

White Death: Finnish World War Two Narrative and Alternative Heritage Work in Social Media

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Abstract

This paper discusses Finnish war commemoration in social media where the public connects with their history through wartime photography. The focus is on one Finnish social media site that chooses images out of the official Finnish military photography collection for posting. Through social media, the public can participate in heritage work themselves and these sites are becoming increasingly important in creating views of the nation's past. The pages tend to repeat nationalistic narratives and recreate national myths. One important symbol in Finnish cultural imaginings is the colour white. In the imagery of World War Two, with Finnish soldiers dressed in white snow camouflage, it is used to emphasise the moral purity and innocence and victimhood of the nation. Such symbolism can distort understandings of the war, and the social media pages have become venues where ethnonationalism is maintained and even racist discourse accepted. I argue that more attention should be paid to photography in the construction of heritage narratives, and professionals should react to the kind of heritage invoked by the public in social media.

Keywords

Social media, cultural heritage, national images, World War Two, Finland

Introduction

In 2019 a 72-year-old Japanese pensioner, Masatoshi Sasayama, flew to Helsinki, Finland to visit the Simo Häyhä museum in Rautjärvi. He walked some 300 kilometres from Helsinki to Rautjärvi to honour the famous sniper who fought for Finns during the Second World War. The sniper nicknamed White Death is rumoured to have the most sniper kills in history and has inspired many popular works from heavy metal songs to gay erotica novels. Sasayama had familiarised himself with Häyhä through manga comics and decided to make the honorary trip to his hometown (Kivimäki 2019). The nickname White Death comes from the winter camouflage the Finnish soldiers wore in the frontlines during the Winter War. Such garments allowed the Finns invisibility in the snowy landscapes, and Häyhä's deadliness is due to his skilful hiding techniques. However, the images of Häyhä and other Finnish soldiers in white winter camouflage carry deeper cultural meanings in Finland. The concept of white death is also related to the Finnish war interpretations and the Finns national self-image. The concept of 'whiteness' is important through notions of purity and innocence; the Finns see themselves as a small mistreated nation yet heroic and proud over their war experiences and independence.

Social media is a form of new heritage, that allows interaction with one's past through remaining material traces (Giaccardi 2012, 1-2). Various scholarly contributions have examined media as sites of 'participatory heritage' or 'alternative heritage engagements' that allow audiences more personal encounters with history (e.g. Harrison 2009; Giaccardi 2012). These approaches often examine the ways heritage is represented in various media, but this paper takes on a different approach, examining the use of historical war images in social media. I discuss the Finns' cultural imaginings of the nation's war experience, and what kind of heritage is invoked in social media through the pictures. The site on focus is called *Sotahistoriaa väritettynä*, 'Finnish War History in Colour' that publishes pictures from the Finnish military's Information Company (IC henceforth) images. The site operates in both Facebook and Instagram and is adjusting the visual landscape of the wars considerably given

its vast following (https://www.facebook.com/pg/jhlcolorizingFIN/posts/?ref=page_internal; <https://www.instagram.com/jhlcolorizing/?hl=fi>). The administrator of the site colorizes the photographs posted on the page – colorisation functions as a way to ‘reinvent’ historical images and give them new cultural worth.¹ I scrutinised the image choices on the pages to see how the Finnish past is imagined and shed light on the types of values the public seeks to salvage from the masses of pictures. ‘The site’ that I refer to henceforth refers to the ‘War history in colour’ page.

Firstly, I will examine the wars’ role for Finnish identity and memory and then discuss how private and familial wartime memories are expressed in social media. Photography can spark the viewers’ need to discuss their fathers’ grandfathers’ experiences, and illustrates the desire to connect with heritage on a more personal level. Such narratives of course intertwine with the crafted national war narrative and I discuss how the war experience and national symbols, such as the colour white, are understood in Finland. Finally, the issue of war memory and how it is used to argue for an exclusively Finnish national identity will be discussed. Heritage professionals can draw important information on the kinds of histories the public is producing, and challenge some of these imaginings. By drawing attention to the functions of images, I emphasise the need to pay more attention to them also in museums.

Visual Heritage in Social Media: A Multidisciplinary Approach

The IC photography collection is vast, almost 160,000 images altogether, allowing considerable choice about what to publish. Heritage can be acknowledged as practices that make the past meaningful in the present and it encompasses all kinds of material traces from architecture and monuments to historical images. As Harrison (2013, 4) argues, ‘heritage is not a passive process of simply preserving things from the past that remain, but an active process of assembling a series of objects, places and practices that we choose to hold up as a mirror to the present, associated with a particular set of values that we wish to take with us to the future.’ Photographs, however, do not traditionally capture the attention of heritage scholars although they are literally nearly everywhere. They are used in museum spaces to illuminate various histories, but we tend not to think of them as museum objects ‘in their own right’ (Edwards and Mead 2013; Matila et al. forthcoming).

Social media has profoundly changed the amount of exposure we get to historical images but has also altered the ways in which the public can participate in its own heritage production. ‘Social media create infrastructures of communication and interaction that act as places of cultural production and lasting values at the service of what could be viewed as a new generation of “living” heritage practises’ (Giaccardi, 2012, 5). The public can participate in cultural production in a space outside official institutions (e.g. Smith 2006; Giaccardi 2012; Roued-Cunliffe and Coupland 2017). This paper takes on the question of what happens when the public is given the opportunity to define their own values and what are some of the unexpected impacts to heritage work through digitisation. The ideal is that digitisation could create more inclusive heritage work, but several issues may arise from free access to heritage materials and ‘losing control’ over their production and publication. As Taylor and Gibson (2017) argue, sometimes digitisation only manages to reinforce existing inequalities.

This paper approaches social media and wartime photography in a heritage frame but with visual methods. A combination of quantitative and qualitative visual methods was used to gain a varied perspective on the content of the site. Content analysis as a method yields

understanding of certain repetitions inside the page, as well as omissions. A little less than 150 images were analysed for the purpose of this paper, between the years 2017 and 2018. Content analysis in social media basically means to treat page as if it were a single publication, similar to a book or newspaper (e.g. Seitsonen et al. 2019). Content analysis is best suited to the analysis of large quantities of images and certain codes have to be defined for the content of the images to make them comparable (e.g. Rose 2016). These categories can be for instance: human, male or female, their clothing, their age, if they have a gun, and whether their action can be defined as aggressive (for instance aiming towards the enemy with a weapon). These coded categories are tabulated, and it then allows cross-comparisons made between various elements. For instance, how many male figures are dressed in uniform, or how many female figures are portrayed in aggressive behaviour out of the total amount of pictures.

Insert table one about here

I also examined the audience's reactions to specific pictures. I manually counted the likes, comments and shares of individual images to see what the most popular themes are. This allows a type of audience analysis of the site and sheds light on which images spark most reactions among the public. The captioning of pictures also influences the way they are experienced, and I analysed captions from the three top categories (most likes, most shares and most comments). Given the modest number of comments, I was able to perform close reading of them to get a more detailed understanding on what kind of emotions the images provoke. Where appropriate, I will discuss other media that has influenced Finnish memory culture, and therefore conduct wider comparative media analysis to assess the variety of media that has influenced Finnish war memory (e.g. Savolainen et al. 2020).

Finnish War Memory

Before I address the results of my survey, I will briefly characterise the importance of the war narrative for Finnish national identity. The Finnish WWII experience is made up of three separate conflicts. First, the Winter War (1939-1940) when the Soviet Union attacked Finland and sought to occupy Finnish territory. The second conflict, the Continuation War (1941-1944) began as Finland attacked the Soviet Union alongside Nazi Germany as part of operation Barbarossa, in the hopes of regaining territories lost in the previous conflict and occupying Soviet territories. The last war, the Lapland War, was fought between Finns and their former co-belligerents, the Nazis in 1944-1945 when Finland was forced to drive out the German troops from their country while securing a peace treaty with the Soviet Union. `The wars´ therefor refer to WWII in general in Finland. The wars touched nearly every family in Finland since some 340,000 men were mobilised in the Winter War and some 530,000 men in the Continuation War out of a population of 3.7 million. The Continuation War resulted in some 90,000 dead soldiers and 200,000 wounded.

The Finns tend to view the wars as unifying conflicts that sutured the gap that divided the nation tormented by a brutal Civil War in 1918. The wars, although lost, have been subsequently explained as defensive endeavours that secured Finnish independence. The commemoration of the wars was severely hampered by the political atmosphere in Finland during the post-war decades when Finns had to avoid antagonizing the Soviet Union in any way. Spreading heroic tales of Finnish soldiers' war efforts would not likely have been accepted, and therefore these commemorations were suppressed immediately after the war.

Because of the political atmosphere in the post-war period, remembering the experiences of the wartime generation boomed only in the late 1980-90s when the Soviet Union collapsed (Kinnunen and Jokisipilä 2012). The public posting in social media express resentment for the treatment of the veterans during the Cold War period and the most visible tone of comments is to argue for the reappreciation of their war efforts and express gratitude for their sacrifices (Figure 1). The viewers use so-called 'memorializing language' in social media and it functions as a type of online memorial website (Fraenkel 2002; Milošević 2017).

[Insert figure 1 about here]

The Finns' reliance on the war to provide a heroic past for the nation means that popular culture in the country is highly militaristic. It is nearly impossible to pass by a newspaper stand without seeing magazines or articles about the wars and some magazines regularly publish special issues dedicated to the wars. The wars have inspired various movies, documentaries and books. As mentioned, Finns are particularly proud over the fact that they were able to keep independence through the Second World War, battling against the Soviet Union in two separate conflicts. Every year on Finnish Independence Day, December 6th, a movie about the war and the heroic Finnish soldiers, called Unknown Soldier (*Tuntematon sotilas*) is played in the national broadcasting network, YLE. The movie was made in 1956 in a different commemorative atmosphere and it is about the Continuation War, (the current memory culture in Finland tends to emphasise the Winter War) but has not diminished in popularity. In fact, the movie got a remake in 2017 and it was the third most watched movie of all time in Finland (*Suomen elokuvasäätiö* 2018) – the first is the original version of the same film. According to Ville Kivimäki (2012, 489), the ability of the movie to gain such popularity is in the narratives openness for readings that emphasise either 'pacifism or patriotism', a tendency, that is arguably visible in the conflicted memory culture in Finland.

The Continuation War is largely understood through the first conflict, the Winter War. Even the name, The Continuation War, implies that this conflict is understood as a justified continuation of the previous Soviet aggression. Therefore, the original attacker was the Soviet Union and Finns merely defended independence a second time around. Killing is made righteous because it served the maintenance of independence. The Winter War, a battle between 'David and Goliath' has been given special emphasis since it was an unprovoked attack by the Soviet Union towards the small, innocent nation. The Winter War and its symbols have a special place in Finnish self-understanding, and these will be discussed in the following sections. Before that, I will examine how private memories expressed on the site and how they relate to the national war narrative.

At the Threshold between Official and Private Memory

The Military Museum in Helsinki, Finland, is the repository of the IC photographic collection, and it has recently been published online. This affords anyone the possibility of browsing through them as opposed to accessing the photographs in the archive in Helsinki. The Military Museum's online site itself has got a lot of interest, and between 2013 (when it was launched) to 2016 it was visited by well over a million users, of whom some 700,000 are Finns (Anygraaf Oy 2017). The online gallery is an important site of visitation, rivalling the annual visitation levels of the Military Museum (*Museovirasto* 2018), and this underlines the need to take seriously various virtual materialities and commemoration and the new importance of online-spaces in representing heritage (e.g. Giaccardi 2012; Bonacchi et al. 2018).

Digitisation has obviously made it easier to republish the images in various other contexts and in a way give them new life. In social media the pictures get vast publicity – the site on focus in this paper alone has over 10,000 followers and popularity is continuing to soar as the images get more views via sharing. The IC collection that has rested in the archives for several decades is being heritagized, meaning that colorisation turns the images into ‘experiences in and for the present’ and connects viewers to this history (Smith et al. 2003; Smith 2006; Ashworth 2011, 2; Milošević 2017). Several people comment on how the images ‘come alive’ through colorisation. A picture of Finnish soldiers inside a barracks illustrates this point well. A black-and-white photograph of a female figure decorates the wall of the barracks where Finnish soldiers are enjoying some free-time and gives the viewers a sense of time distortion (Figure 2). The viewers mention the powerful way colorisation brings the past (black-and-white) moment back to the present day and express being moved by the ‘trickery’ of the image.

[Insert figure 2 about here]

Official military photography can spark familial memories for the page’s followers. Spatially, this manifests in familiar landscapes, that trigger recollection on where the viewers’ grandfathers have served or died. ‘My grandfather was wounded on the same day in the same area’, one participant comments to an image of a soldier getting first aid for a wound produced by grenade fragments. The memories are anchored based on the spatial proximity to the events, and illustrates the importance of a sense of place in the age of new media (cf. Malpas 2008). Photography can be a very powerful tool for working through the emotions that have inflicted one’s family, and the participants’ comments are reacted or commented to, and their memories are hence recognised by others in the group. Likewise, images taken around the same time the viewers’ grandfathers have died or been injured, can spark a need to share their memory with the community. The online community is doing is what Simon (2012, 89) refers to as ‘remembering together’, an affordance in public heritage work brought about by social media platforms.

Even if an individual family has no wartime ancestral memories, many Finns nevertheless share and recognize the national representation of the war. The war veterans and the wars – that are understood as a fight for the nation’s survival – are highly appreciated in Finland. The veterans’ emotional survival stories are repeatedly published in Finnish media and narratives of survival, bravery, and fear are at the heart of war commemorations. Such tendencies are exemplified by the centennial of Finnish independence, when the evening newspaper *Ilta-Sanomat* published short video clips of 100 surviving war veterans describing their war experiences (*Iltasanomat*, 2017). The popularity of such narratives illustrates the Finns’ continued desire to get glimpses of the war veterans’ ordeals. Over half of the pictures on the Facebook page are of Finnish soldiers posing with their guns and reflect the nation’s willingness to remember the war through their heroic deeds (Figure 3). Culturally such narratives of braveness are appealing and reflect the Finns want to be seen a small nation yet powerful and skilled in combat. For the public, there is a sense of pride to have your grandfather secure independence for the Finnish nation and risking their lives for its well-being.

[Insert figure 3 about here]

Social media holds an important lesson for heritage work – people want the opportunity to share their own personal memories of war. As Giaccardi (2012: 4-5) argues, various new heritage, such as social media, have blurred the boundaries between official memories and familial memories and the site seems to operate at a threshold between such heritage engagements. The re-posting of wartime images allows viewers to mediate their personal experiences through public pictures, and instead of just passive recipients of ‘a ready-made’ heritage narrative, the public produces heritage themselves (Smith 2006). The public’s comments and reactions matter and are documented in the community’s page (Ciolfi 2012) and discussion takes place over various historical facts and fictions. At least in Finland and specifically in war museums, such as the Military Museum in Helsinki, there is no such opportunity available for museumgoers.

White Death: Nationalist Heritage Narratives

The History in Colour site reflects broader Finnish heritage narratives and constructs quite a patriotic and conservative view of Finnish war history. As mentioned, the images of Finnish soldiers in white winter camouflage is one iconography that is potentially misleading. The frustrating quality of images is that they have the potential of becoming stagnant symbols that are passively and uncritically received. The viewing of images is affected by canonised versions of history, which are further promoted by certain imagery. The inherent ‘truth claim’ of images sometimes works to mask the cultural ways of perceiving them (e.g. Gunning 2004).

The colour white is a strong national symbol in Finland. Firstly, white has a link to the Civil War (1918) in which the right-wing conservative White Guard won over the socialist Red Guard. The winning side got to dictate post-war history narration, side-lining Red experiences and memories. While in the 1960s an attempt was made to appease the two sides in public commemoration, after the commemorative turn in the 1980-90s, public memory culture again turned to emphasising the White narrative (Kinnunen 2018; Tepora 2018). Finnish history and memory, then, has long been ‘white’. The War History in Colour page references the Civil War with one image with troops of the White Guard.

White is also the colour of the flag, the blue cross on a white background. Blue and white are the national colours and they have inspired a song called Blue and White, a type of popular national anthem (Jukka Kuoppamäki, 1972 [*Sininen ja valkoinen*]). The singer has claimed that he participated in a hit song contest in 1973 and the Soviet Union demanded that the patriotic song be removed from the competition (Lindfors 2007). According to the song, blue symbolizes the many lakes in Finland and the sky, whereas the white symbolizes snow and the bright summer nights. Natural symbols and landscapes have always been important for the nation without deep historical roots (Koponen et al. 2018). Finnish soldiers during war were prized for their ability to move in the landscape which gave them an advantage against the motorised Soviet infantry. The Finns were called ‘*korpisoturi*’, roughly translated it means skilled forest fighters. The white camouflage gave the Finns the advantage of blending in the landscape and perhaps symbolically illustrated that they ‘belong’ in the land they were fighting over.

The white camouflage can be interpreted as a symbol of the moral purity of Finnish soldiers, which was referenced in several contexts when commemorating the war after it ended (Kormano 2006: 284-285; Kivimäki 2012, 486; Kormano 2014, 296-302). The latest

manifestation of the iconography was witnessed in November 2017, when a memorial for the Winter War was unveiled in Helsinki. The memorial is a 10-meter-tall soldier figure in snow camouflage made of steel with a white light glimmering inside. The statue was called 'Light bearer' and it was commissioned for the 100th anniversary of Finland's independence. The memorial contains a QR-code with which the public can access 105 photographs illustrating different themes of the Winter War (Kleemola 2015). If an image is published repeatedly in certain contexts, it gets associated repeatedly to its prior uses, turning it into an abstract symbol 'that signifies by social convention' (Ruchatz 2008, 375). The Finnish viewers instantly link the monument's aesthetic to the Winter War, the morally pure and less-contentious conflict in popular memory.

This iconography was published on the History in Colour site on December 6, 2017 and 2018, on the Independence Day of Finland, with images of a Finnish soldier in white camouflage in the Finnish-Soviet front during the Continuation War. The images with Finnish soldiers wearing white winter camouflage seem to be among the most popular according to the reactions they have got, although only 15% of the images show the winter garment.

Insert table 2 near here

The white camouflage worn by Finnish soldiers is such an icon that it may well serve pre-existing ideas and memory of the Continuation War as a morally pure, defensive endeavour and serves to mask the various problematic aspects that come with an offensive war (e.g. Sundholm 2013, 32-33). One example of issues that have not really been dealt with are the concentration camps that Finns established for Soviet civilians in the occupied territory (Seitsonen et al. 2020; Matila et al. forthcoming). The sniper, Simo Häyhä, and other Finnish soldiers in winter camouflage along with images depicting the Independence Day, and images of the beginning of the Winter War are highly ranked in the public's reactions (Figure 4). It seems that patriotic sentiment runs strong in the community, and iconography emphasising the righteousness of the war, and Finnish heroism and victimhood, resonate with the crowd. There is an apparent conflict between the Finns wanting to be peaceful, innocent, morally unscathed and yet martial and courageous.

[Insert figure 4 about here]

Finns have not really dealt with the more troubling aspects of the conflict, at least not until very recently.ⁱⁱ Finland was co-belligerent with Nazi Germany during the Continuation War and there is a tendency to play down the involvement with the Nazi government in heritage narratives. Pictures with the Finnish war hero, Marshall Mannerheim alongside Hermann Göring and Adolf Hitler seem to hint to the uncanny effect created by opposing two such different icons – one particularly evil and the other, a near saint in Finnish commemoration (Figure 5). Marshall Mannerheim, the commander-in-chief of the Finnish armed forces at the time, and later Finnish president, is a national icon and even research in Finland typically avoids outright criticism of him (Jokisipilä and Könönen 2013). Mannerheim was also the victorious commander of the White Guard in the Civil War. The pictures of him with Nazi leaders are among the most discussed and that reflects the conflicting feelings Finns have of the cooperation (Table 3). However, the cooperation with Nazi Germany does not challenge the Finns' victimhood stance because it is interpreted as Finland's forced choice between two evils, Stalin and Hitler.

[Insert table 3 about here]

[Insert figure 5 about here]

Finland received military and economic aid from Nazi Germany and would not have been able to pursue their war efforts without it. Some 200 000 German soldiers aided in securing frontlines in Finnish Lapland. German aid was viewed positively at the time but in the post-war decades the issue was largely been pushed aside from commemoratives. In social media such images are willingly displayed, reflecting the overall changing commemorative atmosphere. One museum exhibition discussing the relationships of Finnish civilians and the German soldiers in Lapland was arranged in 2015-2016, and the discussion it provoked illustrates the desire to process these wartime memories. Social media allows the public an outlet for discussion without authority or political control (e.g. Smith 2006). A picture of a German field burial illustrates the interest to approach such topics among the public (cf. Herva 2014; Koskinen-Koivisto 2016). The 'War History in Colour' page also published images of Finnish SS-volunteers and the public debates whether they were ideologically committed to the Nazi cause. In 2019 research was published that suggested that the Finnish Waffen-SS troops may have been aware of the destruction of the Jews in the Eastern front and this caused controversy (Westerlund and Soukola 2019). The victims of the Nazis, however, have largely been omitted from public commemoratives in Finland. Some attempts have been made on a political level, such as public apologies, to acknowledge Finnish culpability in the Holocaust during the Continuation War but no sustained interest in the heritage field has been witnessed (Löfström 2011).

Alternative heritage is not oppositional to professional work and strongly echoes the values that are deemed appropriate for the nation in the culture at large (Savolainen et al. 2020). Amateur history follows dominant ideological tones and the social media site is not disconnected from broader national heritage narratives. Heritage, myths and national symbols are important methods that tie nations together (e.g. Smith 2002; Elgenius 2015; Bounia 2018), and the victimhood stance is a significant part of Finnish war remembrance. The nationalism attributed to the white winter camouflage can easily go unnoticed and as such is an expression of banal nationalism (Billing 1995). The concept refers to an everyday nationalism, and its effectiveness is in its 'invisibility'. Kowalski (2017: 125) has argued that banal nationalism shares something in common with heritagisation given that 'it is a process that erects quotidian objects and practices to a new level of cultural worth, but it is also one that profoundly banalizes the experience of cultural specificity and national uniqueness, anchoring it in mundane acts and routine practices.' On the War History in Colour site official military imagery is turned to an everyday experience, naturalised as part of Finns day-to-day social media content.

Right-wing Patriotism: Heritage for Whites Only?

The social media site under scrutiny has some obvious patriotic symbolism that perhaps draws certain kinds of crowds. Right-wing nationalists and militants alike, will recognise the Finnish lion in the Facebook cover image and attribute nationalistic and militaristic value to the site. The Finnish lion is Finland's coat of arms and the logo of the Finnish army. It has been adopted by extreme right-wing patriots and it is associated with anti-immigration and racism. As Kivimäki (2012: 495) states, the wars in Finland are used to 'argue against any form of "multiculturalism" and for the "defence" of an exclusively "Finnish" national identity

and pride.’ Social media clearly illustrates that such tendencies are not dying out but are still repeated. The growing popularity of such sites is perhaps one demonstration that in the face of increasing globalisation, war history provides narratives that give security to counter the rapidly changing social and economic circumstances (Kivimäki 2012).

The refugee crisis in 2015-2016 provoked responses in social media and several groups were established online to discuss immigration, one of them dedicated to hate speech (Pohjonen 2018). In the War History in Colour site participants use hateful tones, commenting on the harmfulness of the EU and immigration policies and even discrediting refugee men for fleeing responsibility and not staying in their homeland to fight. On the Instagram page a few, whether jokingly or not, say ‘Heil Hitler’ and another mentions that the Holocaust is a lie. Such comments illustrate hardening attitudes and that the memory of the wars has been twisted to serve right-wing nationalist ideas. The powerful Winter War narrative serves to simplify the Finns’ reading of contemporary conflicts and influences the public’s perception about contemporary issues. The site is a reminder of heritage work’s ‘inherently political’ nature (e.g. Smith and Campbell 2017). On a positive note, some of the commentators are arguing against such simplistic interpretations and comparing past conflicts with current ones – the site is generating conversation on these topics.

Very few women appear in the pictures on the site, although women were active in the auxiliary military Lotta organization and were responsible for several wartime duties such as food supply and air monitoring. The Lotta organization’s roots are in the Civil War and it was founded to aid the National Guard, i.e. the White troops. During the two-year period only two images of Lotta’s appears on the pages, one illustrates air surveillance duties and the other childcare activities. Along with children, women are depicted as victims of bombings and therefore quite a passive and conservative view of women is crafted. The pages seem to advocate hyper-masculinity, in that, they marginalise women’s output in war activities and counter this with a very aggressive, conservative, and martial view of the men.

As mentioned, most images focus on the Finnish soldiers, which is reflective of the commemorative situation in general. The youngest soldiers get the most emotional reactions, which is understandable given the tendency to emphasise sacrifice on the page; the younger the soldier, the more life missed as a result of war. The imagery had great propaganda value during the war and their heavy usage is also be a product of their availability (Kleemola 2018: 125-128). The Finnish soldiers often have their guns at hand and are aiming towards the enemy (see table 1. for aggressive behaviour). The peaked interest in these images results undoubtedly from gun enthusiasm in addition to the general desire to focus on Finnish soldiers’ bravery; an image asking viewers to identify a particular gun has soared to the top of the list in reactions and is one of the most discussed images. This imagery glorifies the wars, the familiar guns, and their usage, in the hands of heroic Finnish soldiers, and admiration arguably plays a huge part in their repeated exposure. They also function to domesticate the guns held by the Finnish soldiers and perhaps makes them equivalent to the guns in various Finnish assemblages - they naturalise the militant aspects of Finnish culture, and portray them in an innocent way.ⁱⁱⁱ The group in social media works to create the ‘imagined community’, drawing from the past to support views of the militaristic national character (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Anderson 1991).

[Insert figure 6 about here]

In comparison to the mass of pictures depicting Finns aiming with their guns, there are few pictures of deceased Soviet soldiers. There are humanizing and individualizing pictures of dead Soviet soldiers in the collection at hand, for instance pictures with the soldiers' faces clearly visible – the eyes and mouth 'strongly symbolise the main features of life' (Beurier 2004, 110). During the war such pictures would obviously not have been published given that the Finns would have wanted to avoid any feelings of sympathy for the enemy and preferred pictures of Soviet combatants in piles and unidentifiable masses of corpses. Such images also reflect wartime views that emphasised the honourlessness of Russians, even in death (Luostarinen 1986, 187-188; Kemppainen 2006, 227; Kleemola 2014, 106-108; 2016; 110). Three close-up shots of dead and more humanised Russian soldiers appear on the social media site. In one such image, the original caption identifies the killers as Soviet soldiers who wanted to avoid transporting the wounded compatriot back behind the frontlines. Killing, then, is not the result of Finnish attack. Another image illustrates a soldier who has died of a gunshot wound inside his armoured tractor and the viewers participate in guessing how he got the lethal gunshot wound. 'Maybe it ricochet' or 'maybe he shot himself' or 'maybe it is staged', discussion that illustrates a willingness to distance oneself from the option that the Finnish soldiers were involved in directly killing the Soviet soldier. In what Lim (2010) calls 'victimhood nationalism' the nation adopts a passive stance, ignoring perpetrating acts. In the last of the three images, the Finnish soldiers are included in the same frame as a dead Russian soldier, and the Finns are wearing winter camouflage, which again serves to paint the Finns as the real victims and make the killing symbolically righteous (Figure 6). The members of the group refer to the Soviet soldiers as *Russkys* (*ryssä, vanja*) that in wartime Finland were standard expressions, and a means to dehumanise the enemy (Kivimäki 2013, 196). It is difficult to say whether the commentators are merely showing their knowledge of wartime language or use it as a means to repeat wartime enemy positions and racism.

War heritage in Finland can be a sensitive topic, especially if it is connected to ethnopolitics and adopted to serve exclusionary agendas. An example of this is an incident in 2015 when a young man with an immigrant background posed in front of a war memorial with two of his friends in Jämsänkoski, Finland. The rapper known as 'Prinssi Jusuf', Iyouseyas Belayneh, took a picture in front of the WWII memorial that had the text 'for the Fatherland' inscribed in it. The photograph spread in social media and caused fierce anger among commentators who argued that the image was insulting for war veterans, apparently because it was not appropriate for immigrants to honour them (Iltasanomat 2015). Some even made death threats towards the trio. Despite his immigrant background Belayneh has completed Finnish military training that is compulsory for all men (it is symbolically taken as a sort of cultural rite for approved masculinity). The incident showed that the war serves right-wing patriotism and social media seems to function as an outlet for such discourse. As Taylor and Gibson (2017) argue, digitisation is not automatically a politically neutral act, disconnected from power relations. Therefore, it is crucial to recognise the values attributed to wartime heritage and national symbols online. Museums should be able to challenge them and there is urgent need for professionals to participate in this discourse.

Conclusion

Simo Häyhä is a cultural icon whose popularity worldwide is a cause of pride to many Finns. The Japanese fan's pilgrimage to the Simo Häyhä museum illustrates the power of Finns war history that fosters notions of bravery, everyday heroism and legends that transcend national

borders. Inside national borders though, these narratives and imagery can potentially work to obscure some questionable wartime values. By publishing from an official military propaganda collection, the public repeats some of these conceptions. Heritage professionals can draw important information on the kinds of histories the public is producing, and then work to create discussion and challenge some of these imaginings.

By employing visual methods to amateur heritage work, this paper draws attention to the symbols and visual meanings that influence the public's everyday conceptions of history. Visual methods can break down underlying symbolism and codes that are expressed through photography and illustrate how photography can naturalise very narrow historical imaginary. Some of this symbolism and the unconscious meanings may even go unnoticed in the museum environment and therefore these meanings should be addressed by professionals.

The affordances of social media mean that the public can react to what is being posted and participate on the discussions about various aspects of the war. For many, war commemoration is pursued for familial reasons and see the site as a way of respecting their predecessors. Photography in social media functions to trigger personal memories and connect viewers to wartime events. However, war memory is also fluid and can be activated to serve contemporary political debates. Sometimes it is used to promote exclusionism and adopted for right-wing ideological motives. This paper has underlined that social media is becoming an increasingly important venue for participatory heritage engagements, emphasizes the increased value of professional work as a counteracting voice and force in society, something that Finnish museums perhaps have not yet fully grasped. As Giaccardi (2012, 2) argues, heritage in the age of web 2.0 is no longer as much about preservation but also about managing its uses and the values attributed to it in various cultural, social, and political contexts. There are unintended consequences to digitising various materials online and releasing them for public consumption. Therefore, there digitisation should also come with some responsibility of reacting to the many ways these materials are used.

Disclosure statement

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

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Figures



Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.

List of figure captions

Figure 1. Finnish major general Hersalo with his deceased son in 1943. The public expresses their gratitude for the soldiers' sacrifices. Photo: SA-kuva.

Figure 2. Finnish soldiers spending time in a barracks in 1944. Notice the picture on the wall. Photo: SA-kuva.

Figure 3. Finnish soldier aiming towards the enemy in 1944. Photo: SA-kuva.

Figure 4. Finnish soldier on patrol, chasing partisans in Lapland, 1944. The picture is among the ten most liked on the 'War history in colour' page. Photo: SA-kuva.

Figure 5. Finnish Marshall Mannerheim welcoming Adolf Hitler in Finland, 1941. In Facebook, an image with Mannerheim and Hermann Göring was among the most commented. Photo: SA-kuva.

Figure 6. Finnish soldiers advancing in East Karelia, Soviet Union in 1942. Photo: SA-kuva.

Tables and table captions

Table 1		
People	124	86 %
Male	115	79 %
Uniform	89	61 %
Camouflage	15	10 %
Female	4	3 %
Gun	80	55 %
Aggressive	46	32 %
Wounded	12	8 %
Child	5	3 %
Artillery	16	11 %
Deceased	7	5 %

Table 1. Most common codes in the image repertoire.

Table 2			
TOP-10 most reactions (Facebook)	Abbreviated caption	Contents	Reactions
1	Battle in East Karelia on Independence Day, December 6 th 1941.	Two soldiers, winter camo, guns, houses, snow	1051
2	Former Finnish president Mauno Koivisto (1982-1994) in the frontlines during the Continuation War.	Soldier, Mauno Koivisto, uniform, gun, barracks, forest	1048
3	On this day 79 years ago, the Soviet Union attacked Finland and the Winter War began. In February 1940, a Swedish businessman donated a sniper rifle to Simo Häyhä.	Soldiers, Simo Häyhä, colonel Svensson, guns, winter camo, snow	1044
4	79 years ago, exactly, this young soldier defended our Fatherland in Suomussalmi, December 1 st 1939).	Soldier, gun, winter camo, snow, hideout	990
5	Do you recognise this legend?	Man, Simo Häyhä, hunting outfit, gun, forest	953
6	Finnish soldier in a machine gun post in 1942.	Soldier, winter camo, gun, snow	810
7	Finnish patrol chasing partisans in Savukoski, April 1944.	Soldier, winter camo, binoculars, gun, snow, mountains, hills	809
8	Estonian volunteers training for combat, August 1944.	Soldier, gun, forest	811

9	20-year-old soldier who destroyed enemy troops with hand grenades in Syväri, July 1942.	Soldier, gun, grenades, hideout	726
10	Finnish Waffen-SS-volunteer battalion returning home. Hanko, Finland, June 1943.	Soldiers, SS- uniforms, guns	691

Table 2. Images with the most reactions in Facebook.

Table 3				
TOP-10 commented images (Instagram)	Abbreviated title	Contents	Likes	Comments
1	Do you recognize this legend?	Man, (Simo Häyhä), hunting outfit, gun, forest	1285	54
2	Adolf Hitler visiting Finnish Marshall Mannerheim.	Adolf Hitler, uniform, C. G. Mannerheim, uniform, plane, photographer, soldiers	1528	61
3	Evening in a barracks at lake Eldanka, March 1944	5 soldiers, barracks, guns, lanterns, table, photograph	756	44
4	Finnish Army's Renault FT tank in the summer of 1939.	Tank, forest	2505	38
5	Finnish Corporal shoots with Russian anti-tank rifle in Uuksujärvi in 1944.	Two soldiers, gun, uniform, hideout	1928	30
6	Finnish soldiers with a machine gun in Syväri, 1941.	Two soldiers, uniforms, guns, house, river	2620	29
7	Mannerheim Cross Knight with an anti-tank rifle in 1941.	Soldier, uniform, forest, gun	2077	29
8	Battle in East Karelia on Independence Day, December 6 th 1941.	Two soldiers, winter camo, guns, houses, snow	2050	27
9	Young Dragoon of the Finnish Cavalry Brigade in 1941.	Young soldier, gun, horse, forest	1694	27
10	Former Finnish president Mauno Koivisto (1982-1994) in the frontlines during the Continuation War.	Soldier, Mauno Koivisto, uniform, gun, barracks, forest	1322	27

Table 3. Top-10 most commented images in Instagram.

Biographical notes

Tuuli Matila is a PhD candidate in archaeology in the University of Oulu. Her research focuses on the representation and commemoration of World War Two in Finland, with a special interest in wartime photography.

ⁱ Due to copyright reasons, I only use the original black and white IC images in this paper.

ⁱⁱ Research on Finnish cooperation with the Nazis, even the difficult aspects of it, has been conducted by historians, journalists and folklorists but they seem to have had little impact on Finnish heritage narratives (e.g. Sana 2004; Silvennoinen 2008; Heiskanen 2018; Savolainen 2018). For heritage approaches on the topic see Seitsonen 2018).

ⁱⁱⁱ Finns own large amounts of weaponry, mostly for hunting, having the eighth largest civilian gun ownership in the world (Small Arms Survey 2018). Gun laws in Finland, though, are much stricter from those of the U.S. and guns are not as visible in daily life because people are not allowed to carry weapons in public.