# The Memory of a Shared Past

From Human-Wolf Conflicts to Coexistence?

### Introduction

Being a historian, I am interested in what happened in the past. As a historian focusing on a very topical issue, human-wolf relationships, I am also interested in how people use the past as an *argument* in wolf discussions. The past and the present go hand in hand; as feminist scholar Sara Ahmed writes, "each encounter reopens past encounters" (Ahmed 2000: 8). Ahmed also states that "[t]he past is living rather than dead; the past lives in the very wounds that remain open in the present" (Ahmed 2004: 33). In human-wolf history, many wounds are still open. In this article, I write about these wounds in the Finnish context from the late 19th century onward. These wounds and the ways the shared history between humans and wolves is told and remembered are part of cultural memory. As memory studies scholar Astrid Erll points out, cultural or collective memory is a controversial issue and the term is often used in vague ways. It is defined in the book *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* edited by Erll, Ansgar Nünning and Sara Young (2008), as "the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural context" (Erll 2008: 1–2). In a way, the wounds I concentrate on here can be seen as part of the canon of human-wolf history, the official version of what happened (cf. Assmann 2008: 100–102).

I use newspaper reports and magazine articles, historical studies and contemporary literature as well as material related to wolf population management and research to find out how the interspecies past is remembered. I ask how the past has been represented and how it has been used as an argument, for instance, for killing wolves. I focus on two narratives or arguments: One that tells that the shared past was a conflict or even a war which ended when people exterminated wolves in Finland at the turn of the 20th century. The other narrative I focus on tells that after wolves were hunted down, the recent past, meaning the 20th century, was wolf-free, or almost wolf-free, until the end of the century when wolves 'returned' to Finnish nature. After that, I try to see whether the past could be remembered differently, for example, as coexistence. Finally, I discuss whether the past and the ways it is remembered could help us coexist with wolves today.

# Argument No. 1: Past as a Conflict

Wolves and humans have coexisted in Finland for a long time. However, most Finns know only that wolves killed children during the 19th century and that subsequently, Finland's wolves were almost exterminated. Historical studies and the media often tell the story of the shared past as a narrative of conflict (Lähdesmäki and Ratamäki 2015; Lappalainen 2005; Teperi 1977).

*Conflict* is a strong word. As anthropologist John Knight puts it, people-wildlife conflicts mean "relations of rivalry or antagonism between human beings and wild animals which

typically arise from territorial proximity and involve reliance on the same resources or a threat to human wellbeing or safety" (Knight 2000: 3). What is important to see is that people-wildlife conflicts are usually understood in an anthropocentric way (Knight 2000: 3, 23). They are viewed mainly from the humans' perspective: Wildlife threatens humans' way of life, predators attack people, wild animals steal people's prev and crops, and so on. Conflicts are seldom considered from a nonhuman perspective: When people kill wild animals, take over and change their living environments and reduce their nutritional status, it is rarely seen as a conflict. This is also the case with the way many Finns think about the past.

According to the past as a conflict narrative, Finns and wolves were at war with each other. In this narrative, the wolves are on top in this battle between species; they threatened people's livelihood by killing reindeer, sheep, cows, dogs and horses, and caused fear when rabid wolves occasionally attacked adult

Sufi.

I arwa etāin tienee jo wandseista ajcista ctīut enemmān pleifen huomien efineenā faim fufi; sitā mainitaan ufein wandseista atvat udivojesta ja tertemufiista, ja jo lapjamēn ajcista otvat udivojamīn ihmijet tauliest siitā puhuttavan. Kaittialia misējā sufia en tēvitoput, owat ne esiptomeet ihmijen tepppmātīvamānā widselītiens; ja abvam dētestāin owat ne

Suomesja. Sentähren anjaitjeefin fuji tulia tartemmin tunnetutiji.

Tämän maan pete-eläimistä on fuji ahneutenja ja rohteutenja tähren vahingellijin ja lähimai tarhua myöstin fuurin ja mälevin. Se en niin mälemä että je lammas juusia helposti ui jenkun veirran poilli tai hyppää aidan bli.

faawuttaneet liiaffifin furullifen maineen tubotoillanfa Lanfi-

Fig. 9 Popular wolf image: a bloodthirsty predator attacking children Kansanwalistusseuran kalenteri 1883: 96

humans. It was also difficult to kill wolves, which made them a bigger nuisance. What caused the deepest wounds, to use Sara Ahmed's term, was that there were three occasions during the 19th century when non-rabid, healthy wolves allegedly attacked and killed children. The wolf image, the idea of what wolves are and what they do, has been affected by the memory of these alleged incidents. The cultural image of wolves has, for a long time, depicted wolves as bloodthirsty predators attacking children, similar to the picture published in an almanac by the Society for Popular Enlightenment in 1883 (Fig. 9).

These incidents are part of a shared cultural memory and media brings them up from time to time, especially when wolves are a current topic. Wolf conservation in Finland began in 1973, outside the reindeer herding area, which covers about 36 percent of the surface of the country<sup>1</sup>. The decree on wolf protection did not actually restrict the killing of wolves that much

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<sup>1</sup> Reindeer herding covers land areas from Finland, Sweden, Norway and the Kola Peninsula. In the reindeer herding area in Finland, Sámi and non-Sámi Finnish citizens are allowed to practice reindeer herding, while in Sweden and Norway only the Sámi people are allowed to practice it. The reindeer herding area has a special status and when it comes to wolf protection, different rules are followed that those in the rest of the countries.

outside the reindeer herding area, because it was possible to kill wolves legally during certain months in some of the Eastern municipalities, where most of the wolves existed, during the 1970s and 1980s. It was also possible, under certain circumstances, to kill wolves elsewhere in Finland; for instance, if wolves caused damage or their numbers became too numerous (Decree No. 749/1973 [Wolf protection]). However, the idea that wolves are protected made some people worry about safety both before and after conservation began. The incidents that took place in the 19th century proved to some opinion piece writers that wolves were a threat to humans here and now (see, e.g. Luurila 1972: 2). Historian Jouko Teperi also hinted in the preface of his historical study on human—wolf conflicts in the 19th century that to protect wolves was not a reasonable thing to do, because humans and wolves cannot coexist peacefully, as the past shows (Teperi 1977: 5-6).

Finland became a member of the European Union in the 1990s and wolf conservation became stricter. In the reindeer herding area, the wolf came under annex V of the Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora. This means that wolves could be hunted with permits issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Outside the reindeer herding area, the practice has changed several times, but the outline is that people needed to get special licenses in order to make an exception to the protection. Even though it was possible, it was now harder to kill wolves legally and it called for more bureaucracy. Due to conservation, wolves were able to form packs and proliferate more regularly. Again, people brought up the 19th-century events in the media, and some people were afraid that they would recur (Virtanen 1995). Wolf packs have been living in south-west Finland since 2005, and when their territories were first formed, local media and people brought the century-old events out as a warning example (Lähteenmäki 2013; Neihum 2018; Setälä 2005). Because the past wounds were kept open, as Ahmed puts it, it has been difficult for some people to get used to wolves in these areas.

Furthermore, the killing of wolves is remembered in a certain way: The historical narrative, as told by the media and some historians, continues to emphasize that Finns no longer wanted to share their living space with wolves after the child killing incidents and, with the help of better hunting techniques and better guns, they overcame wolves, won the war and got rid of them from central, south and west Finland. The narrative goes on, telling us that people's lives became peaceful after the wolves were gone, thus, suggesting that killing them solves the perceived problem (Lappalainen 2005: 136–137; Teperi 1977: 166).

During the 20th century, people persisted in believing that hunting was the best (perhaps even the only) way to react to the wolves' presence (Lähdesmäki 2014). The killing of wolves was unrestricted before 1973. Wolves could be killed legally anywhere, by anyone (see for instance Act No. 290/1962 [Hunting]). From the 1970s onward, some people have felt that conservation and limits on hunting are too restrictive. Nowadays, people living in wolf areas can feel powerless, and some rely on poaching (Rannikko 2012). I argue that these ideas derive from cultural memory, which implies that coexistence between humans and wolves in the past was a constant conflict, that coexistence was impossible and killing was the only way to solve the problems in the multispecies relationship. Killing wolves has often not been seen as a part

of the conflict but as a way to make the conflict disappear. I will come back to this topic in the last chapter, but first I discuss the second argument often used in wolf discussions, that is, the idea that Finland was wolf-free in the recent past.

## Argument No. 2: Past as Wolf-free

Genetic research combined with statistical information on wolves killed by people implies that Finland could have had a population of 1400 wolves before it declined at the turn of the 20th century (Aspi et al. 2006: 1569, 1572; Jansson et al. 2014: 2). According to historical sources, before the wolf population declined, wolves inhabited almost the whole country from the shores of the Baltic Sea to Lapland (Teperi 1977). In addition to the idea that the past was full of conflicts and killing, there has been a persistent narrative that after the population declined, the near past, meaning the majority of the 20th century, equals the absence of wolves.

Many present-day Finns believe, mistakenly, that the country was almost wolf-free during the 20th century and that the national wolf population died out at some point. An article published in 2017, for instance, in the largest subscription newspaper in Finland, *Helsingin Sanomat*, stated that wolves "were all killed" and "became extinct" after they killed children in the Turku region in the 1880s (Huhtanen 2017). A common notion is that wolves, in a way, returned to Finland's nature from Russia around the turn of the 21st century when they were known to form packs and proliferate inside the country's borders. Many scholars from various fields researching human-wolf relations have stated this, and so did I before I started to work on my doctoral dissertation on human—wolf relations in 20th-century Finland (Bisi 2010: 15, 37, 47; Borgström 2011: 13; Lähdesmäki 2011: 4; Lappalainen 2005: 136—137; Pohja-Mykrä 2014: 32; Teperi 1977: 166). These misunderstandings proceed from the fact that no one before me has done thorough research on wolves in Finland throughout the whole of the 20th century.

The idea that there were no or almost no wolves in Finland can be found in some of the 20th-century sources. Some popular zoological books stated that there were hardly any wolves in the country during the early 20th century (Kivirikko 1940: 23–24; Siivonen 1956: 130). In *Suuri nisäkäskirja* (Siivonen 1956), blank areas in maps illustrating the wolves' distribution in 1900 and 1956 emphasized the alleged absence of wolves (Fig. 9). According to the book, the species bred throughout the country in the 1880s but "has now for the past semi-centennial been exiled to the furthest fells in Lapland" (Siivonen 1956: 130). Identical maps were published thirty years later in a report by the Council for Natural Resources maintaining the idea that wolves were absent (Luonnonvarainneuvosto, Maa- ja metsätalousministeriö 1986).

Statistical data concerning hunting bounties newspaper reports and hunting magazine articles tell a different story. According to bounty statistics published in the Statistic Yearbook from 1900 to 1942, wolves were killed annually – except for the year 1928 (Statistical Yearbook of 1944). After 1942, there is a gap in the statistics until 1980, but according to newspaper reports and magazine articles, the 38 years in between were nothing but wolf-free.

Newspapers wrote about wolves that were seen, whose paw prints or kills were observed, including in the areas claimed to be wolf-free. Papers also reported on the number of wolves killed annually. Some wolves received a lot of media attention. Roaming male wolves, for

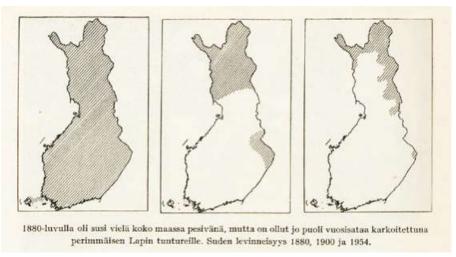


Fig. 10 Distribution of wolves in 1880, 1900 and 1954 Siivonen 1956: 130

instance, that were seen and killed in Lieto in south-west Finland in 1920, in Tavastia in south Finland in 1953, in South Ostrobothnia in west Finland in 1967 and the wolf seen and killed in Tavastia in 1972 appeared on the pages of local newspapers (see e.g. *Hämeen Sanomat* 1953, 1972; *Satakunnan kansa* 1967b; *Uusi Aura* 1920). These wolves were probably young individuals trying to establish their territory and find a mate.

It seems that the story about Finns winning the war and getting rid of the wolves is not the whole truth. One reason why Finns did not succeed in getting rid of wolves was that 'immigrating' wolf individuals came to Finland from Russia. Wolves crossed the eastern border one by one, and occasionally wolves were observed in numbers: There were a lot of border crossing wolves in Eastern Finland, for instance, around the turn of the 1960s (Lähdesmäki 2014).

Even though contemporary people were aware of the wolves' presence, they made it *discursively* invisible and 'unnatural.' When reporting wolf sightings, newspapers often mentioned that "wolves have not been seen in this area within living memory" (see e.g. *Lapin Kansa* 1938), or "for years" (e.g. *Satakunnan Kansa* 1967a). Such statements made any contemporary presence somehow unusual and momentary as if the wolves were not here to stay. People often ensured that any wolf presence was indeed unusual and temporary by killing them soon after they were observed (Lähdesmäki 2014).

There have also been disputes about the 'Finnishness' of the wolves living in Finland. Sometimes the border-crossing wolves were called intruders and Russian or foreign wolves (see e.g. Siivonen 1956: 128, 141). These terms are charged (and humanizing) and reveal that these wolves were understood to be out of place. By calling the border-crossing wolves intruders or Russian wolves, the papers made the wolves' presence 'unnatural' and further legitimized their killing (before 1973, it was legal for anyone to kill wolves anywhere in Finland). Historian Peter Coates has analyzed that notions on nonhuman nationality are linked to the attribution of

spatial and biological belonging, the right to exist (Coates 2007).

People question wolves' right to live in certain areas even in today's Finland. Nowadays, more wolves are living in west Finland than in east Finland (Luke 2019). The narrative that wolves have been absent is used as an argument to resist their current presence in newspaper writings (Pekkala 2018; Heikkila 2014).

In a way, the notion that wolves were absent has some truth to it: According to game researchers, wolves have proliferated regularly in Finland only from the mid-1990s onward (Suurpetotyöryhmä 1996: 35). Some of my 20th-century sources mention wolves being born inside Finnish borders before the end of the century. Zoological books, newspapers and hunting magazines report sightings of wolf dens or pups, for example, in north Finland in the Oulu area in 1906 (Siivonen 1956: 131–132) and east Finland in Ilomantsi in the 1980s (Sivonen 1983). It is also important to see that if wolves did not proliferate regularly in Finland before the 1990s, it was not because of a lack of trying from the wolves' side. Only after strict conservation from the 1990s onward was it possible for wolves to live longer, form packs and proliferate, because it was no longer so easy to kill them legally.

## Past as Coexistence? Living with Wolves and Staying with the Trouble

Thus far, I have written about how Finns have remembered the shared past by using two examples of the commonly employed narratives. The frequently repeated narratives give only one side of the story; cultural memory is quite selective (Assmann 2008). Cultural anthropologist and literary studies scholar Aleida Assmann writes that some things are always forgotten, whether through active or passive forgetting is not sure (Assmann 2008: 97–98). In this chapter, I reflect on how we could think about the past relationships in new ways, see the previously forgotten parts of the past and how this could contribute to the present-day relationships.

Sara Ahmed writes that "[b]ringing pain into politics requires we give up the fetish of the wound through a different kind of remembrance" (Ahmed 2004: 33). If we want to be able to coexist with wolves, one thing we need to do is to let the wounds heal. As I and environmental policy researcher Outi Ratamäki have suggested before, new stories and new ways to remember the shared past are needed in order to let the wounds heal (Lähdesmäki and Ratamäki 2015). One way to do this could be to remember the past as a challenging yet mutual coexistence rather than a conflict.

Of course, one has to admit that the relationships between humans and wolves in an agrarian society were often violent; wolves killed domestic animals and people killed wolves. Still, the story is not as simple as the one we are accustomed to hearing. According to historian Jouko Teperi, before the infamous incidents of wolves allegedly killing children, Finns were not eager to hunt wolves. Historian Jouko Lehikoinen has also shown that some people paid fines rather than participating in mandatory big hunts (Lehikoinen 2007: 83, 191). Teperi suggests that people were reluctant because, firstly, it was difficult to kill wolves and, secondly, people felt that wolves were like a natural force — uncontrollable (Teperi 1977: 73 — 75). Could the unwillingness to hunt wolves also mean that they were not perceived as malign enemies or terrible burdens by all Finns?

We need to remember that historical sources are selective. When it comes to wolves and other wild predators, many of the sources, such as newspapers, statistics, legislation, photographs and pictures, only tell about the negative impact predators had on humans, such as attacks on prey and people. As historian Jennifer Adams Martin states about sharks, there are very few sources relating how sharks ignore humans and an abundance of sources telling about attacks. The lack of sufficient control data showing that sharks actually do not often attack but avoid people affects how sharks and the shared past is seen (Martin 2011: 452, 454). It is important to recognize that the wolves that never crossed paths with people and never killed reindeer or cattle are missing from most of the sources. They are, in a way, invisible. The old narratives might also exaggerate the harmfulness of wolves because they are often based on insufficient contextualization. It is true, for instance, that wolves killed a lot of domestic animals, but animal diseases were a bigger threat to agrarian society (Soininen 1974: 219). In a way, wolves became scapegoats for all the hardships farmers had to endure.

What I think is needed to let the wounds heal in human-wolf relationship(s?) are narratives where the past is multivoiced (see also Lähdesmäki and Ratamäki 2015). Historical sources are biased when it comes to not only predators but also people. Historian Peter Boomgard has noticed a distortion in the sources when studying the historical relationships between tigers and people. Boomgaard states that,

[o]ne has to look hard at the voluminous literature on tigers in order to find indications that tigers were not always and not everywhere looked upon as deadly enemies. On theoretical grounds it could be argued that the literature at our disposal is biased against such information, and that peaceful coexistence between humans and tigers is therefore underreported. (Boomgaard 2001: 59)

The situation is the same when it comes to wolves. Historical sources often state that the wolf is/was the most hated predator in Finland (see e.g. Ylänne 1926: 238), but was it so? Some sources indicate that not everyone hated wolves; and it seems that besides fear and hate, people felt an admiration for wolves. Wolves' appearance, hunting skills and wits were admired (see e.g. *Karjalainen* 1962; Siivonen 1956: 131, 133, 135–137). Some Finns and the Skolt Sámi, one of the Sámi ethnic groups living inside Finnish borders², have also told stories about people transforming into wolves, for instance, to run faster (Lehikoinen 2009: 234–235; Pentikäinen 1995: 101–104). These stories tell us that people could admire wolves and their abilities even though they killed reindeer and livestock. Many Finns have also openly criticized big hunts, at least, since the 1950s. A cartoon titled "The last act in the wolf drama" published in the *Hämeen Sanomat* newspaper in February 1953 commented on the chasing and killing of a lone wolf that had roamed to the south of Finland (Fig. 10). The picture tells about relatively positive feelings toward wolves, depicting it not as a Big Bad Wolf but as a small wolf trying to

live his life and dreaming of Walt Disney's Bambi. In 1972, many people wrote opinion pieces to the same newspaper and, briefly, demanded that wolves should be protected (Andsten and Raunistola 1972: 5; Moilanen 1972: 4).

In the first chapter, I mentioned the idea that killing solves conflicts. Nowadays, strict conservation is seen as a problem by some Finns. Unrestricted (or less restricted) hunting is posed as a way to solve "wolf problems" by many rural people, such as hunters and farmers (Rannikko 2012; Rintamaa 2018). I argue that these wishes are based on the idea that prior to 1973 when wolf conservation began, unregulated killing solved the problems in the human-wolf relationship. When looking into the past, this was actually not the case in Finland, at least not in the long run. Even if some Finns wanted to get rid of the wolves and had the right to kill wolves wherever and whenever they wished, successful hunts did not make wolves disappear: The wolf numbers were constantly replenished by new ones from the east. Nor did free hunting prevent wolves from preying on domestic animals. This becomes clear when looking into the history of compensation paid by the state. The state paid compensation from the 1950s and 60s onwards when wolves and other predators killed domestic animals and reindeer (Act No. 574/1956; Council of State, Decision No. 335/1961). The practice shows that killing — even though it worked in terms of killing wolves — did not remove the problem of wolf predation on livestock and reindeer.



Fig. 11 The last show of the wolf-drama Hämeen Sanomat 1953: 3

<sup>2</sup> The Sámi people are indigenous Fenno-Ugric people inhabiting areas in present-day Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia.

Moreover, the new narratives need to emphasize that in the past, people tried to live with wolves, adjust to their presence and stay with the trouble, as science studies scholar Donna Haraway puts it (2016). This was done, for instance, by using means other than killing to prevent wolves from preying on domestic animals. In an agrarian society, dogs wore iron collars; the houses on farms were built close to each other to form a closed yard that barred predators from entering it; shepherds (often children) guarded sheep and cattle in woodland pastures (Kaarlenkaski 2012: 207); and people built fences that were higher than normal ones, specifically to keep wolves away in east Finland in the 1960s when the number of large predators was high due to immigrating wolves (Karjalainen 28. 8. 1961, 2). These kinds of nonlethal methods of livestock protection are often interpreted negatively, as responses to threat and, as such, part of wildlife conflicts (Knight 2000). Instead of highlighting the conflict side of these actions, we could remember these past examples as human efforts to adjust, to live together with wolves.



Fig. 12 The Wolf Action Group when building protective fences

Some of these practices have been forgotten, but some are used nowadays in re-invented forms. Some people have made protective vests for hunting dogs from the 1990s onwards. The idea was to prevent wolves from killing dogs even if the predators attacked them during hunts: In the first two decade of this century, for example, a local inventor living in southern Savonia, in south-east Finland, made vests that contained chili pepper and had spikes on them; he also planned to incorporate electricity in them (Liikkanen 1998; Niiranen 2014). Also, from the 1990s onwards, sheep farmers and wolf conservationists have collaborated in building special wolf fences sponsored by the state to protect sheep in wolf areas (Fig. 12).

These present-day examples are not perfect; they do not solve all the problems. However, they are ways to live with wolves. If we want to live in the present-day world, often descri-

bed as Anthropocene, we need to try to learn to cope with the trouble of living together. One way to do so could be to look more closely at the others we live with. We need to stop looking at the past (and present) relationships only through anthropocentric lenses and try to imagine it also from the wolves' perspective. We should ask, what has it meant for wolves to coexist with humans, not just the other way around. Many current historians and other scholars are trying to say something about how, for instance, cows, horses and dogs view the world and people (Fudge 2017; Pearson 2012; Swart 2010). This more-than-human history approach has also been used with wolves: While writing about *The lost Wolves of Japan*, historian Brett Walker tries to say something about the wolves' side of the story (Walker 2005). Of course, there are many methodological and theoretical challenges when trying to consider another creature's point of view. We cannot, for example, fully escape anthropocentricism and never go inside other minds. However, many historians have stated that we need to try to escape the human(centered) perspective. They are trying to broaden the perspective, for example, by using research on semiotics, biology and ethology (see e.g. Mizelle 2010: 44; Walker 2005: 11). The change of perspectives is vital, because, as historian Sandra Swart has stated, human history has never been only human; we have a multispecies past and we need to write multispecies history in order to understand it – and ourselves (Swart 2019).

### Conclusion

How we remember the past is vital for the present human-wolf relationship. When media and historical narratives repeatedly mention past conflicts, they maintain negative wolf images, intensify fear and hatred of wolves and, by doing so, perpetuate conflicts in the present-day relationship. They enable people who do not wish to share their living spaces with wolves to use history as an argument. Wolves' presence in certain parts of the country can be perceived as 'unnatural' because of misleading notions about the past.

We should not simplify or silence the past. Rather, I think we should tell many different narratives, more varied and multivoiced narratives than those that have been commonly told. The new narratives should also try to consider the wolves' side of the story. Previous narratives have been anthropocentric. In order to coexist with wolves, we need to recognize that they have their perspectives. We need to tell more-than-human histories and make the wolves and their past visible. If we relate that humans and wolves were archenemies in the past, they will surely be so in the future.

#### List of Resources

Act No. 290/1962 (Hunting): Metsästyslaki. Säädöskokoelma 290/1962.

Act No. 574/1956 (Compensation for Reindeer Killed by Predators): Laki petoeläinten tappamien porojen korvaamisesta. Säädöskokoelma 574/1956.

Council of State, Decision No. 335/1961 (Compensation of the Losses Caused by Predators): Valtioneuvoston päätös petoeläinten aiheuttamien vahinkojen korvaamiseksi. Suomen asetuskokoelma 335/1961.

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