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The End of the Cold War and the Dead Body Politics between Finland and Russia

Abstract

The article examines how the repatriation of missing soldiers became an important component of a new Finnish neo-patriotic memory regime that emerged after the Cold War. As borders opened and the Soviet Union adopted the policy of glasnost, Finnish non-governmental organizations – including war-veteran and Karelian heritage associations – turned their attention to ceded Karelia (in Russia) to commemorate fallen soldiers who had been forgotten or left behind. Finnish efforts at both the NGO and state levels were positively received by the Russian side, fostering transnational cooperation between Finland and the newly formed Russian state after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In mid-September 1993, a group of Finnish men in military fatigues drove a van up to a railway station platform in Vyborg, Russia. The men were part of a Finnish volunteer search team. They arrived after a week of intense camp life and fieldwork on the Karelian Isthmus, a once heavily contested region that Finland ceded to the Soviet Union during World War II. Accompanied by Russian officials, the men lifted over fifty small coffins from the van, the results of their work over the summer. The coffins contained the remains of over one hundred unidentified Finnish soldiers missing in action during World War II.

Once the coffins were placed on the platform, the ceremonial part began. A small cassette player started to play the Finnish national anthem, followed by a short series of speeches. Russian civil servants expressed their wishes that the fallen soldiers would rest peacefully in their native soil and emphasized the importance of ensuring that no bodies, whether Russian or Finnish, would be left unburied on the former battlefields. After the ceremony, the coffins were placed on a train and transported to Finland.[1]

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A month later, in October 1993, the coffins were laid to rest in the military cemetery of the south-eastern town of Lappeenranta.[2] Thousands of civilians and war veterans gathered to witness the first repatriation of Finnish soldiers.[3] The Minister of Education, Riitta Uosukainen, emphasized the importance of Finland and Russia coming together to mourn and honour the fallen. She also expressed her gratitude to the Russian people, as well as the civil and military officials of Vyborg, for their positive attitude towards the search for fallen Finnish soldiers.[4] In his speech, the Russian Ambassador to Finland, Yuri Deryabin, praised the repatriation as a dawn of a new era and an "act of humane justice". He stressed the necessity, in the post-communist era, to build new relations between Russia and Finland, hinting that the relations during the Cold War had been mostly liturgy. He saw the Finnish repatriations, as well as the multiple Russian and Finnish memorial projects on both sides of the border, as nothing less than a "final peace treaty between the two nations".[5]

The repatriation of missing soldiers to Finland and elsewhere in Europe in the early 1990s was part of the reformulation of the post-Cold War world.[6] Running parallel and intertwined with increased globalization, open borders, and liberalism, the era was marked by a resurgence of national sentiment and discussions of national identity. A reassessment of the past and the mobilization of history seemed to offer a path to the future. For much of Europe, this identity debate and reassessment focused on the Second World War and the preceding period. Within this context, dead, lost, and forgotten were drawn from oblivion and endowed with new meanings to help define and legitimize the present.

In this empirical article, I examine the repatriations of missing Finnish soldiers during the early 1990s – an era when tumultuous political changes had reshaped the world and the Cold War had definitively ended, but the future remained uncertain. I argue that these repatriations were a vital part of a neo-patriotic turn in Finland. I look at how and why they – and related forms of remembrance – interested, engaged, and inspired people, at both the grassroots and the state level.[7] I contend that the phenomenon was mostly patriotic in nature, rather than part of a more aggressive and political neo-nationalism of the 1990s. I further argue that in spite of their patriotic nature, the repatriations achieved surprising significance on the transnational level. The Finnish movement was partly inspired by a similar one in the

Soviet Union/Russia. In both countries, the focus on forgotten dead soldiers provided a language and symbols for the new era. For a short period of time, the missing soldiers provided a roadmap for a new kind of Finnish–Russian post-communist relationship. The repatriation movement, together with broader war commemoration efforts, developed into a fruitful field of transnational cooperation between Finland and Russia in the new hard-to-navigate political landscape of the disintegrating Soviet Union.

While acknowledging the broader European and Russian contexts, this article focuses mainly on the repatriation movement in Finland in the early 1990s. However, since the focus is on the search for missing Finnish soldiers whose remains were mostly in Russia, the Russian context is vital. Within the limits of mostly Finnish archive materials, this article provides insights into a Russian post-communist movement that appeared to distance itself from a state-centred ideological past and open the door to a more critical, liberal, and individual perspective.

For this article, I have examined key Finnish non-governmental organizations and state institutions, as well as actors operating between these two spheres. In the latter group, I include the Commission of the War Dead (*Sotavainajatoimikunta*), which was established through joint efforts by the state and NGOs and operated under the Ministry of Education, albeit quite autonomously. Among NGOs, the most relevant for this article are the three main Finnish veterans' unions, the Prisoners of War Association, and Karelian heritage associations. On the state side, the Ministry of Education took a leading role, whereas the archives of the Finnish Consulate in Leningrad/St. Petersburg provide valuable information on the Finnish–Soviet/Russian interaction and cooperation related to the repatriation and commemoration of the fallen Finns.

The repatriation of missing World War II soldiers in the early 1990s was part of a new European political landscape emerging from the ruins of the Cold War order. The geopolitical turmoil created space for new views on national identities and nation states. Much of these redefinitions, by political parties, official institutions, and a great variety of civic actors, can be placed within a broader context of neo-patriotism. Neo-patriotism at the turn of the 1990s can be defined as a renewed openness to nationalistic feelings and a growing willingness to discuss questions of national identities across society and the political field. In this moment of political awakening and new national sentiments, attention often turned to the past. The deceased took on a new significance, creating meanings for the transition into a new era.[8]

The neo-patriotic turn and dead body politics

The end of the Cold War has sometimes been seen as a triumph of democracy and liberalism, paving the way for a world where nation states and strong political ideologies give way to globalization, openness, and never-ending peace. However, the redefinition of Europe at the end of the Cold War led to intense discussions on national identities and national history, as well as a strengthening of nationalistic sentiments, indicating a broader shift to the right. Those positioning themselves in the political centre began to look upon national feeling and national identities as the "new normal".[9] The result was a rise in patriotism and nationalism in Europe. To contextualize this phenomenon within the specific historical framework of the 1990s and to describe the contemporaries' experiences of the resurgence of patriotic feelings, scholars also use the terms "neo-patriotism" and "neo-nationalism". The prefix indicates an interrelation between earlier and recent forms of patriotism and nationalism. The prefix also suggests that the phenomenon adapted to the new conditions of the post-Cold War era.[10] In the European context, this reference usually points to the nationalistic circumstances during the interwar period and World War II. Obviously, the patriotism of the past was different. Silvana Patriarcha has shown that during the heated debate on Italian national identity, the Italian neo-patriotism of the 1990s was more of a recreated patriotism in response to the radical nationalism of the Lega Nord. It also involved a search for historical connections further back in time than the more traditional Resistance of World War II.[11]

Patriotism is a complex phenomenon that can include everything from "love of the motherland" to aggressive nationalism, racism, and hatred against the other.[12] Although many scholars see a clear difference between patriotism and nationalism, others, such as Ross Poole, indicate the difficulty of clearly separating the two, especially when studied in their political context.[13]

Much of the recent debate on patriotism has focused on whether it should be regarded as a virtue capable of strengthening the democratic and liberal polity by appealing to national sentiment – or is it ultimately a vice, just a milder version of nationalism? Authors such as Igor Primoratz view moderate patriotism as loyalty to institutions and laws rather than an emotion linked to ethnicity and common ancestry. In this view, "the patriotism of liberty" enables a multicultural society instead of strengthening nationalism.[14] Others point out the political character of "patriotic loyalty", arguing that there

cannot be a "love of one's country" without a political context. Simon Keller highlights the contradiction that although patriotism is invoked to give legitimacy to political opinions, it is, nevertheless, also portrayed as "independent and unbiased", rooted in national history and moral values – not in politics.[15]

In this article, I use the notion of "neo-patriotism" to describe the rise of national sentiments in Finland after the end of the Cold War. Since the concept "neo-nationalism" is usually linked to political movements of the 1990s with nativist-populist, right-wing, and even far-right tendencies, neo-patriotism more accurately captures the broader changes in politics, culture, and values among Finns.[16] Neo-patriotism of the 1990s has been discussed by Finnish scholars such as Tiina Kinnunen and Markku Jokisipilä. They use the notion of "neo-patriotic turn" to describe the cultural and political change spurred by the end of the Cold War.[17]

Finnish scholars have pointed out how at the heart of the neo-patriotic movement in Finland was the understanding that Finnish actions in World War II had been morally right, and the assumption that the war generation and especially veterans had been intentionally or unintentionally neglected and treated disrespectfully by the Cold War generations.[18] From the perspective of the neo-patriotic movement, the historiography and public histories had all too long been tied to official narratives that were politically steered, and in being so hid the truth. According to Olli Kleemola, veterans were indeed partly affected by national self-censorship. He notes, however, that there can be no talk of a period of total silence.[19] According to the patriots, by paying tribute to those men and women who had participated in the war, the nation would pay a debt of honour.[20] Jussi Jalonen has pointed out how the Finnish movement was no different from other similar movements in Europe, where the remembrance of World War II enjoyed a new boom in the 1990s.[21] The Finnish neo-patriotic movement was not limited to traditional conservatives or war-memory activists; it permeated the whole of society. To be patriotic and commemorate the war generation was as suitable for the left as it was for the right, for liberals as well as conservatives, as is shown by Jussi Jalonen. He argues that even liberal values could be seen as part of the moral victory that Finland gained during World War II.[22]

Another example of how Finnish neo-patriotism adapted and was shaped according to the new era is the changing attitude towards borders, especially Finland's eastern border. Whereas traditional nationalism sees borders as a protective wall separating the nation, the symbolism of borders changed

in the new situation after the Cold War. The border with the Soviet Union/Russia became a border of dialogue and interactions, as well as a means of neo-patriotic expression.[23]

People who engaged in searching for dead soldiers and erecting memorials certainly felt they were doing something for the common good, for the past and future generations of the patria. Their engagement can also be seen as part of a republican tradition of patriotism, including the idea of an active citizen taking part in a wide range of activities that is good for society, and ultimately a readiness to defend the nation also in war. People engaged in the new wave of commemoration and the rehabilitation of forgotten or neglected "heroes" can also be categorized as "mnemonic warriors" as defined by Jan Kubik and Michael Bernhard. The mnemonic warrior sees the past as a "paradise lost" and insists that the spirit of the past also shapes the future. For the mnemonic warrior, in contrast to the mnemonic pluralist, a true vision of history must prevail over the alternative visions.[24]

Another underlying notion in the article is what scholars have called "dead body politics". The notion usually includes politically motivated exhumations and reburials, and it is, as Kevin Hearty points out, mostly understood as a feature of transitioning societies – societies that are moving from conflict to peace.[25] Michael Humphrey and Estela Valverde use the concept in their studies of transitional justice, reburials, and the right to remember in the transition periods in South America and Spain after the Cold War. According to them, dead body politics forms the mechanisms for new regimes to renew national memory. Those who previously were forgotten or persecuted become symbols of shared values and national identity. The new life of the deceased, as well as their potentially violent or traumatic death, serve as links between the past and present, becoming an integral part of manifesting the new regime.[26]

Dead body politics in Eastern Europe after the Cold War has been studied by anthropologist Katherine Verdery. In her book *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, she points out that the political and social changes at the end of the 1980s created a need to acknowledge, politicize, and reinterpret the dead who had been neglected by the previous regime. The desire to find and commemorate fallen soldiers was part of a post-Cold War cultural phenomenon. Verdery emphasizes the spirituality and sanctity that is connected to the dead. She notes that when performing the act of reburial, sanctity is used to manifest and consecrate the new order. Dead bodies become transformation

tools for a new era, and they are charged with meanings and emotions, moral values, and sacredness.[27]

In his book about reburials in American culture (mostly about the American Revolutionary War and the Civil War), Michael Kammen sees patriotism as an equivalent force to the politically motivated reburials usually linked to sudden regime changes – as in Eastern Europe after the Cold War. He shows that "digging up the dead" is also about the worship of ancestors and heroes, and a process for relatives who want to organize a proper burial in cases where the first burial site is seen as inappropriate.[28] The Finnish case illustrates how both political factors and human experiences are integral to understanding the phenomenon.

Raw human memory: The new Russian memory boom

The neo-patriotic Finnish memory regime was not only dependent on the political changes in the Soviet Union but was also influenced by the new post-communist Russian memory boom. The glasnost period in the Soviet Union is impossible to imagine without a major reinterpretation of the past.[29] The distinguishing features of the communist state include constant attacks on memory, the spread of secrecy over the past, and a monolithic memory regime. When the state's political monopoly started to crumble, so did the state's monopoly over history. The connection between political reform and the glasnost of history was manifested in the speech of Mikhail Gorbachev during the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution in 1917, when he stressed the necessity to start to fill in the blank spots of history.

The head of the Soviet Empire hardly realized the strength of the movement he was setting into motion. The following years witnessed intense criticism of Stalin's Terror that brought a never-ending flow of horrific revelations into the living rooms and ordinary lives of the Soviet people. The deported, killed, tortured, imprisoned, and countless other neglected and oppressed groups from the 1930s became an obsessive everyday topic for millions of people. Those who had perished had been condemned as unpatriotic outcasts by earlier regimes, but they now were re-integrated into society, and their deaths gained a new significance in the new historical and political context.

Soon the polyphony of glasnost was extended to the most holy of Soviet history, the Great Patriotic War. In addition to the Lenin cult, the war was part

of the core myth of the Soviet Union. Following the heavy criticism of Stalin, it was inevitable that the myth of the war would also be shaken. The heroic Soviet narrative of the war – the glue of the communist state – became instead more of a story of individual tragedy. War remained a central piece of the past, although it was remembered differently.[30]

At the core of the de-sacralized memory of the war were the tens of millions of war dead. Russia was indeed the only country where the amount of unburied fallen soldiers was in the millions. Nina Tumarkin describes how the memory of the Great Patriotic War was replaced with "raw human memory", referring to the need to discover the destinies and remember the sheer loss of tens of millions of individuals. Political and ideological walls were breaking down, and the people started questioning. Had the war been a victory or was it a national disaster? Had the Soviets liberated Eastern Europe or committed a huge crime against humanity? Was it the Soviets who had committed the mass killings of Polish officers in Katyn? And, in the case of Finland, were the Soviets to blame for the Winter War against Finland?[31]

For many Russians, focusing on the fate of individuals felt liberating and important. It made it possible to commemorate without the pressure of official ideology or morally difficult questions. The individual tragedy of the men and women of one's family, school, or hometown was enough.[32]

It is noteworthy that the interest in Russia in missing soldiers and, at least partly, redefining the past did not reach the point where the honour and memory of the fallen soldiers was called into question. In this way, the movement differed from the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge* in Germany. The German organization felt pressure from the general public when it wanted to continue to honour fallen soldiers as a single, neutral group, regardless of whether SS soldiers were included.[33] Similar moral questions arose in Finland when a Norwegian union of veterans who had been fighting the Red Army in Finnish Lapland within the German ranks wanted to erect a memorial in Rovaniemi for the fallen. The memorial was inaugurated in 1994, but with a lot of controversy that caused a minor diplomatic crisis between Finland and Norway.[34]

The interest in the search for missing soldiers in Russia resulted in the founding of multiple Russian associations focusing on military history and missing Red Army and other soldiers. The groups arose on the grassroots level and continued as independent vernacular actors. The search for missing soldiers was as much a performance of memory as an archaeological mission.[35]

The focus on finding and identifying individual soldiers was a clear confrontation with the old Soviet memory regime. It offered a path to address historical injustices and bring to light an ignored or even silenced past that many hoped would be the foundation for a new era. The tragedy was not only in the deaths of the soldiers, but also in how the state had erased them as individuals from memory. Only when the soldiers could be identified and buried would justice be done.[36]

The movement reflected new moral codes for those willing to break free from the Soviet past and integrate into something new and universal. One occasion that demonstrated the depth of this change was the inauguration of a Finnish prisoners of war memorial in Nizhni Novgorod Oblast in 1995. The highest Russian state official of the occasion was confident that the memorial and the history it highlighted would help "to change public awareness to reflect current realities" and was hopeful that the "universal ideals" connected to the memorial would be used in local educational programmes.[37]

At the same time, we must be careful not to overestimate the liberal and pro-Western tendency. Even the grassroots level of Russian historical associations and search teams should not be seen only as an unchaining from the past. At the same time, they were tools in a new Russian patriotism. The interest in the new way of conducting military history, where information gathering, archival work, fieldwork, and the identification of remains replaced the traditional publications and media, offered a way to experience patriotism and history in a very concrete way. Sharon Macdonald sees the search movement as a form of "past presencing" where people are directly engaged in performing the past, not only remembering.[38] Johanna Dahlin, who made an ethnological study of a search team around 2010, has stressed the emotional involvement of those involved and sees the search as part of a ritual or pilgrimage.[39] Dahlin points out that even if already in 2010 it was clear that the Russian state had turned the search movement more and more into a chauvinist spectacle, there was still the attitude among the search team members of righting historical wrongs by lifting the individual soldiers out of oblivion.[40]

Although Finland had not been part of the Eastern Bloc, its experience at the end of the Cold War was closely tied to historical glasnost. During the Cold War, Finnish state actors, and often also actors on the NGO level, had to live with the reality that history was a central part of the ideological monolith of the Soviet Union; remembering the past, especially on a state level, in a way that strongly contradicted the Soviet truth was problematic. One example of

this was the fact that the state did not organize official commemorations for the Winter War before 1989. In addition, the Finland–Soviet Union Society, with its nearly 100,000 Finnish members, continued to focus on Soviet-themed commemorations until the end of the Cold War. As a result, the end of the Cold War in Finland was strongly linked to the task of constructing a national representation that would reflect the "true history". The glasnost of history sparked a great interest in Finland in World War II, especially in issues that had been addressed less vocally during the Cold War. In Finland, too, history became a narrative of the neglected, silenced, and forgotten, of righting historical wrongs and restoring honour to true patriots.

It is under these circumstances that Finland presented its own forgotten dead, whose remains were given new significance in tandem with the political changes. Firstly, thousands of fallen remained unburied in ceded Karelian territory or in unknown and possibly unmarked field graves. Secondly, there were hundreds of prisoners of war who had died in Soviet prison camps, about whom very little was known before the 1990s. Thirdly, there were thousands of fallen Finnish soldiers laid to rest in the parishes' military graveyards in ceded Karelia. These graves and memorials had been mostly inaccessible to Finns for almost half a century, and most of the sites were falling apart or had been destroyed by the new residents. These categories of war dead became a cornerstone of a cultural and political strategy of the post-Cold War Finland. Initiatives to search for missing soldiers, honour prisoners of war, and rebuild military graveyards and memorials in ceded Karelia saw light also in Finland at the grassroots level. Reflecting the geopolitical changes, the state, which had previously been passive, became rapidly involved and met the vernacular level.

The symbiosis of the grassroots and the state

In the autumn of 1989, Jouko Ruuth, a retired insurance inspector, took part in a trip organized by the Finland-Soviet Union Society to East Karelia, the Soviet part of Karelia that had been occupied by Finland between 1941 and 1944. During their stay in Medvezhyegorsk (*Karhumäki* in Finnish), they went to see the wartime trenches. As they were leaving, two Russian men appeared at the door of the bus and started to explain enthusiastically with the help of a tourist guide that they had been carrying out excavations and had found war material

and human bones that probably belonged to Finnish soldiers. Back in Finland, Ruuth contacted the Finnish Defence Forces and explained what he had heard.[41]

The two men Ruuth had met belonged to the military history association "Bulatin" from Chelyabinsk in the Urals. Led by Ivan Abrahin, the association had established a search team with the aim of finding the remains of fallen soldiers who were originally from the regions of the southern Urals. When they found remains of Finns, Abrahin was eager to get Finland involved. He contacted both the Finnish Ambassador in Moscow, Heikki Talvitie, and Finland's War Veterans' Association.[42] He informed them that his team would be back next summer and suggested a common Soviet–Finnish search team. Abrahin had no shortage of ideas. Upon finding bodies and organizing burials, there could be publications, a documentary featuring Finnish and Russian veterans, and exhibitions.[43]

The opening up of the Soviet Union gave rise to startling encounters. The next summer, in 1990, Abrahin organized a meeting between former enemies on the battlefields in Medvezhyegorsk.[44] The Finns gave the Russians maps with the locations of mass graves containing Soviet soldiers. Poetically, the Finnish and Russian veterans could note how they walked in a shared landscape, first in war and then in nightmares.[45]

The Russian grassroots initiative sparked positive reactions in Finland. One of the enthusiasts was Colonel Matti Lappalainen of the War College and Vice-Chairman of the Finnish Commission of Military History, a society of Finnish military historians. He belonged to the core of the cluster of national defence organizations that would form the neo-patriotic memory regime. For them, military history presented primarily as a means of reinforcing Finnish nationalism, finding justice for the patriots, and claiming the right to what they saw as the truth of history.

At the beginning of 1990, on behalf of the Finnish Commission of Military History, Lappalainen contacted the Ministry of Defence. Lappalainen praised the initiative of Mr. Abrahin and had a clear vision: Finland should get involved in the matter and focus on the fallen Finnish soldiers whose remains were still on Russian soil, and the Ministry of Defence should take a leading role.[46]

During the same year, a wave of requests hit state institutes and associations in both Finland and the Soviet Union. Whether it was the Finnish Red Cross, veterans' associations, the Prisoners of War Association, Karelian heritage associations, the Finnish Commission of Military History or state representatives such as the Soviet Embassy in Helsinki, Finnish ministries or the

Finnish Consulate in Leningrad, all received increasing numbers of requests from people for information about missing soldiers and gravesites. Already in the spring of 1990, the Soviet Embassy raised the idea of a contract between the countries on the exchange of information on the deceased, mostly concerning prisoners of war, and later that year asked if Finland would be willing to help find graves and identify the fallen.[47] All parties involved noticed that the opening of archives and the liberal change in the Soviet Union had led to an increase in cooperation.[48] The Finnish Red Cross was delighted to receive from Moscow, in the summer of 1990, a list of over three hundred missing Finnish soldiers who had died in POW camps in Russia. In exchange, it tried to assist in identifying Russian prisoners of war who had died in Finland.[49]

In some places the issue of missing soldiers took a tangible form. One example is the Leningrad Consulate. Amid growing confusion, the personnel received an increasing number of identification tags and other personal belongings of Finnish soldiers found by Russian excavators. Consular officer Juho Vänskä also reported to his superiors in Finland that the consulate had started to receive a growing number of claims for compensation from Russians alleged that they had sustained injuries while held as prisoners of war in Finland. Vänskä was, therefore, able to observe how wartime experiences suddenly became relevant to people simultaneously as their own society was collapsing. His report to Helsinki ended grimly: "Otherwise, life goes on as before. The food situation is very poor. Queues in front of shops are getting even longer. Faith in the leaders is on a razor's edge."[50]

The Finnish state representatives were aware of the activities at the grassroots level. In particular, the veterans and the Karelian heritage associations formed an impressive NGO body that found new energy in the early 1990s interregnum. Gathering information about fallen soldiers and war graves in ceded Karelia merged into a strong movement when the borders were opened at the beginning of the 1990s. The lost Karelian memory landscape could be – in cooperation with local Russian authorities – re-established.[51] In particular, the gathering of information among veterans as to where their missing comrades in arms had probably fallen was of great help when the Finnish search teams started their work in Russia in the summer of 1993.

A key early NGO actor was the Prisoners of War Association. Led by Teuvo Alava, who had himself been a prisoner of war, the association tried to identify POWs who had died in captivity and initiate memorials on the sites of former POW camps in the Soviet Union. Alava had been lobbying for a memorial al-

ready since the mid-1980s, although without any results before the turbulent year of 1989. As was the case with other organizations, the POW association experienced a surge of interest, information, and inquiries in 1989. Suddenly, the association began receiving daily requests about prisoners of war, and the long-awaited memorial projects were given the green light by the Soviet authorities that same year.[52]

As the signals from the NGO and grassroots level grew stronger so did the reactions from the state level. For the Finnish authorities, the project to identify the war dead was so unusual in scale and nature that it seemed to require state control, especially when the green light was shown by the Soviet Union.[53] Soviet Marshal Viktor Kulikov, who visited Finland in September 1990, proclaimed that the Soviet Union welcomed all projects to commemorate the war dead, whether it was the exchange of information on the fallen, the restoration of Finnish war graves on Soviet territory, or the search and reburials of the remains of Finnish soldiers. He also bragged how the Soviet Union would organize a massive search with tens of thousands of volunteers for missing Russian soldiers.[54] Kulikov was a sworn hardline military leader and a traditionalist who a year earlier had been forced to resign as commander of the Warsaw Pact. Kulikov did, however, continue in the Supreme Soviet, and thus he found a new mission in the war veterans' affairs and remembrance.[55]

Finnish state representatives were also encouraged by the cooperation between the Soviet Union and other states. By the end of 1990, Germany and Japan had already erected several memorials in the Soviet Union and organized commemorations. The Italians were planning to send search teams to the Soviet Union.[56]

At the end of 1989, the Soviet authorities promised that the Finns would be allowed to erect POW memorials in Cherepovets and Karaganda, Kazakhstan (later in the 1990s also Gatchina, Nizhny Novgorod, and Asbest were included), and the Finnish Ministry of Education established a POW memorial working group in the summer of 1990. During the visits to the Soviet Union, the working group was convinced by its hosts that the atmosphere in the Soviet Union had rapidly changed. The old Soviet rhetoric of the POWs as traitors or cowards was on the retreat, which also helped the commemoration of foreign POWs. The discussions emphasized the enthusiasm regarding how the commemoration of the missing soldiers would foster positive relationships at the local level.

Under the spell of ideology-free internationalism, the Soviet authorities proposed that the Finns build an international memorial centre in Karaganda, together with the Germans, Romanians, Japanese, Austrians, and others.[57] Regarding the memorial in Gatchina, the Russians noted that the memorial should be erected outside the city in the nearby Ingrian Finnish countryside, noting positively that a revival of Finnish culture was underway in Ingria.[58]

In 1990, the fast-moving grassroots interest in missing soldiers and their commemoration found a response at the state level. In October 1990, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs had called a meeting to discuss "the cooperation between the Finnish and Soviet authorities concerning the Finnish fallen".[59] The meeting brought together the grassroots and the state. At the table were the three major veteran unions, the association for women who served in the warzone, the Association of Relatives of the Fallen, and the Prisoners of War Association. Also at the table were representatives from the Finland-Soviet Union Society, the Lutheran and Orthodox churches, the Finnish Red Cross, and the Finnish Commission of Military History.[60] The representative of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs stated that "the Soviet policy of reform has contributed to a change of atmosphere", opening the door for more cooperation.[61]

All the convenors agreed that a formal organization should be set up with the aim of searching for missing Finnish soldiers; finding, marking, and restoring the old military cemeteries in Karelia; and erecting memorials at the sites of major battles. All this would happen together and in coordination with Russian authorities and Finnish NGOs and grassroots actors.[62]

The Ministry praised the activity of the NGOs and assured that there was no need for interference. The signals from formerly Finnish Karelia were positive. Without any state-level involvement, the City of Vyborg had decided that Finns could erect monuments on Finnish military and civilian graves.[63] In particular, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs articulated that it fully understood that the work of finding and re-establishing war graves in ceded Karelia was an important part of preserving Karelian heritage and culture.[64] It is noteworthy that the Finnish Defence Forces were missing during the process. Instead, it was the Ministry of Education that was assigned to lead the project. No one wanted to risk the project with "any military representatives wandering around in the Karelian forests".[65]

Commission of the War Dead and the moral obligation

The meeting of the state and grassroots actors in October 1990 resulted in the establishment of the Commission of the War Dead (*Sotavainajatoimikunta*) in the following spring. The Commission was not shy to point out the need for action: "The Finnish military graves, field graves, and memorials on the Soviet territory have reportedly been left untended", and it pointed out that also the most important battlefields did not have memorials.[66] The Commission was surrounded by emotional and patriotic rhetoric. In countless memos and discussions, the moral dimension was frequently present. It was a "moral obligation" of the state to carry out searches and burials, and it was part of a "universal human morality" in the face of which Finland could not stand down when other nations did their part. The Ministry of Defence noted that the task of the Commission was nothing less than "a debt of honour to the fallen that must be paid."[67]

The Commission navigated the terrain between the state and civil society. It can be seen as an embodiment of the new mechanics and new morality formed because of the meltdown of the old system and the surge of a new and bolder culture of remembrance. The Cold War era's rigidly hierarchical and bureaucratic model, where issues between Finland and the Soviet Union were determined at the highest possible level, was giving way to a new grassroots movement that worked around the traditional bureaucracy, getting effective results on the ground.

The first task for the Commission was to collect data on those missing. The response was overwhelming. Within a couple of months, the Commission received over 1500 responses from people reporting where and during which battle their comrades-in-arms or relatives had fallen, with their bodies never evacuated. Some of the answers included self-drawn maps indicating the exact site of the remains. Surprised by the overwhelming response, Antti Vuorinen, representing the Ministry of Education in the Commission, noted that "it feels like these things have been on people's minds for decades" and that "uncertainty has weighed heavily on people". Some respondents believed their loved ones were still prisoners in the Soviet Union. Asked in an interview why the search for soldiers was only now being conducted, Vuorinen replied: "Perhaps the matter has been perceived as embarrassing in the past or has been unnecessarily linked to foreign policy dimensions."[68]

The Commission was only one of multiple remembrance-related investigations involving state and civil society collaboration. The Commission was searching for missing soldiers, while the War Veterans' Association and the War College (from 1993, the National Defence University) built a database of Finnish fallen soldiers. The War College also located the graves of Soviet soldiers who had perished in Finland or regions occupied by Finland. Additionally, the Prisoners of War Association, supported by the Ministry of Education, investigated Finnish POWs who had died in Russia. The same Ministry, alongside Karelian heritage associations, examined military cemeteries in ceded Karelia.

Despite the active vernacular level, the hard bureaucracy was still present. To get the official search teams going, the Commission had to work through the disappearing political and bureaucratic terrains of the Soviet empire and the new ones being formed for the Russian Federation. The Commission – and especially its leading members Teuvo Alava and Antti Vuorinen – threw themselves into an exhausting lobbying process: contacts with the Russian Embassy in Helsinki, trips to Moscow and other Russian places of importance, meetings with Russian authorities and civic actors, and lobbying the issue in Finland. Mostly the reception was positive.

Already on Alava and Vuorinen's first trip to the Soviet Union in May 1991, when they met Marshal Kulikov from the Supreme Soviet and representatives from the Defence Ministry and Ministry of Culture, everyone presented the idea of an agreement on the war dead, and Kulikov showed a newly signed agreement concluded between the Soviet Union and Italy.[69]

Whereas there was no problem for the Finns concerning the agreement, they were wary of the infamous Russian bureaucracy. In the fast-moving field of Finnish–Soviet/Russian relations, the Commission clearly desired to seize the moment and was afraid of being left behind. Between the establishment of the Commission and the first preparatory measures in the field in the late summer of 1992 (the actual field work started in the summer of 1993), the Commission made every effort to speed up the project and sought to promote the issue in both Finland and Russia through discussions with ministries, embassies, and Russian entities. Although the negotiating party changed from the Soviet Union to the Russian Federation, the process was on a fast track by the standards to which the Finns were accustomed.

The rush was explained by vernacular actors: "The government should also start the search as soon as possible, as other agencies are also starting

to carry out ground searches", reported Vuorinen. Whereas the Commission was aware of the growing number of Russian search teams, it also became clear that Finnish organizations and individuals were active. For the Commission it was of great importance that finding Finnish soldiers should be done mainly by Finns, preferably under some kind of state control.[70] It was seen as a continuum of the commemoration of the war dead during the war. The time had come to finish the work, and it seemed inappropriate that random Russians were to perform this "sacred act".[71]

A year later, in the spring of 1992, the Commission claimed that everyone in Finland was enthusiastic to get the search going, including the new Prime Minister, Esko Aho, as well as the Minister of Finance Iiro Viinanen, who had promised funds in spite of the deepening recession in the country.[72] The Commission, which stressed how important it was to take immediate action because NGOs and individuals had already begun the work, was hopeful that the state-sponsored work could start already in May when the ground was not yet covered by vegetation.[73] So eager were the Finns to start the work that they decided that there would be no limits if the Russians wanted to take part.[74]

One of many Finns who did not wait for interstate agreements or official search teams was Jouko Halmesoja, whose father had fallen in the war. When it became possible at the turn of the 1990s, he travelled to the battle sites of Taipaleenjoki in Karelia and visited the Russian archives. He had befriended members of the Russian search team and heritage association "Karelija", and they even constructed together with the Russian heritage activists a memorial at the battle site. At the same site, the Russians had found many remains of Finnish soldiers and a soldier's dog tag. For Halmesoja, it was a great honour to be able to give the dog tag to the still living widow of his father's comrade-in-arms.[75]

The intergovernmental agreement on commemorating the war dead was signed in July 1992 in Helsinki by presidents Mauno Koivisto and Boris Yeltsin. During his visit and according to the new politics of the dead, Yeltsin – as the first Soviet/Russian leader – laid a wreath at the Finnish war graves in Helsinki as a gesture of reconciliation that he hoped Finns would accept. He famously also promised that Russia would never interfere in Finland's internal affairs.[76]

Reconciliation

The intergovernmental agreement on commemorating the war dead can be seen as a formal approval of the activities that had already begun at the grassroots level and a sign of the changed memory regimes in the post-communist world. The agreement did not create anything new but supported a movement that was already vibrant. The agreement made it possible for the government to financially support Finnish memory activists in Russia and helped solve possible bureaucratic problems.

The summer of 1992 was hectic. Immediately after the agreement was signed, the Finnish state started to support economically two dozen memorial projects organized by Finnish Karelian heritage associations. The reconstruction of war grave memorials in ceded Karelia had started already a year earlier. The state funds were ultimately more symbolic in nature as the work was done by volunteers.[77]

During the same summer, the first preliminary field work searching for missing soldiers was conducted, and the following summer the first Finnish official search teams started locating the remains of the missing soldiers. The volunteer searchers did not receive a salary, but the state paid their other expenses. The volunteers were all history enthusiasts, and many had backgrounds in the army, the border guards, or the police.[78]

The inauguration of the first Finnish POW memorial in Russia ended a hectic summer as the commemoration of the war rose to an unseen level in Finnish–Russian politics. At the unveiling ceremony in Cherepovets, Finnish state representatives cheered the "positive growth of cooperation not only with the city of Cherepovets, but between the people of Finland and the people of Russia as a whole". The Finnish POW memorial somewhat surprisingly received coverage on Russian television, and L. N. Pauzin from the Russian Embassy in Helsinki noted to Finns that positive coverage of the memorial was of domestic political importance because it "reduces the anger that citizens feel towards their society".[79]

In 1993, there were twelve unveilings of restored or totally rebuilt Finnish war grave memorials in ceded Karelia, all done by the Karelian heritage associations that received part of the funds needed from the Finnish state. There were three major field cemeteries that were restored, and around 50 Finnish volunteers in four search teams searched for the remains of missing soldiers during the summer.[80] The year of 1993 signified the start of the reburials of

Finnish soldiers, a ceremony that would take place nearly every year during the 1990s and beyond.[81]

In the early 1990s, it was not just about what Finns were doing in Russia. The agreement called for reciprocity and especially in the first years it seemed an opener for the more humane and diplomatic Russian remembrance of the war. There was no lack of remains of Soviet soldiers on Finnish soil. During the Cold War, Finland had tended 70 graves of 12,000 deceased Soviet prisoners of war. The Finland-Soviet Union Society played a major role in these commemorations, maintaining a grassroots organization for Soviet monuments. However, outside these POW graves, the Soviet interest in the war dead was minimal. The thousands of fallen Soviet soldiers within the Finnish borders were largely ignored.

The change in the memory regime meant that the war dead, previously seen as symbols of the Soviet fight against fascism, began to be viewed as universal victims of the harshness and irrationality of war.[82] The new period also inspired Russians living in Finland. Boris Verikov, a sincere critic of the Soviet Union, Chairman of the Russian Club of Tampere, and a fourth-generation Finnish Russian, initiated a memorial for Soviet prisoners of war who died at Orivesi POW camp. Since 1990, he had highlighted their mistreatment and neglect, which irritated the Finnish Prisoners of War Association, which claimed that those forgotten were the Finnish prisoners, not the Russians.[83] The memorial, unveiled in 1991, listed the names of the deceased. It aimed, according to Verikov, to "revive the self-esteem of Russians in Finland". The Finnish Ministry of Education supported the project.[84]

The Orivesi memorial can be seen as an attempt to articulate a new post-communist Russianness. So deep was the change that the Russian minority, which had been strongly anti-communist and dubious in the eyes of the Soviet Union, now embraced the war commemoration. It was a commemoration where one could see both the humane, antipolitical, individualistic memory and a more old-fashioned Russian patriotism overtaking Soviet symbols and narratives. The strengthening of the Russian identity behind the Verikov initiative was connected to the fact that more Russian speakers had moved to Finland. The migration did not become the mass movement many Finns feared at the turn of the 1990s, but still the 10,000 Russian speakers were in 1992 the biggest immigrant group in Finland. However, most of them were Ingrian Finns and had relocated to Finland as ethnic Finns according to the "repatriation" policy, although only a few spoke Finnish. In addition, there was an older Finnish

Russian minority. In the same year, there were only 1,500 non-Russian-speaking people from the Baltic countries, mainly Estonia. Russian speakers quickly became the largest foreign minority in Finland at that time.[85]

The new, less ideological war memory is reflected in a piece on the Orivesi memorial published in the Soviet newspaper *Izvestiia*. In addition to the normal reporting on the unveiling ceremony, the paper commented critically on the absence of Finnish memorials in Russia: "Let's be fair. Many Finns died in our prison camp archipelago." The paper noted with satisfaction that the graves of Finnish POWs in Gatchina, Cherepovets, and Karaganda would soon have memorials.[86]

From a Russian viewpoint, the biggest interest for the new interstate "war dead politics" was in Kuhmo and Suomussalmi in eastern Finland, and especially the battlefields along the Raate Road in Suomussalmi, one of the most mythical sites in Finnish war history. In Raate during the Winter War, the Soviet 44th Division was destroyed by the Finns, causing the first major Soviet loss. The Finns had buried thousands of Soviet soldiers in dozens of mass graves along the road. Before glasnost, the Soviet authorities showed no interest in either the fallen or the history of the battle, nor the fact that the 44th Division consisted of Ukrainians. For the Finns, Raate became at the end of the 1980s a popular destination for dark tourism, but the Russian graves were not part of the tours, and the locals were not interested in showing their location. Amid the Cold War in the 1960s, the police had removed a grave marker (as politically incorrect) with the inscription "here lie eight horses and 57 Russkies".[87] However, after the end of the Cold War, the battlefields of Raate suited perfectly the new victim-focused commemoration.

In Suomussalmi, the Ministry of Education's request to locate the graves was not met with enthusiasm, as it was claimed that an unreasonable amount of work was required to search the bogs and forests. In addition, the War Dead Commission, which was given the task of examining the graves of Soviet soldiers, realized the difficulties. With the resources available, it was impossible to locate the huge numbers of dead in the marshes of the region. The Commission suggested instead that memorials could be erected for all the fallen.[88]

However, Raate had developed into a major Finnish–Russian memory site. For Finns, the place was part of the Winter War myth, and the number of tourists skyrocketed at the beginning of the 1990s, reaching over 30,000 tourists in 1992. The same year an information centre, cafeteria, and exhibition hall were opened. Explaining the increase in interest, Pekka Kemppai-

nen, Administrative Director of Suomussalmi, suggested that the wounds of war had previously hindered such activities and that only now had the time come to address them.[89]

Initially, the locals were concerned that the memorial might glorify the Red Army in a manner akin to the Soviet traditions. However, upon realizing that it was a more humane tribute to those who had fallen, they approved of it.[90]

In March 1993, a minor memorial stone was unveiled in freezing weather, marking 53 years since the end of the Winter War. The event reflected new post-Cold War rhetoric and strategies. President Boris Yeltsin stated in his greetings to the event: "The new Russia is establishing relations with its neighbour on a new basis [...] for our part, we will do what we can to help perpetuate the memory of Finnish citizens who fell on Russian territory". Yeltsin's statement was accompanied by President Mauno Koivisto's greetings, in which he stated that the time had come to heal the wounds between the two nations.[91]

At the Raate memorial inauguration, Russian veteran General Gribkov admitted that he had fought in the war under the mistaken belief that it would bring freedom to Finland. Other speeches emphasized the soldiers as casualties and held Stalin accountable. The head of the Orthodox Church in Oulu, Metropolitan Leo, stated that the memorial symbolized a final reconciliation between the two countries "as we have recognized the historical facts and acknowledged the resting places of those who gave the greatest sacrifice in the forests of Suomussalmi". Leo also noted that for the first time in 70 years, people had crossed the border from East Karelia into Finland to take part in an Orthodox feast. Ambassador Yuri Deryabin and Jaakko Numminen from the Ministry of Education announced a future monument to the fallen Russians on Raate Road, and Deryabin repeated the mantra of how the new phase of war remembrance was helping relations between the two countries.[92] Deryabin stated that the Russian Embassy had agreed with the Finns that a bigger memorial would be erected at the site of approximately 100 Russian mass graves and that efforts would be made to uncover the identity of the fallen.[93]

The new memorial to the fallen Russian soldiers was unveiled in the autumn of 1994, exactly 50 years after the end of the Continuation War between Finland and the Soviet Union. The Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus', Alexius II, inaugurated and blessed the monument. He pointed out that the Winter War was the result of the criminal policies of the Soviet Union.[94] It is telling, however, that most Red Army soldiers who fell on the Raate Road were Uk-

rainians. The memorial erected by Ukraine was not completed until 2009. Russia, as the successor to the Soviet Union, appropriated Ukrainian history for itself at the inauguration of the monument.[95]

Russian war memorial diplomacy was not limited to the Second World War. On the Åland Islands, Yuri Deryabin together with Orthodox priests and representatives from the leading Ålandic institutes inaugurated a memorial to ten Russian sailors who had been buried on the site 250 years earlier during the Swedish–Russian war of 1741–1743. The local authorities looked a little surprised when taking part in the liturgy where the Orthodox vicar sprinkled the water of consecration on the memorial stone amid burning incense. Who would have thought this would happen five years ago, asked one of the Ålandic participants. Deryabin hailed the event as a prime example of how countries should work together, and reassured suspicious Ålanders that it was not about praising the Russian occupation but mourning the dead. No wonder many Ålanders were surprised; only a decade earlier, as a Soviet diplomat, Deryabin had actively questioned Finnish neutrality and had therefore been named "Brezhnev's apostle of horror".[96]

Disturbances

In the 1990s the neo-patriotic memory regime became part of the post-communist dynamic in the relationship between Finland and Russia. The Finnish engagement in ceded Karelia continued through the years, new memorials were built, and the grassroots cooperation developed. On the state level, the Finnish–Russian War Victims' Advisory Board was established in 1993 and continued to meet regularly. In Finland, the Ministry of Education gave up its role in 1998 and the War Victims' Remembrance Association took over. The association was established by NGOs. In Russia, the Voennye Memorialy Association was the main cooperation partner. Between 1995 and 1996, the association, operating under the Russian Federation's Ministry of Defence, erected prisoner-of-war memorials in Krasnogorsk, Yegla, and Shibotovo to commemorate Finnish soldiers.[97]

The Finnish neo-patriotic memory regime seemed to fit in the new post-communist world and find common grounds with the chaotic process in Russia. However, the new wave also created disturbances, showing the underlying tensions behind the formal openness and willingness to cooperate.

Memorials do not only perpetuate the collective message of one group, but also enable demonstrations and provocations, even vandalism. In the early summer of 1992, the Russian Embassy in Helsinki reacted when over forty crosses were vandalized in Kemi and vomit stains were found at the site. The Ministry of Education reacted quickly and informed the Russians of the measures taken. Those responsible were never found.[98] The following year, the Soviet monument at the POW graveyard in Hanko was vandalized with swastikas and Nazi slogans. The Russian Embassy called for measures, referring to the agreement between the two countries.[99]

There was still wartime history that was uncomfortable for Finland. One of the questions was the Russian civilian and military victims during the Finnish occupation. Although the subject was not completely silenced, it did not fit the neo-patriotic memory boom of the late 1980s and the early 1990s.[100]

Finnish authorities had to answer to Russian inquiries about the victims of the concentration camps established by the Finnish military administration in East Karelia. The Russian Karelian Supreme Council was active and wrote directly to the Finnish PM about the need to know who were held in the Finnish camps, since otherwise many would remain without compensation. The Supreme Council could inform that "what is known is that the Finns organized a census in 1941 and registered those who were transferred to places specially set aside for the purpose".[101] The darker history of the Finnish war campaign in 1941–1944, the nation's Greater Finland aspirations, the high mortality in the Finnish POW camps, and the disturbing facts about the Finnish concentration camps for civilians did not fit well into the neo-patriotic memory where the essence of actions was to hail the Finnish soldiers as war heroes.

There were quite surprising requests also about the mass graves of Russians soldiers that the Finns had established in Tienhaara, close to Vyborg. St. Petersburg City Council asked the Finnish Consul in St. Petersburg to send a list of Russian prisoners of war buried in Tienhaara and requested information about the exact location of the unmarked graves. Later in the spring, the Chairman of the City Council wrote a similar request to President Mauno Koivisto.[102] The fact that the Russian authorities were unaware of the graves shows how little importance this played during the Soviet Union.

While in Finland cooperation between the state and the grassroots was smooth and without major tensions, the situation in Russia was not always so easy. Among the many independent war heritage associations, many had started as a form of indirect criticism of the system. Russian neo-patriotism

did not necessarily appeal to all of them. One of the pioneers was the Karelian Military Historical Society, a heavily Soviet-critical society based in St. Petersburg and focused on the war history of Karelia and Ingria. In 1994, the Society was already very critical of the development. They claimed that the search for and commemoration of the fallen Russian soldiers was still largely the responsibility of private associations (this was the case still in the 2020s). Local authorities usually had no funds. New barriers had appeared on the road to reform and liberation in Russia. "It is impossible to liberate the people against their will", wrote the Society's spokesperson in Nevskoe Vremya when criticizing the war in Chechnya. During the same year of 1994, the Society continued to commemorate the Winter War, and their latest memorial to both Finnish and Russian soldiers was unveiled in Losevo (*Kiviniemi* in Finnish). The rhetoric around the memorial reached new levels by portraying all fallen soldiers as victims and the leaders of both countries as evil: "After all, both armies were forced into this military threat against their will."[103] At this stage, the Finnish Consulate no longer participated in the events organized by the society.

Whereas in the early 1990s, the Finnish Consulate in St Petersburg closely monitored the rise of pro-Finnish sentiments in Russia, only a few years later, concerns grew over a new, less broad-minded Russian nationalism. The Consulate reported strong patriotic feelings during the 1994 commemoration of the end of the Leningrad siege. Duma Speaker Ivan Rybkin, whose father fought the Finns in Toksova, delivered a highly patriotic speech on the old battlefield.[104]

Two years later, an incident occurred that highlighted the disturbances. In August 1996, multiple Finnish memorials were unveiled at five different locations on the Karelian Isthmus. One of these was situated in the centre of Vyborg, at the ruins of the dome church, on the site of former Finnish military graves. Instead of a joint ceremony with Finns and Russians, as would have been the case a few years earlier, the Russian representatives and townspeople were conspicuous by their absence. According to the Finnish organizer, it appeared that the situation was challenging for the city's authorities, who seemingly preferred to avoid the erection of another Finnish monument in the city.

The local newspaper criticized the number of Finnish monuments, stating that they were "springing up like mushrooms in the rain", and noted that this particular monument had been erected without the permission of the

local authorities. The newspaper reported that the City Council had discussed the matter, and it was concluded that the existing memorial would be left undisturbed.[105]

Finnish organizers quickly addressed the criticism. Antti Vuorinen from the Commission of the War Dead clarified that it was a minor bureaucratic error and reminded that maintaining war graves was a reciprocal agreement. He tersely stated that Finland indeed took care of more than 70 Russian war graves in Finland, and the number of Russian memorials in Finland exceeded the number of Finnish memorials in Russia. Finally, he threw a jab, stating that "when a representative of a Finnish town announces that the matter is in order, it is".[106] René Nyberg from the Finnish Consulate in St. Petersburg claimed that the whole issue was symptomatic and reflected the current confused situation in Russia, where nationalist agitation was on the rise, but he reassured that Finnish memorials in Karelia would remain undisturbed.[107]

The disturbances in Vyborg continued. A month later, the Finnish memorial had been partly demolished. The Finns responded more openly than before. The agreement's reciprocity was one-sided, they claimed. While Finns maintained Russian graves and for instance financed the Kuhmo memorial, Russia systematically neglected Finnish memorials, leaving Finns to cover all costs. "There are elements of scandal in the matter", stated the consulate, putting the ball in the Russians' court. Soon the Mayor of Vyborg apologized and said that the demolition had been the work of some local hooligans. A scandal was avoided, but it highlighted the shifting political climate in Russia. The liberal self-reflection of the early 1990s was becoming history.

The disturbances should not obscure the success of local cooperation in ceded Karelia. Even the politically unrealistic question of the restoration of Karelia to Finland did not create too many tensions, although many tried. One of the leading conservative politicians, Raimo Ilaskivi, as the chairman of the memorial committee of "Mother Karelia" expressed the wish in his speech at a reburial site in Lappeenranta: "Will we ever get Karelia back? Can those who still lay in the woods of Karelia also rest in the Finnish soil one day?"[108]

Over thirty years after the Finnish–Russian agreement on the commemoration of the war dead was signed, it is still valid, although the political environment has changed dramatically. The full-scale Russian attack on Ukraine in 2022 stopped Finnish search teams from travelling to ceded Karelia.[109] Already

long before the war in Ukraine, it had been clear that the idealistic visions of dead body politics as a moral basis for the relationship between Finland and Russia would not materialize, at least not according to the most optimistic hopes of the early 1990s. Whereas the search movement for missing soldiers in Russia continues to be popular, it has become increasingly politicized with anti-Western rhetoric emerging in the reburial ceremonies in Russia.[110]

Although Finnish search teams stopped travelling to Russia, the work has not ceased. Russian search teams have continued to locate missing Finnish soldiers, and the Finnish War Victims' Remembrance Association (*Sotavainajien Muiston Vaalimisyhdistys*), established in 1998 to continue the work of the Commission of the War Dead, has brought the remains to Finland. On 21 May 2023, the repatriation of 48 missing and unidentified soldiers took place in Lappeenranta. They were part of the 1,600 missing Finnish soldiers found in Russia by both Finnish and Russian search teams between the end of the Cold War and 2024.[111]

The changed political landscape is also reflected in attitudes towards the Finnish memorials in ceded Karelia. Both local and state actors have asked vociferously why the rehabilitation of Nazism should be allowed, referring to the Finnish graves. The memorial in Primorsk (in Finnish *Koivisto*) was vandalized in 2020, and three weeks after Russia attacked Ukraine in 2022, the memorial was further destroyed by removing all the nameplates of the soldiers.[112] Six months later, the local court in Vyborg decided that the memorial to "Finnish Nazi soldiers" should be destroyed.[113] More followed when a war memorial in Svobodnoye (in Finnish *Kirvu*), which was re-erected by the Finns in 1993, was ordered to be destroyed because of its alleged "anti-Russian" inscriptions.[114]

Conclusion

With the end of the Cold War, the commemoration of World War II became a key point in the transformation of both Russia and Eastern Europe. Instead of a centralized and heavily ideologized past, a new memory regime emerged, focusing on criticizing former regimes. The war was highlighted as a tragedy of millions who were victims of politics rather than heroes.

In Finland, the end of the Cold War led to a neo-patriotic memory boom that focused on World War II. The memory boom was fuelled by a cluster of

grassroots organizations focused on defence and war heritage. Many saw the Cold War era as a period that undermined genuine patriotism and believed that the fall of the Soviet Union marked the right time to reassert it. The focus was, in addition to the war veterans, on the white spots of war history and those who had been neglected or forgotten. Three groups of victims stood out above the rest: the missing soldiers whose bodies had never been evacuated, the deceased prisoners of war, and the fallen who had been buried in war graves in ceded Karelia. The engagement in the commemoration and reburials of these groups was made possible only with the end of the Soviet Union.

Inspired by the active grassroots level in Russia, the search for missing soldiers began to interest Finnish associations, individuals, and the state, resulting in a dead body politics that was firmly linked to the transition to a new, as of yet unknown future. The search for the remains of missing soldiers, repatriation, locating war graves, and erecting memorials were part of the changing political reality where confronting the past became a central way of addressing the present and charting a path to the future.

The interest in the "dead bodies" in ceded Karelia would ultimately unite the grassroots actors with the state authorities and create a space for cooperation between Finns and Russians on both the vernacular and governmental levels. In both Finland and Russia, the missing soldiers became an important part of the new memory regime. In the early 1990s, it seemed that this activity might even serve as the basis for a new relationship between Finland and post-communist Russia, with the Finnish–Russian agreement on the commemoration of the war dead from 1992 as the main manifestation. The mourning and repatriation process provided an opportunity to focus attention on individual soldiers, thereby offering a novel approach to addressing complex historical events.

The scenario from the early 1990s did not materialize in full. The window where Russia was ready to seek an apolitical and humane attitude towards the past did not last long. In Finland, the efforts to locate missing soldiers in ceded Karelia and to honour those who were never interred in their homeland have become significant elements of the neo-patriotic memory regime. The dead body politics that in the 1990s seemed in Finland and Russia to form a genuine way of dealing with a troublesome and violent past history seems from the perspective of 2025 just a distant memory.

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56 KA. Opetusministeriö III. Uba 565, Jaakko Nummisen asiakirjat Sotavainajatoimikunta, 30 July 1991; UM. Suomen sodat 1939–44. Vuosi 1991. Sotavainajatoimikunnan kirjeopetusministeriölle, 20 June 1991, eversti Venkovin kirje, 27 November 1991. In the autumn of 1991, the remains of 240 Italian soldiers were exhumed and taken to Italy where they were reburied.

57 In the prison camp in Karaganda, Kazakhstan, some 5000 POWs had died, most of them Germans but also Romanian, Japanese, Austrian, and Finnish captives. UM. Suomen sodat 1939–44. Vuosi 1991. Sotavankimuistomerkin työryhmä kirje opetusministeriölle, 10 June 1991.
58 UM. Suomen sodat 1939–44. Vuosi 1991. Sotavankimuistomerkin työryhmä kirje opetusministeriölle, 10 June 1991.
59 KA. Rintamamiesveteraanien liitto. Sotavainajatoimikunta. Ulkoasiainministeriön pöytäkirja, 30 October 1990.
60 The three war veteran associations were Suomen sotaveteraaniliitto, Rintamamiesveteraanien liitto, and Sotainvalidien veljesliitto. In addition to these, state institutions were represented by the Church Government, the Orthodox Church Government, the Institute of Military Science, the University of Tampere, and the Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs and Defence; KA. Rintamamiesveteraanien liitto. Sotavainajatoimikunta. Opetusministeriö, 12 February 1991; KA. Kaatuneiden omaisten liitto. Sotavainaja-asiain neuvottelukunta. Pääesikunnan ulkomaanosaston kutsu.
61 Numminen 2020, 330–331.
62 UM. Suomen sodat 1939–44. Vuosi 1991. Sotavainajatoimikunnan kirje opetusministeriölle, 20 June 1991.
63 UM. Suomen sodat 1939–44. Vuosi 1991. Pääkonsulinvirasto, 5 September 1991.
64 UM. Suomen sodat 1939–44. Vuosi 1991. Sotavainajatoimikunnan kirje opetusministeriölle, 20 June 1991.
65 Numminen 2020, 331.
66 KA. Rintamamiesveteraanien liitto. Sotavainajatoimikunta. Kokouspöytäkirja, 22 March 1991.
67 KA. Rintamamiesveteraanien liitto. Sotavainajatoimikunta. Kokouspöytäkirja, 22 March 1991, Vuorisen muistio, 16 April 1992.
68 *Helsingin Sanomat*, 16 February 1992.
69 UM. Suomen sodat 1939–44. Vuosi 1991. Sotavainajatoimikunnan kirje SNTL:N kulttuuriministeriöön, 22 August 1991.
70 KA. Opetusministeriö III. Uba 565, Jaakko Nummisen asiakirjat, Sotavainajatoimikunta, Vuorinen muistio, 28 April 1992.
71 KA. Opetusministeriö III. Uba 565, Jaakko Nummisen asiakirjat, Sotavainajatoimikunta, 30 July 1991.
72 KA. Opetusministeriö III. Uba 565, Jaakko Nummisen asiakirjat, Sotavainajatoimikunta, Vuorinen muistio, 3 February 1992.
73 KA. Opetusministeriö III. Uba 565, Jaakko Nummisen asiakirjat, Vuorisen muistio, 16 April 1992.
74 KA. Opetusministeriö III. Uba 565, Jaakko Nummisen asiakirjat, Sotavainajatoimikunta, Moskovan suurlähetystölle, 15 May 1992.
75 *Seura*, 2 April 1993.
76 UM. Suomen sodat 1939–44. Vuosi 1992. Jaakko Nummisen raportti, 18 August 1992; UM. Suomen sodat 1939–44. Vuosi 1994. Moskovan edustuston raportti ulkoministeriölle, 20 December 1994.
77 KA. Suomi–Neuvostoliitto-Seura. Sotilashaudat 1952–1993. Lehtileikkeet 1992.
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79 KA. Opetusministeriö III. Uba 565, Jaakko Nummisen asiakirjat, Sotavankimuistomerkin työryhmä. Vuorisen muistio, 22 September 1992.
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81 *Länsi-Savo*, 11 November 1994.
82 KA. Suomi–Neuvostoliitto-Seura. Sotilashaudat 1952–1993. Lehtileikkeet 1985.
83 *Uusi Suomi*, 8 November 1990.
84 UM. Suomen sodat 1939–44. Vuosi 1991. Raportti, 20 November 1991.
85 *Helsingin Sanomat*, 17 June 1992.
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87 *Uusi Suomi*, 2 August 1991.
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