The Hero’s Mother: Lotta Svärd and mediated memories

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Abstract. This chapter explores the retrospective meaning making of the 1918 Finnish Civil War, a dramatic rupture in the country’s history. The aim is to study how the war and pre-war activities were perceived, described and remembered by the Lotta Svärd organisation. Lotta Svärd was born out of bourgeois women’s desire to help the White Army and the voluntary auxiliary defence organisation Suojeluskunnat (the White Guards). Lotta groups were initially subordinated to local Suojeluskunta units and became a separate organisation in 1921. Due to its popularity and size, Lotta Svärd played an important role in shaping the national consciousness and memories of the 1918 war. The organisation is of great interest, since, over the years, Lottas have both lost and regained their good reputation.

The material consists of the Lotta Svärd magazine and Lotta pages in the military magazines Suomen Sotilas, Suojeluskuntalaisen lehti and Hakkapeliitta in the period 1919–1939. As the Winter War began on 30 November 1939, memories of the 1918 war faded into the background. Much of remembering (and forgetting) is socially motivated, since memories need to be communicated (Cubitt 2007; Fentress & Wickham 1992). However, the early wartime experiences shaped the Lotta organisation’s activities, membership requirements, ideology and sense of belonging. Lotta pages and magazines often described individual members’ experiences and contributions to the national struggle. Texts were typically written from the point of view of ‘us’ or ‘I’, meaning that the individual was always positioned as serving the organisation and the Fatherland. The 1918 war was ‘kept alive’ by various rituals, involving sacralisation of the Nation, for example flag raising or visits to war cemeteries. Such events were also described in the magazines, meaning that there was an element of anniversary journalism (Kitch 2007; 2008). In the process these rituals were turned into Lotta rituals.
Introduction

This chapter examines how the Finnish Lotta Svärd organisation remembered and made sense of the 1918 Civil War and the pre-war experiences. The focus is on mediated memories, not on what ‘really’ happened. How the war is recalled reveals the speaker's political affiliation. Civil War (Fi. sisällissota) is a neutral term, mainly used by historians. The victorious White side, Lotta Svärd included, always spoke of “the Liberation War” (Fi. vapaussota). Hence, in this chapter Civil War or 1918 war is used for the event itself, whereas Liberation War marks the Lotta view.

The birth of the Finnish nation-state was a violent and dramatic rupture. The Russian Empire collapsed, the Bolsheviks orchestrated the October Revolution and Finland declared independence on 6 December 1917. The Finnish civil war ended on 16 May 1918 with the White Army’s victory parade in Helsinki. That summer special treason courts were established to deal with the Reds, some of whom already been sentenced in field courts (Roselius 2009; 2013). Women on both sides were involved in the war, but their involvement was judged differently.

Although Lotta Svärd was formally registered in 1921, it was born in 1918 out of bourgeois women’s desire to help the White Army. Many Lotta pioneers came from families in which both sexes had participated in the resistance against the Russification policies at the turn of the century. During the war, women assisted the White Army by cooking, nursing, sewing, etc. Annika Latva-Äijö (2004) says some women’s wish to fight created an instant furore and women were forbidden from carrying arms.

The Red women, on the other hand, received military training and the White’s judgment against them was harsh. Simply working as a nurse or a cook for the Red Guards could lead to a long prison sentence. The “pant guardists” (Fi. housukaartilaiset) or “wolf bitches” (Fi. susinartut), armed women wearing men’s trousers, were perceived as monstrous women and risked death sentences. Some were shot on the spot (Hakala 2006; Hoppu 2008; Pekkalainen 2011). They vanished from the nation’s collective memory until the late 1990s. As Paul Connerton (1989; 2009), James Fentress and Chris Wickham (1992) point out, both remembering and forgetting are socially motivated. Women and war is often a controversial topic. As Sofie Strandén’s (2010) interviews with Lottas, nurses and
veterans show, even Lottas lost their good reputation during WWII, although disciplinary problems were rare, as shown by Vilho Lukkarinen (1981). It was not until the change of political climate in the 1990s that Lotta Svärd was re-evaluated.

The name Lotta Svärd comes from Johan Ludwig Runeberg’s poem “Lotta Svärd” about a woman who followed her husband to the Finnish War in 1809 and, after her husband died, stayed among the troops looking after them with motherly love. Lottas saw the poem’s Lotta as a role model.

The material consists of articles published in the Lotta pages in three military magazines, and the Lotta Svärd magazine, from 1919 to 1939. The date 30 November 1939 marks another violent rupture, the Winter War, and a new phase in Lotta history. The first obituaries of fallen Lottas appeared in the December issue. New heroes and myths began to emerge, and worship of the Liberation War faded into the background. The 16 May White Victory Celebration disappeared and Lotta Svärd was ordered to abolish the ‘socialist paragraph’ forbidding Leftist women from seeking membership. During WWII Lotta Svärd’s membership rose from roughly 100,000 to around 240,000 people, Lotta Girls included, at a time when Finland had less than four million inhabitants.

The Liberation War appeared routinely in various types of text. My focus is on stories about women’s contributions to the war and national struggle during the Russification period. Texts that do not mention women’s involvement at all are excluded. The two series of articles called Hero’s Mother and Patriotic Women are included in-so-far-as the texts refer to war or pre-war activities. Both series are rather impersonal presentations of women who had done something admirable or whose sons had been soldiers. Presentations of heroes’ mothers consisted mainly of a headshot and a short biography. Occasionally several mothers were presented in the same article. Commemorative articles were published particularly during anniversaries related to districts, local Lotta units or key historical events. Especially important years were 1933 and 1938, the fifteenth and twentieth anniversaries of the Liberation War, as well as year 1934, the Jägers’ (Fi. Jääkärit) twentieth anniversary². The studied articles are generally fairly long, one page or more.

storytellers. The Lotta and military magazines served the same function but were generally not produced by professional editorial offices. They were voices of specific organisations and their memory work stemmed from a particular point of view and experiences. It was consequently more important to tell the ‘right’ story than to tell the whole story.

Memories must be articulated, but they are not limited solely to words (Fentress & Wickham 1992; Cubitt 2007). They can be preserved in both speech and rituals, for example Wwar cemeteries, or heroes’ graves (Fi. sankarihaudat) were important memory sites. Lottas looked after the graves and provided help for White veterans. Rituals performed at the graveyards and national monuments are visible in the magazines, but less so in the studied articles, which focus on women’s activities before and during the 1918 war.

The foundation of Lotta Svärd, Lotta pages and the Lotta magazine

As the Liberation War ended, the White Army was not officially demobilised. Instead, it was reorganised into the regular army and a voluntary auxiliary paramilitary group called Suojeluskunnat, the White Guards. Existing Lotta groups were initially subordinated to local White Guard units, but the explosive increase of Lotta groups soon led to organisational disarray. Latva-Äijö (2004) discusses at length Lotta Svärd’s early years, its organisational ties to the White Guards and the High Command’s attempts to cope. It is not possible to give an exhaustive account of all the disputes in this article. However, in the end, the White Guard High Command imposed a solution on the Lotta groups. By order of the Supreme Commander on 27 January 1921, Lotta Svärd was to be separated from the White Guards and given its own chairman (Latva-Äijö 2004; Lukkarinen 1981; Kataja 1986; Pirhonen 1979). The order took effect as of March that year, and as a result common statutes were accepted and a Central Board nominated.

Throughout the 1920s, the Central Board struggled to consolidate its position and convince local groups to adopt its rules, uniforms and routines. Since the name Lotta Svärd was registered, local groups either had to join the central organisation or find a new name. Lotta work was organised into sections, covering tasks considered suitable for women³. In 1928 Fanni Luukkonen, the Lotta leader from Sortavala in the Karelian district, was elected
chairman of the Central Board and remained in that position until 1944, when Lotta Svärd and the White Guards were abolished under the peace treaty with the Soviet Union. Under Luukkonen’s leadership, Lotta Svärd developed into the country’s largest women’s organisation, within which the Lotta Girls got their own unit, in 1931 (Latva-Äijö 1998; Seila 1972; Bäckström 1993).

Lotta Svärd needed a way to communicate with the increasing number of members and groups located around the country. During the 1920s, Lottas had neither the means nor the wish to start their own magazine. Lottas were hesitant to compete with the military magazines popular among Lotta and White Guardist families and thus risk these magazines’ survival. Instead, Lottas wrote for Suomen Sotilas (Finland’s Soldier) and Suojeluskuntalaisen lehti (White Guardist Magazine), renamed to Hakkapeliitta in 1926. In the mid-1920s Lottas got their own column in Suojeluskuntalaisen lehti. Suomen Sotilas and the more radical Suojeluskuntalaisen lehti were founded in 1919. All Lotta and White Guardist magazines closed down in 1944, while Suomen Sotilas still exists.

The first magazines produced by the Lottas themselves were Christmas magazines published by local associations before the organisation was officially registered (Kotila 1993; Latva-Äijö 2004). These Christmas magazines were an important source of income to the Lottas and in 1922 the Central Board took over their publication. As Lotta Svärd grew, it also outgrew the column space available in the military magazines. Despite continuing resistance, the first sample issue of Lotta Svärd magazine was published in December 1928.

Lotta leaders felt that the family and women’s magazines of the time had given up uplifting, patriotic content. Lotta Svärd was to be “a patriotic women’s magazine that could also be read by patriotic women outside Lotta Svärd” with the purpose of strengthening “the mentality that guarantees life and peace in our country, as well the moral posture, the will to stay free, independent, and the education in self-preservation and national defence among women and in Finnish homes” (LS 1928, 1–2).

The aim was thus to reach a wider audience, not only its own members. Later new magazines were founded, although Lotta Svärd remained the flagship. Pikkulotta (Little Lotta) was founded in 1938, and renamed Lottatyttö (Lotta Girl) in 1943. During the Winter War (1939–1940) Lottas had little time for journalistic efforts, although during the Continuation War (1941–1944) a Swedish version of Lotta Svärd magazine was founded, as
well as *Flicklottan* (Lotta Girl in Swedish). A free magazine, *Kenttälotta* (Field Lotta), was published specifically for the Lottas on active duty in a wide range of tasks.

18 to 22 issues of *Lotta Svärd* were published per year in continuous pagination, with between 292 and 376 pages per year. At the end of the year all articles were organised thematically in a separate list of contents. The thematic categories were Lotta work, religion, society, general topics, stories, memoirs, person portraits, literary reviews, handicraft and information. Although partially overlapping content-wise, these categories remained the same over the years.

The decent profit of the Christmas magazines may have created unrealistic financial expectations and the *Lotta Svärd* magazine’s humble turnover was a disappointment (see circulation data in Figure 1). Since the founders lacked journalistic experience, they did not realise that patriotic themes were absent in the commercial women’s magazines because there was no market for them. Although the magazine was sold at newsstands, its main source of revenue was subscribers, and unfortunately many members could not afford to buy it. While the leadership initially may have hoped for better revenue, money had not been the primary reason for starting *Lotta Svärd*. It was a tool for disseminating Lotta ideology, spreading organisational information, informing members about practical matters and getting feedback from the field.

**Figure 1. Circulation of *Lotta Svärd* and the Christmas magazines per year** (Kotila 1993).

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<td>51 275</td>
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<tr>
<td>1939</td>
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<td>41 188</td>
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* No information available.
Since the organisation had approximately sixty-four thousand members in 1929 and slightly over one hundred thousand in 1939, the circulation of the *Lotta Svärd* magazine was modest. Subscribers came mainly from the more affluent southern districts. The magazine had more readers than subscribers, which did not improve its income. It was customary, for example, to read it aloud during work evenings.

Lotta magazines were run by editorial boards consisting of members of the Central Board, section and district leaders, meaning that there could be no conflicts between the organisation’s goals and the magazine’s journalistic integrity (Kotila 1993; cf Åker 1998). The boards were stable and people resigned only for personal reasons. In reality the editorial secretaries were in charge of the work. Vera Linkomies, wife of a well-known high-ranking conservative politician, was *Lotta Svärd*’s editorial secretary until 1940 when Valma Kivitie took over the position. Both women had previous journalistic experience, which was unusual. In 1935 a typist, and five years later a clerk, were hired to help the editorial secretary. The tram itself did not produce the content. Instead, suitable contributors had to be found for each issue, for example military pastors, officers, politicians, academics, and popular male and female authors or poets. There were few advertisements and they had to be suitable, meaning no ads for tobacco or alcohol. Advertisements were usually placed on the last page.

Both Lotta leaders and ordinary members wrote for the magazine. Hilja Riipinen, the first editor in chief, often wrote articles herself. Members were encouraged to submit their own texts, for example through writing competitions. Lotta districts had correspondents writing about local activities. During the annual Lotta Days in 1930, the editorial secretary gave an evaluation of the magazine’s first year and explicitly asked for more contributions from the districts, including articles about heroes’ mothers (LS 1930, 132–134). The Lotta archive contains many letters, in which the writers confess that they would have never dared to send their stories elsewhere, and that they trusted “their own magazine”. Most authors were women, only about eight percentage were male. However, there were also ample numbers of unsigned texts; usually instructions, official information or presentations of members, leaders, etc. Initials and pseudonyms, like “I was there too”, “field Lotta” or “Lotta’s husband”, were also used.
In 1936 the Central Board took a firmer grip of the magazine. Hilja Riipinen was fired and Chairman Fanni Luukkonen became the formal editor-in-chief. Riipinen was cordially thanked for her services and she was asked to continue her good work in other tasks within the organisation (LS 1936, 114). According to the official explanation, Riipinen could not continue as the editor-in-chief because she no longer belonged to the Central Board. The Lotta archive contains angry letters protesting against Riipinen’s dismissal with some members even cancelling subscriptions as a result.

The real reason was Riipinen’s political opinions. Due to the Liberation War heritage radical right-wing attitudes were acceptable and mainstream until the mid-1930s. Then in 1932 the Mäntsälä rebellion, in which even White Guardists had been involved, failed leading to an official crackdown. The political turmoil quietened down, but Riipinen remained as far right as ever. She was one of the founders and members of Parliament for the right-wing Isänmaallinen kansanliitto (Patriotic People’s Front) party. However, despite her dismissal she continued to be a leading figure in the Lotta organisation.

**Nation and remembering**

According to Maurice Halbwachs (1992), collective memory binds individuals’ personal memories together. While individual memories may differ, they are nevertheless part of group memory, and remembering itself is typically done in shared social and cultural contexts. Fentress and Wickham (1992) think Halbwachs overemphasises the collective nature of social consciousness. They speak instead of a social memory that identifies a group and gives it a sense of its past and future. Barbara Misztal (2003), however, points out that even Halbwachs saw collective memory as multiple, since different groups may have different memories.

Lotta Svärd represented experiences and memories that were specific for a certain generation and segment of society, despite the existence of counter-memories. The Reds had their own view of the 1918 war. The ‘collectiveness’ of Lotta memories is thus a matter of definition. Aapo Roselius (2009) says more Reds died in the war’s violent aftermath than during fighting, a fact that was at the time labelled malevolent agitation. The Reds’ point of view, post-war treason courts, prison camps and executions were absent from Lotta texts.
Lottas focused instead on the good work done by the patriots.

Nation is both an imagined and a mnemonic community. It is imagined since feelings of togetherness are created between distant others (Anderson 1993; Ekecrantz 1998). Hobsbawm (2012) speaks of invention of tradition and Smith (1991) sees nation building mainly as a reconstruction of its ethnic core and integration of its culture with the modern state. A nation, nevertheless, shares a collective name, myth of common ancestry, historical memories, culture, system of ideas, specific homeland and a sense of solidarity (Gellner 1997; Smith 1991). The Finnish national awakening began in the 1840s and became increasingly political during the Years of Repression (1899-1905 and 1908-1917), meaning that many Lotta pioneers were politically active during the nation’s formative years. Female activism partly contributed to the acceptance of universal suffrage in 1906.

Lottas participated in the construction of a national identity and an acceptable past, as well as the appropriate interpretation of key historical events. Miika Siironen (2012) says Lotta Svärd and the White Guards were White Finland’s most important symbols and organisational core. Lotta Svärd itself could be seen as an imagined community. Despite its size and geographical spread, members shared a feeling of togetherness, fostered through publications, annual Lotta Days, ideological education and practical work. Believing in the common cause was linked to working for the common cause. Mosse (1975) speaks of longing for uplifting, extraordinary experiences, typical for both religious cults and the secular religion of politics. In Lotta texts, the Fatherland was God’s creation, meaning that religiosity was intertwined with patriotism. This combination gave the mundane work that the women did a deeper meaning, an aura of sanctity. Cooking for the White Guards was not just about cooking. It was about participating in a joint effort of defending and serving the Fatherland.

Lottas aimed to honour and preserve the memory of activist women. This commemorative effort became more systematic and intentional over the years. The first autobiographical stories appeared in 1919, although the publication of Valkoinen kirja (The White Book) in 1928 was a more conscious effort to make use of women’s experiences. The book’s stories resemble those published in the magazines and are therefore not included in the analysis. The ”Hero’s Mother” series was another attempt to collect women’s experiences. Its purpose, introduced in the Lotta Svärd’s sample issue in December 1928,
was as follows:

The patriotism that particularly the Years of Repression had awakened in the Finnish people, burned strongly in the heart of the Finnish mother. This spiritual fire left its mark on the whole household, and the youth who grew up in the family. In this way, Finnish mothers planted in the minds of their sons love for the Fatherland, love that in the moment of destiny turned into heroic deeds. Since we Lottas believe that the memory of these brave mothers – mothers who for the freedom of the Fatherland many times sacrificed their sons, their lives’ only source of joy and safety – needs to be preserved so that these women become role models for the new generations, we will publish in the pages of Lotta Svärd magazine short stories of their lives and noble work as educators (LS 1928, 6).

The article series was to be seen as “wreaths honouring these mothers, who had sacrificed so much”, and as an attempt to preserve their memory for future generations. The “moment of destiny” was the Liberation War and the hero was the son who died or was wounded. The key words here are ‘role models’, ‘memory’, ‘sacrifice’ and ‘heroic deeds’. Heroism and sacrifice will be discussed in the next chapters.

According to Kitch (2007, 34) photographs are memory objects that “allow their owners to recall and regain the context of which they were once a part”. The texts had few photographs. At times pictures and text did not match. For example, a picture of a smiling young woman with ammunition belts wrapped around her waist appears in at least two stories, neither of which is about her. One of the stories is written by two women who shared their experience of visiting a Russian army barracks to buy weapons (LS 1938, 131). They tied ammunition belts and a couple of rifles to their waists, covered them with long overcoats, and walked out without being frisked. The primary purpose of the picture was thus to evoke memories of the war and wartime activities, not to illustrate that specific story.

Another such example is the photograph in Tekla Hultin’s article about the 1905 general strike (LS 1930, 249). It shows a large crowd singing Maamme laulu (later the national anthem) at the Senate Square in Helsinki as the strike ended. The square was a
mnemonic site and a site for national rituals. A statue of Tsar Alexander II, the university, the cathedral and the Senate of Finland were located there, and in 1904 Governor General Bobrikov was shot dead there on his way to a Senate meeting. Hultin mentions Bobrikov, but instead of saying he had been murdered, she states that "he left office". Riipinen's article about the 1930 peasant march has a similar photo, as the march also ended at the square (LS 1930, 161).

The importance of being active: Memories of doing

Lotta texts typically focus on doing something. If the author had done nothing special, she either sounds apologetic or creates a feeling of participation. For example, Maila Talvio, a well-known author and writer of Lotta stories, wrote a long story about life in Red Helsinki in spring 1918 (LS 1938, 130–132). She confesses that she was not involved in the war effort at all and when a Red Guard patrol inspected her handbag, it only contained a piece of hard rye bread. Yet, by describing her own thoughts and observations, the mood among her friends and the Whites' general feeling of uncertainty, she nevertheless places herself within an on-going drama.

Although some Lotta pioneers had been members of Naiskagaali during the Years of Repression, it was rarely mentioned. Naiskagaali was a sister organisation to Kagaali, both founded to organise passive resistance and spread forbidden leaflets and publications. Only one text, written by a former member, focuses on it. She describes the common feelings of danger, importance, sisterhood and trust, and the joy of working for a common cause. She mentions meetings, contact people in the countryside, the importance of collecting funds, the need to keep the money boxes and people's names safe and the fright even false alarms of police raids created. She also praises the leading figures Dagmar Neovius and Tekla Hultin. (LS 1937, 289–290) Both women were journalists and members of Parliament. Although the text does not provide any details, it shows the importance of participation.

Another such example is a story about Countess Mannerheim, a relative of Marshall Mannerheim. Her admirable deed was to organise a concert that the Tsarist authorities closed down as too oppositional and later to stand by her husband who was deported by
Governor General Bobrikov. Ellen Svinhufvud, the president’s wife, is called “hero Lotta” for the same reason. She followed her husband into exile in Siberia, where he was deported due to his nationalist activities (LS 1932, 84–85; 1938, 312–314). Although these women only shared their husband’s fate, they are framed as the stories’ heroines.

Several articles memorialise activist women’s assistance to The Jaeger Movement (Fi. jääkäriliike). Jaegers were patriotic young men, who left Finland for military training in Germany. Some served in the German army in World War I. When the Finnish Civil War began, they returned home and joined the White Army. The articles speak of knitting socks and sending parcels to Jaegers or assisting men on their way out of the country. A couple of texts feature Saara Rampanen, called the Jaegers’ nurse (LS 1931, 52–53; 1934, 313; 1937, 28). She later wrote a book about her experiences at the Eastern front. A second nurse, Ruth Munck, became a Lotta leader, whereas Rampanen emigrated to California. These stories show how women played a small role even the Eastern Front.

Commemorative articles from Lotta districts were fairly impersonal and provided a general overview of the first years of these districts. The districts explained whether women had been involved in the Jaeger Movement and passive resistance, or had first joined the struggle during the Liberation War. The work women did during the war is briefly listed, whereas large scale operations, such as organising linen, clothes and food for thousands of men in provisional recruiting and training centres, are described at length. Small private contributions, such as a pair of hand-knitted socks donated by a poor woman, are also mentioned. Some articles quote unnamed front-line soldiers, who give thanks for all the help they received and express admiration for the women who brought them hot coffee and comfort even under fire.

These texts all show the pride Lottas felt for their involvement. The main point was their participation, rather than the extent or nature of it. It was important to do something, no matter how little. The feeling of pride is more tangible in the autobiographical tales, where the language also tends to be more emotional. These stories describe both personal accomplishments and the joy of having been part of something exceptional, something greater than oneself (cf Mosse 1975).

Lottas speak in collective terms. The use of ‘we’ and ‘us’ makes even the occasional ‘I’ part of the collective. At times, instead of the grammatically correct conjugation of the
predicate, a passive form is used together with the pronoun ‘we’. This is typical for spoken Finnish and gives the text an informal tone. In a text this may either be a sign of the author’s inexperience in writing, or a way of highlighting the joint effort. The Finnish passive has neither agent nor formal subject, which shifts the focus to doing and to the end result, (for example, soldiers were fed). Thus “the doer” becomes irrelevant.

**Perceptions of causes and effects, friends and foes**

Lotta Svärd saw women’s participation in the resistance against Russification as a prelude to the voluntary work carried out during and after the Liberation War. Activities in different periods of time are intertwined in the mediated memories and form a chain of causes and effects. Although the commemorative articles do not explicitly discuss causes and effects, Russification was implicitly presented as the cause for national awakening. The country had to be liberated from Russians and their henchmen, which led to the Liberation War. In fact, the national awakening began in the 1840s with the first dividing line based on the question of language. Russification began in 1899 and created new dividing lines. Lotta Svärd steered away from language squabbles by adopting official bilingualism. Lotta texts do not discuss the previous dominance of Swedish or the role of the Swedish-speaking elite. The matter is mentioned in passing in one article (LS 1937, 289–290).

These mediated memories are fragmented; unsuitable details are excluded and key patriotic events appear as part of Lotta history. A speech given at the 10th anniversary celebration of Suonenjoki Lotta organisation is a prime example. The speaker reminded the audience of the 1899 February manifesto, how the Russians had “purported to destroy Finland’s ancient and precious constitution” and how the people sought to protect “the laws of the country by lawful means” (LS 1929, 209–210). The “lawful means” was the Great Petition: nearly half a million signatures were collected in less than two weeks, mainly by skiing to even the remotest villages. The speaker recalled signing the petition and depicted it as a solemn, almost holy moment. She explained how even the poorest peasants learned to write their names just for the occasion and how disappointed everyone was when the Tsar refused to see the delegation. She thus implies that despite the regime’s illegal actions
the Finns were still loyal to the Tsar and that the loss of loyalty was Russia's fault. She emphasised the feeling of national unity and the enthusiasm that arose from the project. The working class was not yet an enemy, although she does not say so aloud.

A Karelian Lotta presents a similar chain of cause (oppression) and effect (activism):

The struggle for independence during the last years of Tsarist reign had thoroughly awakened Karelia. The oppression of the Russian authorities and later the united, senseless brutality of the Red Russians in their own negative way hastened and ensured the end result. An activist movement was born even in Karelia. [...] In Vyborg female activists had organized the first collection of funds in winter 1916 and began making linen, socks and gloves for the Jaegers and for future use (LS 1938, 38).

The text links Russian oppression, national awakening, activism, female activism and Lotta Svärd. Calling the Red Guards “Red Russians” divides “true Finns” (Whites) and those who gave up their Finnishness by joining the Reds. This is, however, an unusual example of dehumanisation of the enemy. Lottas seldom wrote of the Reds. The speaker also conveniently equates all Russians with Reds.

The general strike in 1905 is another example. Only Tekla Hultin commemorates the 25th anniversary of the strike, “the greatest and most efficient demonstration in our country and the perhaps most complete and largest strike that has ever taken place anywhere” (LS 1930, 249–251). Interestingly, she does not hesitate to thank the working class movement for starting the strike and doing an excellent job in organising it. She also emphasises the national unity against Russification and downplays the differences between the radical working class movement and cautious bourgeois political groups. She presents the main parties as the Finns and the Russians. Hultin, part of the Constitutional political group, described the Finnish delegation’s meeting with the Governor General, Lieutenant General Obolenski. Her story places humble, modest and sincere Finns against a grand, arrogant representative of the Russian Empire. Hultin’s text nevertheless ends with a warning against national discord. The November Manifesto, drafted by Mechelin, one of the leading Constitutionals, and accepted by the Tsar, ended the first period of Russification.

In Riipinen’s view the notion behind the Jaeger Movement was not simply limited to
achieving independence, it also encompassed the idea of national unity and a strong Finland (LS 1934, 269). In her view the country “was fought and won free after a thousand years of foreign rule” and should be protected against the “chaotic, undisciplined, worthless East” (LS 1929, 17‒18). She equates “foreign rule” with the “East”, conveniently forgetting both that Finland was part of Sweden until 1809, and that the relationship with the Russian Empire only turned sour much later.

As these examples show, Lottas’ imagined community was White Finland. Leftist Finland appears only indirectly, and when it does the views of the Left, and other citizens who were not patriotic enough, were portrayed negatively. Since Lotta Svärd was founded during the 1918 war, Lottas believed that the individual’s survival was dependent on the survival of the Fatherland, meaning that every citizen had to defend the country against the common enemy – Russians and their henchmen. Lotta Svärd’s interests and ideology thus coincided with the hegemonic belief system and the interests of the state.

A mnemonic community must familiarise new members with the collective past in order to ensure that they identify with the past and attain the required social identity. In a speech for young Lottas, a speaker says:

We, who were born in a free Fatherland, have also a sacred obligation to protect it. Putting their faith in us, our fathers and brothers did their heroic deeds. [...] How could we betray their trust? (LS 1939, 36).

Karl Mannheim (1993) and Misztal (2003) say generations acquire distinct profiles through their specific shared experiences, memories and discourse of self-thematisation. Many Lottas, however, came from families where men were in the army or the White Guards and children were active in Lotta or White Guard youth units. Seija Nevala-Nurmi (2006) speaks of defence families, with no significant generational conflicts. Although the children did not have first-hand experience in the Liberation War, participation in the youth organisations meant sharing their parents’ beliefs and experiences. All generations participated in the same historical and social circumstances and shared the same mentality. According to Ilona Kemppainen (2006) remembering is an important part of a nation’s self-understanding and self-perception. Fallen heroes must be remembered, not only by friends and relatives, but
also by the collective. Lottas saw the sacrifices of the earlier generation as an inspiration and obligation.

The heroism of small deeds and healing stories for gruesome events

Commemorative texts downplay difficulties and offer healing stories with which to heal the effects of gruesome events. For example, in 1919 *Suomen Sotilas* published a series of articles, offering a Lotta’s personal account of her time at the frontline. She wrote of cooking food for hungry soldiers without a field kitchen or other equipment, constantly moving from one location to another and looking for a place to cook. She downplayed the dangers and practical difficulties. For example, cooking while dodging flying bullets, emerges mainly as a subtext. Willingness to serve is presented as more important than the appalling conditions.

Lottas’ view of heroism was twofold. On one hand, men dying for the Fatherland were perceived as ‘true’ heroes, while on the other hand there was the heroism of small deeds. Nurse Ingrid Bäckström-Boije’s wartime diary is a typical example of male heroism and ‘die smiling’ stories. She donated her diary to the Lotta magazine to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the Liberation War. The texts consist of short dated notes, describing personal observations, thoughts and feelings. She writes:

Has anyone seen the look on a recently fallen young volunteer’s face? There is nothing so beautiful among the living. This is to say that dying for Fatherland is the highest moment of life, concentration of love and sacrifice without any limits. This beautiful glow radiates from the features of the dying men (LS 1933, 58).

This particular excerpt includes both “a young volunteer” and “men”. Lotta texts are seldom explicitly age specific, meaning that protagonists usually appear to be adults. Siironen (2012) writes about the large number of boy soldiers and the “Runebergian” idea of sacrifice. Juha Poteri (2009) claims pastors often compared the death of the White soldiers with the sacrifice of Jesus. As Kaarle Sulamaa (2009) shows, religion was ingrained in Lotta
ideology. In Lotta texts death, pain and suffering are typically described in a positive light. No one complains and no one is afraid. Men always die peacefully, having happily sacrificed their lives for the right cause. After all, the Fatherland was God’s creation.

The possible physical and psychological problems of veterans were consequently not discussed in Lotta texts. Riipinen’s article, lamenting some Jaegers’ difficulties, is an exception (LS 1934, 274). She admits that some former soldiers had psychological or physical problems and some had left the military, feeling discriminated against when they could not speak Swedish, often spoken by officers. Riipinen was nevertheless quite sure that these men, despite all their problems, had no regrets and they still believed there was nothing “nobler than to fight for the Fatherland”.

Kemppainen (2006) points out that during WWII some women also died heroic deaths. The studied Lotta texts have no such examples. Instead, Lottas write about the heroism of small deeds, such as the following:

[...] a quiet farmer’s wife who has laboured at her chores year after year, prepared food for the family year after year, taken care of the cows, and put her faith in God and the Fatherland brought up many children despite poverty and other difficulties. [...] Or, the exhausted father, who had done everything for his family, now resting in peace, fallen as a hero. Or, another honest Finn, who had conscientiously fulfilled even the demands of his most pressing duties, bravely fought for his beliefs, toiled tirelessly for the good and right. [...] But (to be called) a hero a person must have given everything, done everything, even if other people wouldn’t notice it. Are you a hero? (LS 1930, 1, original emphasis)

Stories of poor women’s small donations are in line with this. A pair of socks may seem like an insignificant donation, but if it was all the woman could give or do, she had consequently done everything. The key words are ‘everything’ and ‘sacrifice’. Men gave their ‘everything’ by dying and women through hard work, self-sacrifice and selfless service. But, here the self was not depleted in the service of God but in the service of the Fatherland. Sulamaa (2009) sees Lottas as protestant nationalistic nuns. Lottas believed in the idea of service. Chastity and strict sexual morals were an important part of the Lotta ideology, although this topic
was not discussed in the studied articles.

There is latent intertextuality in the texts. Lottas belonged to the generation who knew many of Runeberg’s poems by heart. Lottas mainly referred to the poem “Lotta Svärd”, since she was a role model and the organisation was named after her. Another well-known poem is about Paavo from Saarijärvi, a farmer whose faith in God despite several years’ misfortune never wavers – “the Lord tests but does not abandon”. Paavo never complains regardless of how miserable his life is. Stories of Heroes’ mothers, as well as many autobiographical stories, contain the same attitude. The Heroes’ mothers were generally poor, struggling to feed their families and some had lost both husband and son(s). They might be sad, poor and grief stricken but they never complained.

Men’s view of women’s heroism is somewhat ambivalent. In texts directed to a Lotta audience women’s contribution is at least briefly mentioned. Officers, such as Lieutenant Colonel Zilliacus, Chief of Staff of White Guards’ High Command, usually wrote in general terms of the war, national struggle and women’s willingness to work for the cause (e.g. HL 1926, 9 or HL 1926, 16–20). In some texts even ordinary soldiers reminisced about the women they had encountered at the front.

At times the women were depicted as braver than the men. For example, some soldiers fleeing from battle were accused of cowardice by women, who then demonstratively picked up the rifles and stomped off towards the battle. The men had no alternative but to return to their posts. In another story a local White Guard leader describes how his group was on guard duty and suddenly heard footsteps in the darkness. They heard a nervous female voice asking if they were “the White boys”. She had waded through the deep snow and passed the Red Guards just to bring “the White boys” hot coffee. In the process she told what she knew about the Reds’ troop movements. The author says:

> With great risk for her life, without sparing herself, she had the courage to do what she could. Only the soldiers at present know the value and difficulty of her deed, as unimportant as it may seem in today’s peaceful society (SS 1920, 70–72).

The quotation shows again the importance of doing something, no matter how little. On the other hand, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether the praise for women’s bravery is
serious or ironic. For example, in an article about heroic women in Joutseno, a young lady is said to throw herself down like a seasoned soldier when the Reds are shooting with a machine gun, and to have quickly jump up ready to encourage the soldiers as soon as the shooting stops. She is described as “burning with patriotism”, doing her bit to keep that front section from collapsing. The tone of the text is slightly ironic. It also shows how unsuitable fighting was thought to be for women. She could encourage but not shoot.

Discussion

As stated, the past was reminisced about particularly during anniversaries and commemoration days. Edy (1999) speaks of various types of anniversary journalism. Lottas’ anniversary stories aimed primarily at creating an emotional connection between the past and the present. Only a few articles contained descriptions of both the commemorative celebration and the historical event. The stories generally contained few historical facts. Lottas wrote to an audience that already knew what, when and who, but needed an appropriate explanation of why bad things happened and what the purpose of the suffering was. There was a need to connect the past to the present in meaningful ways. The past was connected to perceptions of a desirable future, as well as to the practical Lotta work and the reason for the organisation’s existence, i.e. the survival of the Fatherland.

Yvonne Hirdman (1993) speaks of a gender system, based on separation of the sexes and men’s position as a norm. Irma Sulkunen (2007) discusses the importance of Finnish non-gendered public activity, the blurring of gender-based public and private spheres and the self-evident character of women’s social participation. However, it was thought that only certain types of tasks were thought to suite women, a belief that is visible in Lotta texts. Lottas believed in the separation of male and female roles. Although Lottas emphasised the importance of participating, they did not challenge traditional gender roles or fight for gender equality. On the contrary, Riipinen (1927) claimed that the Lotta movement had surpassed the women’s movement, since Lottas worked with men, not against them.

Lotta ideology and activities contained both conserving and emancipating elements. Although Lotta Svärd as an organisation stayed away from party politics, some of its
members were politically active. Thus, Lotta magazine instructed its members to vote for ‘patriotic women’ from bourgeois parties, and if such women were not available, for a patriotic man. Voting – and voting for women – was hence thought to be important, although patriotism was emphasised more than gender. Nira Yuval-Davis (1997; 1998) and Päivi Harinen and Sonja Hyvönen (2003) say that national galleries of heroes are usually male. Lottas attempted to change that by increasing the value of the work done at the home front but without questioning gender roles. Similarly, although Lottas valued ordinary women’s experiences and contributions, men’s heroic death was nevertheless seen as the ultimate sacrifice. For example, the stories of heroes’ mothers often said more about the men than the mothers, particularly if a man had died.

Kitch (2007; 2008) says that memory needs to be domesticated. Nostalgia personalises the past, blending individual memory into shared memory of generation or nation. She thinks that producing a unified image of the past is an act of self-preservation and that nostalgia offers people a way to define memory in ways that fulfil their needs. For Lottas, retelling the stories of past hardships was a way of redefining and making sense of them and confirming the common identity. These memories contained an element of nostalgia as the older generation felt they had participated in a larger-than-life event and the future generations needed to honour the sacrifices made. The sacrifices would not be in vain as long as they were remembered and appreciated.

Lotta texts were a means of socialisation and had a distinctive educational air. They taught desirable attitudes, values and behaviour and aimed to influence readers’ cognitive thinking and intentions. They aimed to make Lottas internalise Lotta discipline and act in the desired manner by their own choice. Lotta magazines also taught members never to doubt themselves, although it is not as explicit in the commemorative as in the instructive articles. Lottas were told never ask if they could do something. They should only ask how to do it, or how to do it better next time. This principle was expressed explicitly in instructive articles, and implicitly in personal stories of “I had no idea even where to begin, but I rolled up my sleeves and it all went well” moments. In brief, although Lottas believed in traditional gender roles, they also fostered a ‘women can’ attitude.

We should not overemphasise the importance of textual representations, since being a Lotta was foremost about practical work. Although a Lotta was to participate only in gender
appropriate tasks, she was expected to know how to make decisions, solve problems, take responsibility and execute. After all, Lotta Svärd had close ties to the military although it was not directly part of the army’s chain of command. Since Lottas were to replace men in a wide range of duties, they had to know how to obey orders and do what had to be done. This topic appears mainly in articles providing practical information and instructions. But, by describing concrete situations and difficulties, the commemorative texts provide many examples of problem solving, decision making and taking responsibility.

Magazines
HL = *Hakkapeliitta* 1926‒1928.
LS = *Lotta Svärd* 1928‒1939.
SS = *Suomen Sotilas* 1919‒1928.

References


Notes

1 The Red and White Guards can trace their history back to the 1905 general strike. Such groups were formed on both sides to 'keep order’ in the streets. However, the first clashes occurred during the strike. Suojeluskunnat grew out of this experience and formed an essential part of the Civil War White Army under mannerheim’s leadership. There is no established translation for Suojeluskunta (or, Suojeluskunnat in plural), which was an essential part of the White Army. *Suojelus* means ‘protection’. *Kunta* has several meanings, but in this context it refers to a collective, for example *ihmiskunta* means ‘mankind’. The word *valkokaarti* (White Guard) also exists, for example in *Helsingin valkokaarti* (White Guard of Helsinki). In Finnish *Suojeluskunta* is more common, since it is the official name of the organisation. Haapala and Tikka (2012, 81) speak of “Protection Guard”, combining *suojelus* and *kaarti*. Heimo and Peltonen (2006, 52) prefer “White Guard”. Lavery (2006), Nevala-Nurm (2006), Ahlbäck and Kivimäki (2008) say “Civil Guard”. Kirby (2006) uses suojeluskunta but also mentions “the White Guards”. The Reds used the word *lahtarit*, i.e. the butchers. I will use “White Guards” to emphasise the political element and the link to the White Finland.

2 Jaeger Movement was born during the second Russification period (1908-1917). Young patriotic men were smuggled out of the country to Germany, where they received military training. A Finnish Jaeger battalion fought for Germany in the First World War. As the Finnish Civil War began most of them came home and joined the White Army. Jaegers, particularly the Jaeger officers, were quite influential in the Finnish military forces.

3 The first section included cooking and field kitchens. The second trained women for field and military hospitals. The third manufactured and acquired needed equipment, e.g. uniforms or material for field or military hospitals. The fourth worked with internal and external information, gathered funds, for example by organizing lotteries and organising Lotta and White Guard events.
and fetes. This section later had more diversified tasks, for example working as army secretaries, telephone operators and enemy aeroplane spotters.

4 In the late 1920s and the early 1930s Finland experienced a surge of right-wing radicalism, which turned into so-called Lapuanliike (the Lapua Movement). Its activities culminated in Mäntsälä rebellion. Several hundred White Guardists interrupted a socialist meeting and gave the government an ultimatum. For example, the Social Democratic Party should be abolished. Since there were thousands of armed White Guardists around the country, the situation was serious. Challenging the government was a mistake, which ended the Lapua Movement. The government and President Svinhufvud, a well-respected conservative politician, decided to use the law against subversive activity against the rebels. The situation calmed down after Svinhufvud’s famous radio speech asking people to go home. The public opinion also turned against the radicals. The rebels were convicted and the Lapua Movement was abolished. Its leaders founded the small right-wing party Patriotic People’s Front (Fi. Isänmaallinen kansanliitto, IKL).