Asia Europe Journal (2024) 22:185–200
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-024-00697-x

ORIGINAL PAPER

Neighbours under the North Star: Civil wars in Finland and Korea

Sungju Park-Kang[1]

Received: 25 July 2022 / Revised: 14 May 2024 / Accepted: 25 May 2024 /
Published online: 5 June 2024

Abstract

The article has two objectives. The first one is to advance the existing studies on civil wars by developing a comparative approach. It explores similarities and differences between the Finnish and Korean experiences. The broader objective of the article is to initiate a project to explore potential connections between the Nordic region and the Korean peninsula. There are various direct and indirect linkages between the Nordic countries and Korea. Finland had long been part of Sweden and then part of Russia. Finland achieved independence, but it was immediately overshadowed by the war. Korea had long been influenced heavily by China and then colonised by Japan. Independence brought sunshine on the peninsula, but it soon disappeared with the Korean War. Against this backdrop, the article investigates the civil wars in Finland and Korea. In order to go beyond the existing research, the article pays attention to popular culture (film) depicting the two wars. The article also sheds light on how Finland and Korea have tried to pave the way to reconciliation. If the war still divides Finland even after 100 years, the reconciliation process in Korea would be much more complex and difficult.

Abbreviations

TRC Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Introduction

The year 2018 marked the 100th anniversary of the Civil War in Finland (1918), the war between the Soviet-backed Reds and the German-backed Whites. According to the Finnish public broadcasting company Yle, the majority of Finnish public believe that the war still divides Finns. It is no wonder that the Ministry of Finance in 2017, when Finland celebrated the 100th anniversary of its independence, retracted

✉ Sungju Park-Kang
sungju.park-kang@utu.fi

[1] Centre for East Asian Studies, University of Turku, Turku, Finland

a design of the commemorative coin depicting the execution of the Reds by the Whites. Finland had long been part of Sweden, its neighbouring country and then part of another neighbour Russia. Finland achieved independence, but it was immediately overshadowed by the Civil War. Finns are not alone in this turbulent history. Korea had long been influenced heavily by China, its nearest neighbour, then colonised by Japan, another close neighbour. Independence brought sunshine on the peninsula, but it soon disappeared with the Korean War (1950–1953). Taken together, it can be said that Finland and Korea, in spite of their long geographical distance, become neighbours in terms of geopolitical burden and civil war experiences.

In this article I aim to advance the existing studies on civil wars by developing a comparative approach that investigates two cases: the Finnish and Korean Civil Wars. In principle, I selected these two cases because Finland and Korea share geopolitical destiny as small states surrounded by Great Powers, whilst in practice, Finland just commemorated 100 years since the beginning of its civil war, and at the same time (2018–2019) there were serious discussions taking place amongst the concerned parties about ending the (technically) ongoing Korean War by concluding a permanent peace treaty—with a number of summits being arranged involving North Korea, South Korea and the USA. Going beyond the existing research, I also pay attention to popular culture depicting the civil wars in question. Furthermore, the article reviews the post-conflict reconstruction/reconciliation efforts made by Finland and Korea. My goal is not to identify the exact same (or opposite) components within the two wars and compare them. Rather, I reflect on the potentially meaningful elements embedded in the two cases in terms of tragic political upheavals and human suffering inflicted by armed conflicts, along with various efforts to redress the painful consequences.

The broader objective of the article is to initiate a project to explore potential connections between the Nordic region and the Korean peninsula. There are various direct and indirect linkages between the Nordic countries and Korea. If the scope is limited to the Korean War and ongoing conflict, the subject of this research, Sweden, has been an observer and monitor of the conflict between North and South Korea for more than six decades. It has been a member of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission since 1953. Until 2001, it was the only Western country that had embassies both in Pyongyang and Seoul. It was also the Swedish Prime Minister, Göran Persson, who led the European Union delegation to Pyongyang in 2001. This visit was apparently the first major Western engagement with North Korea.

Other Nordic countries have something to share. Denmark is no stranger to Korea, having dispatched a medical unit to South Korea during the Korean War. The hospital ship named *Jutlandia* inspired the late Kim Larsen, one of the most beloved Danish singers, to make a song of the same name. Norway, too, sent a medical unit to South Korea to help war victims, and about five decades later in 2000 the Norwegian Nobel Committee would award President Kim Dae-jung of South Korea the Nobel Peace Prize partly due to his effort to end the ongoing war and conflict. In the case of Iceland, it offered cod liver oil as a medicine to South Korea through the United Nations (Edwards 2013: 149).

However, this unique relationship and the Nordic-Korean relations in general have not been thoroughly studied (exceptions include Saxer (2017)), and thus I

hope that this article will lead to a large and in-depth project on the Nordic-Korean relations.

The article proceeds as follows. Firstly, the current status of civil war scholarship is discussed. The article goes on to contextualise the civil wars in Finland and Korea in terms of history, and to explore them. This endeavour then expands to a research on two major historical films in Finland and (South) Korea. Films or popular culture in general have been used as a vehicle for analysis in broader fields such as International Relations (IR) already (e.g., Weldes 1999; Åhäll 2012), allowing an opportunity to make connections between IR and human/social affairs through popular films (Weber 2005: 9). Part of the Finnish movie *Under the North Star* or *Täällä Pohjantähden alla* (1968), a dramatised version of Väinö Linna's novel of the same name, describes the ideological divides and politically charged violence surrounding the war. *The Taebaek Mountains* or *Taebaek Sanmaek* (1994), a Korean film based on Jo Jung-rae's novel of the same title, captures the collective wounds and fierce ideological conflicts propelled by Korea's national division and war. Going further from these movies, the article sheds some light on how Finland and Korea have tried to pave the way towards post-war reconciliation.

Situating civil wars

Human history is full of wars. It is no exaggeration to say that '[e]very generation has its civil war' (Regan 2016: 1). But according to Lars-Erik Cederman and Manuel Vogt (2017: 1993), civil war 'as a conceptual category' in scholarship only appeared during the 2000s. There is no universally agreed definition of civil war. It is however possible to describe civil war as 'armed combat within a sovereign state between an incumbent government and a nonstate challenger' (Cederman and Vogt 2017: 1993). Some conflict dataset projects often have casualty thresholds. For example, in the Uppsala Conflict Data Program/Peace Research Institute Oslo project the threshold is more than 25 deaths in one calendar year (UCDP 2019), whilst the Correlates of War Project stipulates at least 1,000 battle-deaths during each year of the war (COW 2019). The Finnish case obviously qualifies as it meets all the above definitions, but the Korean one may require a different interpretation—as technically speaking North and South Korea fought each other as two separate states. Nonetheless, considering the origins and fundamental aspects of the war, the Korean case can be regarded as a civil war (e.g., Cumings 2011).

One of the most common perceptions about civil war is that it is an entirely domestic conflict. This can be called 'closed polity' approach, which does not reflect reality: 'participants and processes outside the boundaries of each individual state' could influence the dynamics of conflict (Gleditsch 2007: 294). Some scholars are more explicit about the international elements of civil war when they say that 'external interventions in civil wars are nearly ubiquitous' (Balch-Lindsay and Enterline 2000: 618). This transnational dimension of civil war is compatible with the core proposition of IR scholarship: 'states do not exist in isolation but are influenced by their interaction and exposure to other states' (Gleditsch 2007: 295; see also, e.g., Rosenau 1964). The Korean War is regarded as a civil war with strong international

elements (for instance, the US-led United Nations forces were deeply involved), so this article would offer a valuable insight.

Another common perception is that civil wars are bilateral conflicts between the state and rebel forces. This is not the case. Armed actors, often called 'paramilitaries', 'civil militias' or 'civil defence forces', can operate alongside government forces or independently of the state (Jentzsch et al. 2015: 755–756). 'Whilst some militias start out as primary protectors of civilians, they may later engage in predatory behaviour', as in Sierra Leone (Jentzsch et al. 2015: 758). It is worth noting that militias were active both in the Finnish and Korean cases.

Civil wars do not occur overnight. They 'are often the final acts of decades of the slow agony of … little hope, so little that the risk of death whilst fighting seems better than slow death under acceptable conditions' (Regan 2016: 9). Civil wars are filled with tragedy, including direct violence against noncombatants or civilians (Balcells 2010: 292). History tells us that civil war costs a lot—it goes beyond battle casualties. Various attempts to explore economic, social, psychological and political consequences of civil war have been made (Collier and Hoeffler 2007: 725–731). With the complexity and severe consequences of war, we might need to think harder about 'what civil war is and what it does to us as a community' (Regan 2016: 10). That is probably why 'innovative methods including case studies … often in connection with field research' are needed in the study of civil war (Cederman and Vogt 2017: 1999). This is where my work in this article comes in, as it features case studies of the Finnish War along with the Korean War. Furthermore, it utilises historical films, *Under the North Star* and *The Taebaek Mountains*, as vehicle for analysis.

Having reviewed various civil war-related literature, it appears that there is one important theme overlooked by mainstream works: gender. To be fair, there are some specific case studies that deal with gender. For example, Tiina Lintunen (2014) investigates gender components in the Finnish Civil War (see also Ahlbäck 2014; Laitinen 2018). The study of civil war as a whole, however, seems to have neglected gender so far. In broader fields like war studies and IR, gender has now been established as a significant category of analysis (e.g., Enloe 1993; Sjoberg and Gentry 2007; McEvoy 2010; Park-Kang 2014). This article does not examine gender directly, but at least presents the theme of gender as a future research agenda.

Contextualising the civil wars in Finland and Korea

The question of how to name the war in Finland could serve as a point of departure for understanding the complex nature of this war. It appears that three main terms have been used to describe the war: *vapaussota* (war of liberation), *kansalaissota* (civil war, or war between the citizens) and *sisällissota* (civil war, or domestic war). The victorious Whites called this conflict the war of liberation or *vapaussota*. It refers to the war fought for freedom from Russia and the Bolsheviks. The victors' narrative was shared by conservative historians, the state authorities, right-wing parties and the church (Haapala and Tikka 2012: 74). It maintained a dominant position up until the 1960s. Afterwards the term civil war or *kansalaissota*, used by the Social Democrats, replaced the White interpretation. In other words,

the defeated Red interpretation emerged due to social changes in Finland. Since the 1990s, academics and the general public have begun to favour the word civil war or *sisällissota*. This terminology was considered more neutral than the White-oriented *vapaussota* and the Red-oriented *kansalaissota* (Tepora and Roselius 2014: 5).

According to Tiina Kinnunen (2014: 408), the 'War of 1918' would be a better option as a neutral term partly because both *kansalaissota* and *sisällissota* are translated as 'civil war' in English. In addition, the word *luokkasota* (class war) was used mainly by communists and left-wing socialists (Alapuro 2002: 172). Throughout the article, I prefer to use the term civil war or *sisällissota*.

It can be said that 'the temporary weakness of the Russian Empire in 1905 as a result of losing the war against Japan created a revolutionary situation in Russia' (Kekkonen 2012: 70). The then autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland was no exception. The working-class movement easily became part of the established polity (Alapuro 1988: 137). But a revival of the Tsarist regime had been realised, which made a democratic system, Finland, within Russia impossible. This acted as one of the factors to radicalise the Finnish working class (Kekkonen 2012: 71). The year 1917 was decisive for Finland. In March, the Tsarist regime in Russia collapsed and was replaced by a Provisional Government. Then in October, the Bolsheviks seized power. In Finland, these developments created a power vacuum in the country (Alapuro 1988). The rival parties at the time started to set up their own security forces to ensure law and order (Kekkonen 2012: 72). The declaration of Independence on 6 December 1917 did not resolve this rivalry.

The contested nature of the Korean War also starts with its name. North Korea calls it the Fatherland Liberation War. The term implies that the Korean peninsula at the time was colonised by imperialists led by the USA and its South Korean puppet regime—Kim Il-sung and his army therefore wanted to liberate the peninsula by force. In South Korea, a different view is maintained as the war has been called, for instance, the June 25th War. The term implies that the South was invaded by the North on 25 June 1950 and subsequently the war began. As the word invasion suggests, the war was the result of North Korea's intention to occupy, not liberate, South Korea. To make this statement clearer, South Korea often employs another term, the invasion into the South (by North Korea) or *Namchim*. In the South, it seems that a different term, which does not specify any aggressor, is now established and commonly used: the (South) Korean War or *Hanguk Jeonjaeng*. I prefer to use the term Korean War in this article (but not referring to *Hanguk Jeonjaeng*, because *Hanguk* means South Korea only).

Korea 'has experienced five major periods of foreign occupation—by China, the Mongols, Japan, and, after World War II, the USA and the Soviet Union' (or Russia) (Orberdorfer 1997: 3). When it comes to the last case, the Southern part of the Korean peninsula was occupied by the USA from 1945 to 1948, and the Northern part by Russia during the similar period. Then the US-backed Republic of Korea (South Korea) was formally established in August 1948, and the Russia-backed Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) in the following month. The South was headed by Syngman Rhee, a 70-year-old US-educated elite, whilst the North was led by Kim Il-sung, a 33-year-old guerrilla commander during the Japanese occupation (Orberdorfer 1997: 8). In North Korea, most of the Japanese

collaborators were harshly punished, whilst in South Korea, very few collaborators were punished, in part because the US occupation 'reemployed so many of them, and partly because they were needed in the fight against communism' (Cumings 2011: xvii). It seemed that the stark difference between the two countries was too big to be resolved by any peaceful means.

The Finnish and Korean Civil Wars

The Finnish Civil War was fought between the White and Red sides from January 1918 to May the same year. Finland, more precisely Grand Duchy of Finland, had been part of Russia since 1809 (before that, it had been part of Sweden for several hundred years). Following the Bolsheviks' and Vladmir Lenin's Revolution in Russia, Finland declared independence on 6 December 1917. As mentioned earlier, the newly independent country, however, was not stable. It is worth noting that Finland 'had been split between a revolutionary Red Finland in the relatively more industrialised South and an anti-revolutionary White Finland in the relatively more rural North' (Tepora and Roselius 2014: 1). This split had become more operative since the February Revolution in Russia in 1917. Furthermore, the Social Democrats-led parliament was dissolved by Russia when it challenged the legitimacy of the Russian provisional government in July. The new election was held in October and the Social Democrats lost their majority (Haapala and Tikka 2012: 75). Subsequently the bourgeois leadership assumed power. Then the confrontation between the working class and upper/middle classes, including the freeholding peasantry, developed into armed conflict (Alapuro 2002: 169).

The Helsinki Red Guard occupied the capital city on 27–28 January 1918 and the Reds established a revolutionary government (Tikka 2014: 95). It thus can be said that the Civil War 'began as a socialist revolution in Helsinki and with the simultaneous action taken by the Whites in Ostrobothnia on the western coast' (Tepora and Roselius 2014: 1). Fierce battles were waged between the Red Guards and the White Army. Although some Russians helped the Red side and German troops supported the White side, the overwhelming participants were Finns (Alapuro 2002: 169). The war did not last long. By April the Whites won the battle in Tampere, a major industrial city in Finland and a stronghold of the Reds. The White Army, led by General Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim, organised a victory parade in Helsinki on 16 May 1918. Over the course of the war, more than 38,000 people were killed. It is believed that one-third of them died in battle, one-third was unlawfully executed or murdered and one-third perished in prison camps. About 85% of all the victims belonged to the Red side (Tepora and Roselius 2014: 2). Both the Reds and Whites used terror as a strategy in the war. As a result, about 11,000 unarmed people were killed. Of these terror victims, around 10,000 belonged to the Reds (Tikka 2014: 118).

The dominant view (outside of North Korea) of the Korean War states that the war started with North Korea's invasion in June 1950 and ended with a ceasefire in July 1953 (e.g., Morgenthau 1978: 424). After several decades of Japanese colonial rule, Korea was liberated on 15 August 1945. Then the Northern part was occupied by the USSR and the Southern part by the USA. North and South Korea were

formally established both in 1948. The creation of two separate states would come with an enormous price. Once North Korea's full-scale military operation began on 25 June 1950, the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution on 27 June urging its member states to help South Korea. The North quickly advanced and captured the capital city of the South, Seoul, and then most of the Southern part except for the port city of Pusan and its surrounding area. With the Inchon landing on 15 September, the South Korean and US-led allied forces managed to push North Korea back. Within a month, South Korea captured most of the Northern area. Soon on 25 October, China intervened to assist North Korea and pushed the South Korean and UN forces back. On 10 July 1951, truce talks began and the armistice was signed two years later on 27 July 1953. Total casualties for all sides were 'more than 4 million, of which at least 2 million were civilians' (Cumings 2011: 35).

As such, whatever the name is, this war ended with an armistice, not a permanent peace treaty. Then it can be said that the collective experience of the Korean War and ongoing war situations for about 70 years (with armistice) may have contributed to the formulation of a different security mindset in Korea, different from other Western or Asian countries. Two things are worth considering. Firstly, North and South Korea (and the related third parties) have been at war ever since 1950, as the Korean War ended only with a ceasefire. That is, technically speaking, the Korean peninsula is still at war. Secondly, both Koreas have consistently engaged in actual military confrontations since the armistice was signed in 1953. The North Korean assassination squad, for instance, nearly succeeded to topple the then South Korean president, Park Chung-hee, in 1961. Meanwhile South Korean secret agents were dispatched to North Korea to conduct similar missions (Kim 2006). The conflict is still ongoing, and experiencing various ups and downs. This hot and unfinished war continues to cast a deep shadow over the peninsula.

Neighbours in films

The film *Under the North Star* or *Täällä Pohjantähden alla* is based on a trilogy of the same name from 1959 to 1962 written by Väinö Linna, one of Finland's most famous authors. Edvin Laine, one of the most influential filmmakers in Finland, directed the movie in 1968. This film covers the first two works of Linna's trilogy. A second film, *Akseli and Elina* or *Akseli ja Elina*, also directed by Laine and released in 1970, is an adaptation of the last part of the trilogy. A combined version of the whole film was released under the title *The North Star* or *Pohjantähti* (1973). The film became the most expensive movie ever produced in Finland at the time of its release. In addition, it became the third most watched Finnish film with more than one million viewers (Himberg 2017)—the most watched film was *The Unknown Soldier* or *Tuntematon sotilas* (1955) with almost three million viewers, which was directed by Edvin Laine, based on Väinö Linna's 1954 novel of the same title.[1] Another set of the same work was produced by Timo Koivusalo under the titles

[1] It is about the Continuation War or *jatkosota* between Finland and the USSR from 1941 to 1944.

Täällä Pohjantähden alla in 2009 and *Täällä Pohjantähden alla II* in 2010. Laine's film was a success. It received three awards at the prestigious film award ceremony in Finland, Jussi Awards. The categories include the best director and best actor. Furthermore, Väinö Linna received a special award for his role as co-screenwriter.

The film mainly tells the story of the Koskela family on the Red side. The beginning part is dedicated to explore the hard work and difficulties of peasants represented by Jussi Koskela. He wants to turn a swamp-like abandoned area into land that he could use for farming. His landlord is sympathetic, and sceptical: 'But remember that your work does not mean anything [Mutta muista, ettei työsi merkitse mitään], unless there is God's blessing.'[2] What means nothing to the landlord, however, can mean everything to Jussi. His diligence and effort do not betray him—the land is now ready for farming. This powerful scene reminds us of the so-called spirit of *sisu*. It is not easy to translate the Finnish word *sisu* into English (or any other language), but the word could mean determination, perseverance, hardiness, courage or willpower. It is a useful word to know to better understand the people, culture and society of Finland (Nyland 2018).

As a peasant, Jussi continues to struggle. His farming work is full of uncertainties even under a new landlord. He is told: 'This is just a temporary contract [Tämä on vain väliaikainen sopimus].' The narrator of the film succinctly describes his hardship. 'In short: Jussi was a tenant farmer [Lyhyesti sanoen: Jussi oli torppari].' Make no mistake, however; Jussi was not just another farmer—he was *torppari* filled with the spirit of *sisu*, determination.

The movie documents various actual events during the Russian rule of Finland and independence, leading up to the Civil War. Examples include the assassination of Governor-General Nikolai Bobrikov on 16 June 1904. Finland was part of Russia at the time and the Governor-General of Finland, appointed by Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, headed the Grand Duchy of Finland. The Finnish nationalist 29-year-old Eugen Schauman assassinated him in the Senate building in central Helsinki.[3] Under Governor-General Bobrikov's rule, Finland underwent the so-called Russification period, which garnered resistance in many ways.[4] As the local vicar Lauri Salpakari says in the film, 'A murder is a murder, but this case is different [Murha on murha, mutta tämä tapaus on erilainen].' This assassination may remind some people of the assassination of the Japanese Resident-General of Korea Itō Hirobumi, who was shot dead by 30-year-old Korean nationalist An Jung-gun on 26 October 1909, when Korea was about to be colonised by Japan.

Both the Red and White sides committed unlawful killings during and after the Civil War. The film does not shy away from describing this tragic aspect of the war.

[2] All translations are mine. This also applies to the Korean film.

[3] In fact, Schauman shot himself as well on the spot. Bobrikov did not immediately die, but died in the hospital. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this comment.

[4] Russification did not concern only Finland, but was part of the imperial effort to unify the diverse and bureaucratic administration of the empire. Finland, unlike for instance Poland, did not violently rebel against imperial administration at any point. The Finnish elites were divided in their opinion on how to respond to Russification. In this context, the view on outright colonisation of Finland could be a bit problematic. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this comment.

During the chaotic and violent period, Magnus the Baron in the village is killed as a result of the Red Terror. Aadolf Halme or Aatu, the chair of the socialist workers' association, condemns the killing. 'The murder of an old man is not a revolution! [Vanhan miehen murhaaminen ei ole vallankumousta!].' Aatu is on the Red side himself with an important position and thus his words cannot be easily dismissed. He has already warned his Red colleagues about the danger of the use of violence, even before the independence and war. 'Violence is an unfamiliar means for workers [Väkivalta on työväestölle vieras keino].' It is believed that the Reds experienced the Whites' violence in a more severe and systematic manner. For example, a lot of the Red prisoners of war died of hunger and mistreatment. Relevant scenes are portrayed in the film when Akseli Koskela, Jussi Koskela's eldest son and a Red Guard leader, is captured and sent to a prison camp.[5]

The Taebaek Mountains dramatised a ten-volume novel of the same title from 1983 to 1989 written by Jo Jung-rae, one of South Korea's most respected writers. Like the Finnish case, one of the country's most renowned directors, Lim Kwon-taek, made the film in 1994. Unlike the Finnish case, however, this work took a serious risk. Due to the sensitive nature of the novel, the writer Jo Jung-rae was subjected to a criminal investigation under the infamous National Security Law in April 1994: from the government's perspective, Jo's novels described North Korea and its leftist ideology in a humane and friendly manner, which was not compatible with the then state's dominant view. But Lim's film production went ahead and the movie was screened in September the same year. The work was received well, winning various film awards at several ceremonies. Meanwhile, a somewhat liked-minded film was released earlier. *North Korean Partisans in South Korea* or *Nambugun* (1990) was based on a novel of the same name in 1988, written by Lee Tae who had worked as a reporter for the Korean Central News Agency in North Korea and later for the North Korean Partisans in South Korea during the Korean War. It was also successful enough to become the second most popular film in that year. Together with this work, Lim's film demonstrated that the Korean War and more nuanced interpretations over the leftists could be both highly controversial and intriguing in South Korea, where democratisation was gradually taking place at that time.[6]

Part of the movie features the story of the Yom family with two brothers fighting each other as enemies. From the beginning, the film does not hesitate to address the issue of a deeply divided Korea by describing the Yeo-Sun Incident in October 1948. A group of the South Korean military in Yeosu and Suncheon, who were mostly left-leaning, refused to follow the order to suppress participants of the Jeju Uprising, which started in April 1948. Both the military members

[5] For those unfamiliar with Finnish history and society, it is necessary to clarify the ideological position of the Social Democratic Party before the Civil War. Social Democrats were not committed to actively seeking the opportunity to develop towards socialism. The quick escalation of the situation in 1917 and especially after the October Revolution made Finnish Social Democrats revolutionaries. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this comment.

[6] The film actually appears to distance itself from ideological preferences. Rather it focuses on the aspects of humanism and Korea as one nation. For instance, the seemingly-nationalist character Kim Bum-woo plays a crucial role throughout the film including in the very final scene.

of the Yeo-Sun Incident and people of the Jeju Uprising had one thing in common. They were by and large against the strongly anti-communist Syngman Rhee regime in the South and the US policy during and after the United States Army Military Government in Korea. The ideological divides, along with hardships of ordinary people, led to an upsurge of leftist forces in South Korea.

The hardships that ordinary people faced at the time are reflected in a scene where the leftist guerrilla leader Yom Sang-jin's wife is interrogated by a military officer. 'You should have stopped your husband from doing a communist activity. What's the point of communist activity whilst your children are starving?' The capitalism (the South) versus communism (the North) competition is well weaved into this narrative. It appears that the communists are already defeated by the huge score. That is, however, not the case. 'You should say it correctly. One becomes a communist, because children are starving. It is not that children are starving, just because one becomes a communist!'

The scene reveals another important aspect of the ideological divide in symbolic terms: how these divides even penetrated into the family circle. The military officer scolds Yom Sang-jin's wife when she does not cooperate with the interrogation to arrest her husband. This officer then says that she is not cooperative, because her brother-in-law is a high-ranking member of the police, Yom Sang-gu—she is taking advantage of this connection. She furiously responds. 'Do not even mention him in front of me. He is not my brother-in-law, but a sworn enemy. If he is a human being, he should not be so mean to his little nephews. He has not sent any food at all, when those kids are starving!' Indeed, the anti-communist police Yom Sang-gu has been an enemy to his older brother, the leftist leader Yom Sang-jin. It demonstrates the cruel nature of the ideological divides.

Their seemingly irreconcilable difference developes into a full-scale confrontation when their village falls under control of the leftists at the beginning of the Korean War. The younger brother Sang-gu, now escaping from a manhunt by the leftists, goes into hiding in a small underground place at Sang-jin's house. He is under protection by Sang-jin's wife and his mother. In the end, however, Sang-jin realises that his anti-communist brother is hiding right there. His wife tries to work out the situation. 'No matter what, he shares your bloodline. Furthermore, our family members are alive up until now [after a fierce anti-communist manhunt], thanks to your brother.' Indeed, in any case, they are brothers, the same family members. Likewise, South Korea and North Korea are one family. No matter what, they are the same nation and people. What a tragedy it is to kill each other.

But Sang-jin dismisses his wife's appeal and picks up his gun. He then disarms and confronts his brother. Sang-gu says. 'What are you doing now? Why don't you just shoot me?' 'Do not expect that I will leave you alive!' 'I don't want to beg for my life either. I just regret that I go away without killing all communists.' Sang-jin sighs. And yes, the Korean peninsula sighs, their people sigh. 'We were raised up together. We also went through poverty together. I don't know at all why you are doing this.' Sang-gu then criticises Sang-jin in many aspects. After a confrontational dialogue, however, Sang-jin decides to release his brother. He even gives a gun back to his brother, apparently a small sign for a seed of the potential for reconciliation.

Neighbours in reconciliations

It is not easy to achieve reconciliation in any post-war situation. The degree of difficulty has been reflected in part in the practices of commemoration. In the 1920s and 1930s, the official commemoration of the war in Finland was organised only for the victors, the Whites. 'The families of the Reds were not allowed to mourn or honour the memory of their dead in the public sphere' (Kinnunen 2014: 415). This culture gradually changed once Finland experienced World War II, particularly since the 1960s. The publication of Väinö Linna's novel was a landmark of this phase (Alapuro 2014: 33). World War II 'established for the first time shared commemorations of the Civil War victims' nationally and locally (Tepora 2014: 364). And President Urho Kekkonen promoted Red commemoration. It is important to recognise that Kekkonen himself participated in the execution of Reds in the war. It is also worth noting that the Red commemoration 'suited into the official Finnish post-World War II Soviet-friendly discourse' (Alapuro 2014: 416).

The question of how to commemorate the war is still a politically sensitive matter. As Aapo Roselius (2014: 297) points out, the problem 'derives not only from the fact that the adversaries continue to share the same public space after the conflict but also from the ideological concept of nation-state'. In 2008, President Tarja Halonen rejected an invitation to the White-oriented commemoration of the end of the war. Halonen still attended the commemoration event organised by leftist activists. This sparked controversy (Alapuro 2014: 414). In 2018, various efforts to bring reconciliation have been observed in the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the war. For example, President Sauli Niinistö (2018) made carefully measured remarks on collective wounds and reconciliation, stressing the importance of being honest or *rehellinen* about history. Furthermore, on the Commemoration Day of Fallen Soldiers, national representatives laid wreaths on monuments of both White and Red soldiers.[7]

The terror is another sensitive issue to consider. Both the Whites and Reds were associated with terror. At the same time, it should be noted that the White Terror was more severe than the Red Terror (Tepora and Roselius 2014: 9; Paavolainen 1966, 1967).

Meanwhile, the emergence of the so-called Lapua movement made any reconciliation measure harder. It was 'the Finnish variant of fascism' and a reaction to continue the war of liberation, attacking the legacy of the Reds (Alapuro 2002: 173). The Lapua movement failed and eventually was dissolved in 1932. An important step towards reconciliation was taken in 1937, when the centrist Agrarian Union formed a coalition government with the Social Democrats. It was a symbolic and significant move to release 'the Social Democrats from second-class citizenship' (Alapuro 2002: 173). About 60 years later in 1998, the Social Democrats government-funded project was launched to identify Finns killed in conflicts between 1914 and 1922. The overwhelming majority of the dead were victims of the Civil War.

[7] For more on the commemoration of the Finnish Civil War see, amongst others, Saarela (2014), which deals with the relations between the labour movement and the Civil War memory.

The year 1998 was also memorable in the sense that, for the first time, 'representatives of *all* parties assisted at a celebration in memory of the Red victims' (Alapuro 2002: 181, emphasis in original).[8]

In Korea, a turbulent and long way to achieve reconciliation is evidenced by this simple fact alone: a permanent peace treaty has not been signed yet. Let me elaborate further on the issue of reconciliation, with emphasis on the Southern side. In the South, there was a government agency to pursue reconciliation by investigating the Korean War: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). It investigated the massacres of civilians during the war.

In 2004, the liberal ruling party won the National Assembly election, gaining a majority of seats for the first time since 1961 (Kim 2010: 543). In the past, it was immensely difficult to investigate the wrongdoings of the state as these efforts were almost fiercely blocked by the ruling political establishments. With democratic transitions largely achieved by civil movements, however, there was now enough space for those seeking the justice and truth that had been suppressed by the past authoritarian regimes. The TRC was launched in December 2005. The Commission had six specific areas of interest, including massacres occurring from 15 August 1945 (National Liberation Day) to the Korean War period and incidents ranging from 15 August 1945 to the end of the authoritarian regimes (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2009: 14). Unfortunately, the organisation had to work within various limitations or restrictions. According to a sociology professor who served as one of the standing commissioners, 'the cold war political landscape limited the purpose and mandate of the articles in the new law' (Kim 2010: 544). As a result, the TRC's investigative authority was limited.

Once the Commission ceased to operate, civil society has continued to investigate the massacres and carried out their own exhumation project on a regular basis. Indeed, civil society actively engages with the issues of truth and reconciliation regarding the war.

Most of all, the National Association of Bereaved Families of Civilian Victims in the Korean War has a long and turbulent history. The families of civilians massacred in the Korean War launched the National Association in September 2000. But it would be more appropriate to say that they managed to *revive* the organisation. Their predecessor organisation was established back in 1960, a few months after the resignation of President Syngman Rhee, who held a strong anti-communist and anti-North Korean stance. The families raised a sensitive but undeniable issue of civilian killings committed by their own government forces—the Rhee government massacred numerous ordinary people who were falsely regarded as communists or North Korean sympathisers. Their activities however were severely repressed when the military general Park Chung-hee, another vigorous anti-communist figure, came to power. Under General Park, key members of the organisation were prosecuted

[8] It can be said that the 1998 project is regarded as a Finnish version of truth commissions. The thing is that the Finnish 'reconciliation' has been passive since the late 1930s and World War II set a new commemorative focus for the state (Tepora 2014). In this respect, it would be difficult to say that the Finnish case is similar to the Korean one. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this comment.

mainly because their campaign, the government claimed, could have potentially benefited North Korea. The National Association began to breathe again 40 years later. Partly thanks to this group's effort, the second-term TRC was launched in December 2020.

Reflection

The article has explored how Finland and Korea experienced the civil war and its aftermath. In the course of the investigation, going beyond conventional approaches to civil war studies, the article looked at the relevant historical films produced in Finland and Korea. I would never claim that this comparative project is a fully-fledged work. More research is definitely needed in terms of, for instance, underdeveloped subjects such as gender. It is however my hope that this article can serve as a stepping stone towards an in-depth comparative work on the civil wars in question. Building upon this research, one might pursue a broader line of inquiry, as mentioned at the beginning of the article, that looks into connections between the Nordic region and the Korean peninsula. One thing can be said clearly: both in Finland and Korea, the same people cheered together (at independence) and soon they feared each other (during civil war). No one can deny that Finland and Korea have been deeply shaped by their devastating civil wars.

The year 2018, marking significant anniversaries, was not taken lightly both in Finland and Korea. Finland commemorated the 100th anniversary of the Civil War—it was particularly special because Finland celebrated the centenary of its independence the previous year. In Korea, the 65th anniversary of the armistice was commemorated—through several historic summits North and South Korea promised to work together to conclude a peace agreement by the end of the year. However, the historical weight of the centenary or at least several decades proved to be heavy. The Finnish public broadcasting company delivered the news about its survey, suggesting that 68% of respondents believe that the Civil War still divides people in Finland (Palmolahti 2018).[9] Korea failed to reach any peace treaty as planned, despite the dramatic improvements in inter-Korean relations. Meanwhile, it is interesting to note that several working-level talks (including 'track 1.5' dialogues) between the USA and both Koreas took place in Nordic countries such as Finland and Sweden in 2018–2019.

The complex nature of reconciliation process becomes even more visible when the difference between the Finnish and Korean experiences are taken into account. Finland was not divided before and after the war, and the war lasted for about three months. Korea was physically divided before and after the war, and the war lasted for about three years (and it is still going on). If the war still haunts Finland even

[9] The divisions, however, should not be exaggerated. The Civil War memory divides people's sympathies, and it is a crack in the Finnish unity narrative. More importantly, the commemoration of World War II and the Winter War surpasses the one of the Civil War. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this comment.

after 100 years, then how difficult would the reconciliation process be in Korea? 'Experiences of history and effects of geopolitical location', not surprisingly, have long shaped Finland's ideas about peace, security and survival (Möttölä 1982: 287). Given the similar historical experiences and geopolitical constrains, that might also be the case for Korea. It remains to be seen how Finland and Korea can translate their historical burdens or tears into a wellspring so they can cultivate a better future under the North Star.

Acknowledgements I would like to convey sincere gratitude to the anonymous reviewers at *Asia Europe Journal* for their useful and considerate comments on the manuscript. Many thanks to my Finnish colleagues, amongst others, Lauri Paltemaa, Outi Luova, Silja Keva and Katri Kauhanen. *Kiitos paljon*. My gratitude also extends to Dean Ouellette.

Author contribution The article is the single author's own work.

Funding Open Access funding provided by University of Turku (including Turku University Central Hospital).

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate Not applicable.

Consent for publication The author's consent for publication is granted.

Competing interests The author declares no competing interests.

References

Åhäll L (2012) The writing of heroines: motherhood and female agency in political violence. Secur Dialogue 43(4):287–303

Ahlbäck A (2014) Masculinities and the ideal warrior: images of Jäger movement. In: Tepora T, Roselius A (eds) The Finnish Civil War 1918: History, Memory, Legacy. Leiden, Brill, pp 254–294

Alapuro R (1988) State and revolution in Finland. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles

Alapuro R (2002) Coping with the civil war of 1918 in twenty-first century in Finland. In: Cristie K, Cribb R (eds) Historical Injustice and Democratic Transitions in Eastern Asia and Northern Europe: Ghosts at the Table of Democracy. Routledge, London, pp 169–183

Alapuro R (2014) The legacy of the civil war of 1918 in Finland. In: Kissane B (ed) After Civil War: Division, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation in Contemporary Europe. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, pp 17–42

Balcells L (2010) Rivalry and revenge: violence against civilians in conventional civil wars. Int Stud Q 54(2):291–313

Balch-Lindsay D, Enterline AJ (2000) Killing time: the world politics of civil war duration, 1820-1992. Int Stud Q 44(4):615–642
Cederman L-E, Vogt M (2017) Dynamics and logics of civil war. J Confl Resolut 61(9):1992–2016
Collier P, Hoeffler A (2007) Civil War. In: Sandler T, Hartley K (eds) Handbook of Defense Economics, vol 2. North-Holland, Amsterdam, pp 711–739
COW (2019) The correlates of war project. Available at: https://www.correlatesofwar.org. Accessed 27 July 2019.
Cumings B (2011) The Korean war: a history. Modern Library, New York
Edwards PM (2013) United Nations participants in the Korean war: the contributions of 45 member countries. McFarland & Company, Jefferson
Enloe C (1993) The morning after: sexual politics at the end of the cold war. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles
Gleditsch KS (2007) Transnational dimensions of civil war. J Peace Res 44(3):293–309
Haapala P, Tikka M (2012) Revolution, civil war, and terror in Finland in 1918. In: Gerwarth R, Horne J (eds) War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp 72–84
Himberg P (2017) Täällä Pohjantähden alla -elokuva uhmasi uutta aaltoa ja syntyi pystypäin vanhana [The movie Under the North Star resisted the new wave and was born old upright]. Available at: https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2017/12/19/taalla-pohjantahden-alla-elokuva-uhmasi-uutta-aaltoa-ja-syntyi-pystypain. Accessed 25 July 2019.
Jentzsch C, Kalyvas SN, Schubiger LI (2015) Militias in civil war. J Confl Resolut 59(5):755–769
Kekkonen J (2012) Judicial repression during and after the Finnish (1918) and Spanish (1936-1939) civil wars: a comparative analysis. In: De Koster M et al (eds) Justice in Wartime and Revolutions: Europe, 1795-1950. Brussels, Algemeen Rijksarchief, pp 57–72
Kim D-C (2010) The long road toward truth and reconciliation: unwavering attempts to achieve justice in South Korea. Crit Asian Stud 42(4):525–552
Kim S (2006) Wooriga Jiun Eolgul [The Face We Erased]. Hankyoreh, Seoul
Kinnunen T (2014) The post-cold war memory culture of the civil war: old-new patterns and new approaches. In: Tepora T, Roselius A (eds) The Finnish Civil War 1918: History, Memory, Legacy. Leiden, Brill, pp 401–439
Laitinen R (ed) (2018) Sisaret 1918 [Sisters 1918]. Arktinen Banaani, Espoo
Lintunen T (2014) Women at War. In: Tepora T, Roselius A (eds) The Finnish Civil War 1918: History, Memory, Legacy. Leiden, Brill, pp 201–229
McEvoy S (2010) Loyalist women paramilitaries in Northern Ireland: beginning a feminist conversation about conflict resolution. In: Sjoberg L (ed) Gender and International Security. Routledge, London, pp 129–150
Morgenthau HJ (1978) Politics among nations: the struggle for power and peace, 5th edn. Alfred A. Knopf, New York
Möttölä K (1982) The politics of neutrality and defense: Finnish security policy since the early 1970s. Cooperation Conflict 17(4):287–313
Niinistö S (2018) Tasavallan presidentti Sauli Niinistön uudenvuodenpuhe 1.1.2018 [President of the Republic Sauli Niinistö's New Year's Speech on 1 January 2018]. Available at: https://www.presidentti.fi/puheet/tasavallan-presidentti-sauli-niiniston-uudenvuodenpuhe-1-1-2018. Accessed 25 July 2019.
Nyland J (2018) Sisu: The Finnish Art of Courage. Gaia, London
Orberdorfer D (1997) The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History. Basic Books, New York
Paavolainen J (1966) Poliittiset väkivaltaisuudet Suomessa 1918, osa 1: Punainen terrori [Political Violence in Finland in 1918, Part 1: The Red Terror]. Helsinki, Tammi
Paavolainen J (1967) Poliittiset väkivaltaisuudet Suomessa 1918, osa 2: Valkoinen terrori [Political Violence in Finland in 1918, Part 2: The White Terror]. Tammi, Helsinki
Palmolahti, H (2018) Vuoden 1918 sota jakaa yhä kansaa, vaikka enemmistö seisoo juoksuhautojen välissä [The War of 1918 still divides the nation/people, although the majority stands between the trenches]. Available at: https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-10014896. Accessed 25 July 2019.
Park-Kang S (2014) Fictional International Relations: Gender, Pain and Truth. Routledge, London
Regan PM (2016) Sixteen million one: understanding civil war. Routledge, London
Roselius A (2014) The war of liberation, the civil guards, and the veteran's union: public memory in the interwar period. In: Tepora T, Roselius A (eds) The Finnish Civil War 1918: History, Memory, Legacy. Leiden, Brill, pp 297–330

Rosenau JN (ed) (1964) International Aspects of Civil Strife. Princeton University Press, Princeton
Saarela T (2014) To commemorate or not: the finnish labor movement and the memory of the civil war in the interwar period. In: Tepora T, Roselius A (eds) The Finnish Civil War 1918: History, Memory, Legacy. Leiden, Brill, pp 331–363
Saxer CJ (2017) The Korea question and the Nordic response: from war participation to diplomatic recognition. Korea J 57(1):128–152
Sjoberg L, Gentry CE (2007) Mothers, monsters, whores: women's violence in global politics. Zed Books, London
Tepora T (2014) Changing perceptions of 1918: World War II and Post-War Rise of the left. In: Tepora T, Roselius A (eds) The Finnish Civil War 1918: History, Memory, Legacy. Leiden, Brill, pp 364–400
Tepora T, Roselius A (2014) Introduction: the Finnish civil war, revolution and scholarship. In: Tepora T, Roselius A (eds) The Finnish Civil War 1918: History, Memory, Legacy. Leiden, Brill, pp 1–18
Tikka M (2014) Warfare and terror in 1918. In: Tepora T, Roselius A (eds) The Finnish Civil War 1918: History, Memory, Legacy. Leiden, Brill, pp 90–118
Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2009) Truth and reconciliation: activities of the past three years. Samin Publishing Co., Seoul
UCDP (2019) UCDP: Uppsala Conflict Data Program. Available at: https://ucdp.uu.se. Accessed 27 July 2019.
Weber C (2005) International relations theory: a critical introduction, 2nd edn. Routledge, London
Weldes J (1999) Going cultural: Star Trek, state action, and popular culture. Millenn J Int Stud 28(1):117–134