiinnitän analyysissäni erityistä huomiota aistikokemuksiin ja niitä seuraaviin pohdintoihin. Tutkimukseni osoittaa, että Norvajärven hautausmaalla vierailevat hautausmaaturistit ovat tietoisia paikallisesta historiasta ja Lapin synkästä kulttuuriperinnöstä. Vierailu syventää heidän ymmärrystään toisesta maailmansodasta ja johtaa pohdintoihin sodan seurauksista ja järjestettömyydestä.