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Author(s): Koskinen-Koivisto, Eerika

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Contested and Ambivalent Heritage: Revisiting Responses to the Second World War Heritage of Finnish Lapland from the Perspective of Affects

EERIKA KOSKINEN-KOVISTO

Introduction: Multivocal, Affective, and Emotional Heritage

Cultural heritage comprises sites, things, and practices that a society regards as old, important, and worthy of conservation. To recognize something as cultural heritage is a product of a complex process of valuing and selecting. In the process of valuing and selecting cultural heritage, the meanings adhering to it are continuously created, recreated, and validated for the present situation.¹ Therefore, heritage values are dynamic and apt to change. In addition, they are also political and *emotional*, and connected to such issues as cultural, national, and local identity which materialize through embodied engagement with both intangible and tangible cultural heritage.²

Considering the emphasis of contemporary heritage studies on political and emotional aspects of heritage, it is important to ask why do we want to treat something as cultural heritage, and what do we then cherish, celebrate, and remember? And following this, when doing so, what falls outside of this category? What do we want to neglect, ignore, and forget? In this paper, I will introduce examples of heritage sites that relate to Second World War history of Finland (henceforth WWII) which are somehow problematic and can thus be considered as *contested, difficult, or ambivalent heritage*. The sites that I have studied and visited as part of multidisciplinary research on WWII material heritage are both contradictory and *evocative*. In this article, I ponder upon different

¹ Sharon MacDonald, *Memorylands: Heritage and Identity in Europe Today* (Abingdon 2013); Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (New York 2006).

² Divia Tolia-Kelly, Emma Waterton & Steve Watson, "Introduction: Heritage, Affect and Emotion", in Divia Tolia-Kelly, Emma Waterton & Steve Watson (eds.), *Heritage, Affect and Emotion: Politics, Practices and Infrastructures* (London 2017), pp. 1–11; Margaret Wetherell, Laurajane Smith & Gary Campbell, "Introduction: Affective Heritage Practices", in Laurajane Smith, Margaret Wetherell & Gary Campbell (eds.), *Emotion, Affective Practices, and the Past in the Present: Key Issues in Cultural Heritage* (London 2018), pp. 1–21.

interpretations and reactions to engaging with and representing this contested heritage, asking what makes this heritage evocative, and *affective*: How do different people react to it and why? These questions also relate to both methodological and ethical questions related to cultural heritage: how can we gain knowledge about the affective relationships with heritage and be sensitive to differing views and interpretations of heritage without defying altering views?

The cases that I introduce here derive from the research project *Lapland's Dark Heritage – Understanding the Cultural Legacy of Northern Finland's WWII German Materialities* (Academy of Finland, 2015–2018) in which I, as a part of multidisciplinary research groups of archaeologists, museum and cultural heritage scholars, studied the engagements with the WWII material heritage in Finnish Lapland. The research material I use is conducted via ethnographic fieldwork (field visits to WWII heritage sites and museums of Finnish Lapland in 2015–2016) and includes fieldnotes, photographs, and interviews. In this article I revisit this research material and my former analysis of the values and meanings adhered to WWII heritage sites, applying methodological and theoretical underpinnings stemming from my current research projects *Sensory and Material Memories* (SENSOMEMO, Academy of Finland 2020–2024),³ in which we explore affective materiality and human-objects relationships and are especially interested in the ways in which affects, senses, materiality, and memory intertwine as well as the project *Smokestack Memories* (Kone Foundation 2021–2023), studying industrial heritage sites and the ongoing negotiations of their future. The majority of these sites we study have not received an official heritage status but are either somehow reused or in a state of neglect and decay. In the project we scrutinize the ways in which local people and visitors experience the sites and their material environment. Both projects emphasize the emotional and affective responses to materiality and cultural heritage, dimensions that are also characterized as more-than-textual embodied approaches heritage research.⁴ According to Margaret Wetherell, Laurajane Smith, and Gary Campbell these approaches allow us to “deepen our understanding of how people develop attachments and commitments to the past, things, beliefs, places, traditions and institutions.”⁵ Furthermore, focusing on emotion can also reveal tensions that are both emotionally and discursively constructed as people explain and thus

³ SENSOMEMO project decision number: 334247.

⁴ Tolia-Kelly, Waterton & Watson (2017).

⁵ Wetherell, Smith & Campbell (2018) p. 2.

reconsider their attachments to things and sites regarded as heritage. In my analysis of attachment and encounters with WWII heritage I pay attention to both discursive and experiential dimensions of people's responses to cultural heritage.

What is Contested Heritage? Is There Such a Thing as Uncontested Heritage?

Uses of heritage and G. J. Ashworth stated that dissonance is intrinsic to the nature of heritage, because heritage processes always entail questions of ownership, interpretation, and multiple uses.⁶ According to Helaine Silverman, who has analysed the historiography of the concept of contested history, acknowledging differing interpretations of heritage can be considered as a shift in the heritage paradigm which recognizes the role of power in the construction of history and the production of identity.⁷ These questions are especially emergent in former colonial states and societies, as recognized by critical cultural heritage scholars.

Power differences already exist between the authorized heritage professionals and heritage activists of local communities. This is because the authorized heritage discourse often excludes local understandings of nature and history.⁸ Sensitivity to listen to the interpretations of local communities is of the utmost importance in documenting and managing of cultural heritage. Local communities can be involved in these processes, e.g. through public archaeology projects⁹ and/or collecting of public oral history¹⁰ which aim at democratic and multidisciplinary approaches.

In many cases, local heritage sites are of interest to small or larger-scale heritage tourism or other businesses. The process of commercialization of heritage can be twofold: it has been noted that heritage status and heritage management can stimulate local economies, help to conserve built heritage, and

⁶ J. E. Tunbridge & G. J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict* (Chichester 1996).

⁷ Helaine Silverman, "Contested Cultural Heritage: A Selective Historiography", in Helaine Silverman (ed.), *Contested Cultural Heritage: Religion, Nationalism, Erasure, and Exclusion in a Global World* (New York 2011) pp. 1–49.

⁸ Smith (2006).

⁹ E.g. Iain Banks, Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto & Oula Seitsonen, "Public Engagements with Lapland's Dark Heritage: Community Archaeology in Finnish Lapland", *Journal of Community Archaeology and Heritage* 5:2 (2018) pp. 128–137.

¹⁰ E.g. Linda Shopes, "Oral History and the Study of Communities. Problems, Paradoxes, and Possibilities", *The Journal of American History* 89:2 (2002) pp. 588–598.

strengthen local identities, but in some cases the use of heritage in tourism business may lead to situations in which the host communities and their history become alienated from the process as their traditions and places turn into stages of economic exchange.¹¹ On the other hand, in some cases the tourism sector agents may also ignore and refuse to engage with heritage that is somehow difficult or problematic.¹² When it comes to the role of difficult and dark heritage in heritage tourism, it is interesting to consider the perspective of tourists and visitors by analysing the experiential dimensions of heritage.¹³ What kind of experiences are expected when visiting cultural heritage sites? What do visitors expect to encounter and how are they affected by the contradictions embedded in difficult and dark heritage?

I will illustrate some affective and emotional responses to WWII material heritage and heritage sites in Finnish Lapland and discuss the varying interests of people who engage with this heritage such as local communities and groups of history hobbyists, and visitors/tourists who encounter the sites when visiting them. I will also reflect upon the questions of curating and representing the WWII history of Finnish Lapland, and in so doing I discuss different conceptualizations of contested heritage such as difficult, dark heritage and ambivalent considering their limitations and analytical potential in studying contested heritage.

Difficult and Dark Heritage of WWII German Presence in Finnish Lapland

The concept of *difficult heritage* emphasizes that some groups may perceive certain heritage troublesome in today's perspective. According to Sharon McDonald, difficult heritage is "concerned with histories and pasts that do not easily fit with self-identities of the groups of whose pasts or histories they are

¹¹ See Brian Graham, "Heritage as Knowledge: Capital or Culture?", *Urban Studies* 39 (2002) pp. 1003–17.

¹² See e.g. Vesa-Pekka Herva, "Haunting Heritage in an Enchanted Land: Magic, Materiality and Second World War German Material Heritage in Finnish Lapland", *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 1:2 (2014), pp. 297–321. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1558/jca.v1i2.95>>; Mullins, Paul. "Consuming Dark Histories in Santa Claus Village." *Archaeology and Material Culture* (blog), September 22, 2014. Accessed June 30, 2016. <<https://paulmullins.wordpress.com/2014/09/22/consuming-dark-histories-in-santaclaus-village>>

¹³ See e.g. Shanti Sumartojo, "Sensory Impact: Memory, Affect and Sensory Ethnography at Official Memory Sites", in Danielle Drozdewski & Carolyn Birdsall (eds.), *Doing Memory Research: New Methods and Approaches* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 21–37. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-1411-7_2>

part”.¹⁴ The notion of “difficult heritage” raises important questions regarding the dis/continuity of national, collective, and individual identities. MacDonald, who has studied the perceived agency of Nazi architecture, warns that Nazi heritage should not be treated as “normal” heritage because it risks revitalizing its agency. On the other hand, it should not be eradicated either.¹⁵

One of the darker chapters in Finnish history is the alliance with Nazi Germany during the World War II. After the Finnish-Soviet “Winter War” (1939–40), Finland, believing that a new conflict with the Soviet Union would arise, allied with Germany. As a result, about 200 000 German troops arrived in Finland, mostly in Finnish Lapland. During their time in Finnish Lapland, German troops established several military bases and military airports, the largest of them in the city of Rovaniemi, built thousands of kilometres of new roads with the help of prisoners of war that they brought with them from Central Europe. The German presence in Finnish Lapland from the end of 1940 lasted until 1944 when, as part of the conditions of peace with the Soviet Union, Finland had to take up arms and fight against their former German brothers-in-arms. Withdrawing to Norway, the German army destroyed not only their own settlements but also 90 per cent of local infrastructure and dwellings.

The WWII German material heritage in Finnish Lapland is not a typical case of material heritage since there are very few actual heritage sites or fine artefacts but merely ruins and remnants of structures destroyed in the 1944–45 Lapland War, war junk, and small artefacts from soldiers that people have kept or found.¹⁶ The material remains, however, are plentiful, and they are part of local landscape.

¹⁴ Sharon MacDonald, “Difficult Heritage: Unsettling History”, in Marie-Paule Jungblut & Rosemarie Beier-de Haan (eds.), *Museums and Universal Heritage: History in the Area of Conflict between Interpretation and Manipulation* (International Committee for Museums and Collections of Archaeology and History 2008) pp. 8–15.

¹⁵ Sharon MacDonald. *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond* (London 2009).

¹⁶ We have analysed the engagements with material objects in several articles, e.g. Vesa-Pekka Herva, Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, Oula Seitsonen & Suzie Thomas, “‘I Have Better Stuff at Home’: Treasure Hunters and Serious Collectors of World War II Artefacts in Finnish Lapland”, *World Archaeology* 48: 2 (2016) pp. 267–281. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00438243.2016.1184586>>; Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto & Suzie Thomas, “Lapland’s Dark Heritage: Responses to the Legacy of World War II”, in Helaine Silverman, Emma Waterton, and Steve Watson (eds.), *Heritage in Action: Making of Past in the Present* (Cham 2017) pp. 121–133; Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto & Suzie Thomas, “Remembering and Forgetting, Discovering and Cherishing – Engagements with Material Culture of War in Finnish Lapland”, *Ethnologia Fennica* 36 (2018) pp. 28–54. <<https://doi.org/10.23991/ef.v45i0.60647>>

After the war and up until today, Finns have generally tried to distance themselves from the German war efforts, and thus Finnish people have been reluctant to engage too closely with this aspect of national history. Therefore, the national narratives of WWII in Finland have not paid much attention to the final chapter of WWII events, the Lapland War, and its traumatizing effects on the local residents. The way of representing WWII in Finland in two phases, as the Winter and the Continuation Wars, place the Lapland War as an epilogue of the latter, a scene that happened far in the north after the peace was already set.¹⁷ In recent years, researchers have paid attention to this discrepancy, and analysed the silences and taboos related to the war experiences of the residents of Finnish Lapland and the narratives about them.¹⁸

In the research project *Lapland's Dark Heritage*, we studied the engagements with remnants of military structures and small artefacts connected to German soldiers, prisoners of war, and civilians. We interviewed official heritage agents and museum professionals, various history-hobbyists and hobbyist groups who study, document, or collect WWII material heritage or guide and manage WWII heritage sites, as well as local people who live next to WWII German material remains. We were interested in finding out how different communities relate to aspects about the past that may be difficult or painful to reconcile, and why people are attracted to objects and places of conflict, pain, suffering and death and why they want to engage with this heritage that can be considered *dark heritage*.¹⁹ We found out that this attraction bears links not only to specialized activities like

¹⁷ Marja Tuominen, "Lapin ajanlasku: Menneisyys, tulevaisuus ja jälleenrakennus historian reunalla", in Ville Kivimäki & Kirsi-Maria Hytönen (eds.), *Rauhaton rauha: Suomalaiset ja sodan päättymisen 1944–1950* (Vastapaino, 2015) pp. 39–70.

¹⁸ E.g. Nina Säaskilahti, "Ruptures and Returns: From Loss of Memory to the Memory of a Loss", *Ethnologia Fennica* 40 (2013): 40–53; Nina Säaskilahti, "Konfliktinjälkeiset kulttuuriympäristöt, muisti ja materiaalisuus" (Post-conflict cultural environments, memory and materiality), *Tahiti: taidehistoria tieteenä* (2016/1). <<http://tahiti.fi/01-2016/tieteelliset-artikkelit/konfliktinjälkeiset-kulttuuriymparistot-muisti-ja-materiaalisuus/>>; Lehtola, Veli-Pekka, "Second World War as a Trigger for Transcultural Changes among Sámi People in Finland." *Acta Borealia* 32: 2 (2015), pp. 125–147. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/08003831.2015.1089673>>; Kaisa Hiltunen & Nina Säaskilahti, "Post Memory and Cinematic Affect in *The Midwife*", *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 9:1 (2017). <<https://doi.org/10.1080/20004214.2016.1273594>>; Marja Tuominen & Mervi Löfgren. *Lappi palaa sodasta* (Vastapaino, 2018).

¹⁹ The concept refers to the potential dark force of heritage, to the interest in and fascination with death, war, and other atrocities, and to a motivation to engage with it. E.g. Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, "Reminder of Dark Heritage of Humankind – Experiences of Finnish Cemetery Tourists of Visiting the Norvajärvi German Cemetery", *Thanatos* 5:1 (2016), pp. 23–41. The term is also related to the phenomenon of "dark tourism", an interest in graves, battlefields, and other macabre scenes or burial sites. See Philip Stone, "A Dark Tourism Spectrum: Towards a Typology of Death and Macabre Related Tourist Sites, Attractions and Exhibitions", *Tourism: An Interdisciplinary International Journal* 54: 2 (2006) pp. 145–160.

“dark tourism” (exploring and visiting dark places), but also to other activities of treasure hunting, looting, and collecting of war memorabilia.²⁰ There are, however, varying motivations driving tourists and visitors, local history hobbyists, and heritage activists.²¹

Difficult and Dark to Whom?

In our research, we noticed that not all local people see WWII heritage as difficult or especially traumatic. For many of our interviewees, it is a chapter of their own history that their family has witnessed and that younger generations have learned through stories and childhood play. The motivations to engage with it as a hobby lie in safeguarding local heritage, raising awareness of its existence, and also in making it part of the national WWII narrative.²² Some of the people we have interviewed in different parts of Lapland have even reacted to the title of our research, namely, the very use of the term “dark heritage”. Those who have expressed concern to us about the concept have assumed that it suggests a negative attitude towards the war and military historical hobbies, demonizing the Germans and criticizing the Finno-German alliance.

Among our interviewees there were also first-hand witnesses to the German period in Lapland and the Lapland War. These include elderly people of the Southernmost Sámi Village and reindeer herding community, Vuotso located in Sodankylä, where German had a large military complex. The community wanted us to interview elders who shared with us very touching stories about their war experiences, evacuation, the complete destruction of their home village, and the aftermath of war. We learned that the stories of difficult and painful periods also included stories of hope. Indeed, the interviewees also expressed that their motivation for sharing the stories is to provide their version of this chapter of history so that it would not happen anywhere again.²³

During our research we discovered several individuals and communities in different parts of Lapland who see a potential in making the war heritage sites, even the darkest ones, accessible to visitors, at least by putting up signs to WWII sites. We discovered an interesting example of this in the tiny village of

²⁰ See Herva et al. (2016).

²¹ See Koskinen-Koivisto & Thomas (2017).

²² Herva et al. 2016; Koskinen-Koivisto & Thomas (2017).

²³ See Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto & Oula Seitsonen, “Landscapes of Loss and Destruction. Sámi Elders’ Childhood Memories of the Second World War”, *Ethnologia Europaea* 49:1 (2019) pp. 24–40. <<https://doi.org/10.16995/ee.816>>

Purnumukka next to Vuotso. The local village society erected an information board about the history of the location close to the area that was a German prisoner of war camp during WWII. Along with other narratives of the history of the area, the board depicts a dark history of the presence of a “hanging” pine where Germans hanged several prisoners. According to our interviewees, this place has been acknowledged and remembered in a ritualistic manner in the post-war decades: people who passed the tree used to stop at that spot, and honour with silence what it symbolizes. Some local people still do this even though the hanging tree fell years ago.²⁴



Image 1: The information sign in the Purnumukka village, Vuotso. Photo by Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto 2015.

The people that we interviewed believe that information and signs make the local history – including its dark and painful chapters – visible and acknowledged. Another example we found was that a local entrepreneur (reindeer herder) had set up geocaches in the WWII sites of his locality in Inari. Despite some local efforts, there is still silence around the existence of WWII dark heritage sites such

²⁴ For more about the interviews with local Vuotso people see e.g. Oula Seitsonen & Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, “Where the F... is Vuotso?” Material Memories of Second World War Forced Movement and Destruction in a Sámi Reindeer Herding Community in Finnish Lapland”, *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 24:4 (2018) pp. 421–441. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2017.1378903>; Koskinen-Koivisto & Seitsonen (2019).

as prisoner of war camps. Next, I will analyse the silence and neglect around German WWII heritage occurring in tourist destinations and museums.

Silence and Oblivion in the Tourism and Museum Scene

During our fieldwork in Lapland, we discovered sites that have been deliberately avoided and thus collectively forgotten. These kinds of places have been seen as sites of forgetting or oblivion (*lieux d'oubli*) that are avoided because of “the disturbing affect that their invocation is still capable of arousing”.²⁵ Some of these sites are located in the plain wilderness far away from human settlements, but interestingly enough, there are also those located right next to tourist attractions. One of them is Santa’s Village, the most popular tourist attraction of Rovaniemi, built right on the site of a former German Military base.²⁶ This information is not indicated anywhere in the area and the former military history of the area is not used in any way in the tourism business. WWII history is clearly problematic when it comes to international tourism, and this is understandable.



Image 2: WWII remains near Santa Claus Village, Rovaniemi. Photo by Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, 2015.

²⁵ Nancy Wood, *Vectors of Memory: Legacies of Trauma in Post-war Europe* (Oxford 1999).

²⁶ See Herva (2014); Mullins (2014).



Image 3: The archaeologist Oula Seitsonen scrutinizing war junk near Santa Claus Village, Rovaniemi. Photo by Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, 2015.

Another example is from the National Museum of the Finnish Sámi in Inari, Siida. During our research we also visited local and national museums that are either responsible for documenting and safeguarding WWII history or are located in areas where central events of WWII battles occurred.²⁷ When visiting Siida and interviewing the staff members there, we discovered that the Siida Museum is located next to a former German prisoner of war camp. This fact is not mentioned anywhere. There are some trenches in the outdoor museum area of Siida, which are rather invisible and hidden. They are part of the museum tour but the information about them can only be obtained through a mobile application. WWII is also almost invisible in the main exhibition of Siida. German presence in Finnish Lapland is not mentioned at all; not even in the case of major road building projects in the Sámi areas or destruction caused by the retreating German army. The only time the consequences of WWII are mentioned is in relation to the Skolt Sámi who lived in the Pechanga (Petsamo) area that the Soviet Union annexed in 1944. The texts explain about the process of resettlement that resulted in the erosion of Skolt culture and the loss of traditional livelihood that depended on their nomadic way of life and reindeer herding.

The silence about German-Sámi relations extends to research: there is a lack of research about war operations and trade between Sámi and Germans, even if it has been noted by the Sámi historian Veli-Pekka Lehtola that WWII brought a monetary economy even to the most remote Sámi areas.²⁸

²⁷ See Suzie Thomas & Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, “‘Ghosts in the Background’ and the ‘Price of the War’: Representations of the Lapland War in Finnish Museums”, *Nordisk Museologi* 2016 (2) pp. 60–77. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5617/nm.4411>>

²⁸ Veli-Pekka Lehtola. *Saamelaiset Suomalaiset: Kohtaamisia 1896–1953* (Finnish Literature Society, 2012).



Images 4 and 5: Trench and information signs with QR codes at the Outdoor Museum of Siida. Photos by Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, 2015.

In theorizing the politics of commemoration, Jay Winter has divided the silences around war into three categories: (1) Liturgic silence motivated by loss and grief; (2) strategic and political silence that aims at balancing the contradictory ideologies and views of the past, and (3) essentializing silence that indicates who

is entitled to speak about the memories of war.²⁹ In the case of Siida, the silence might be interpreted as strategic silence. One of the reasons may be that discussing the Nazi ideology and its hierarchies of races, setting the Sámi lower than Finns, would have been too sensitive a topic. But it is interesting that the material destruction during the Lapland War and its effects on Sámi livelihoods are also downplayed. Perhaps at time in the 1990s when the museum's permanent exhibition was created, local communities were not yet ready to discuss the drastic effects of the WWII on Sámi cultures. Furthermore, the experiences of the Sámi differ noticeably from the hegemonic "national story" and relate to the area's complex colonial past and emergent postcolonial themes which were long neglected and are still sensitive issues.³⁰

Experiencing Dark Heritage Sites

Recently, researchers interested in affective dimensions of heritage have developed approaches to study the experiential side of cultural heritage, being interested in how visitors themselves define heritage sites, on their own terms, and consider their meanings as contextualized by their own thoughts and feelings (Sumartojo 2019). Ben Anderson (2014, 12) has suggested that we should study memory sites as complex "specific types of relational configurations" in which historical narratives are folded into the memories and sensory experiences of individuals who encounter them.

One possibility to familiarize oneself with WWII history in Finnish Lapland is to visit the only official memorial of WWII German presence in Finnish Lapland, The Norvajärvi German Military Cemetery close to Rovaniemi. The cemetery is located in a scenic spot by a lake on a pine forest cape about 18 kilometres from the centre of Rovaniemi. It is close enough to the city to be reached by driving or biking. The distant location and peace it offered were a wish on the part of German Association who wanted the cemetery to be located close

²⁹ Jay Winter, "Thinking about Silence", in Ezran Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio & Jay Winter (eds.), *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge 2010) pp. 3–31.

³⁰ See Magdalena Naum & Jonas M. Nordin, "Introduction: Situating Scandinavian Colonialism", in Magdalena Naum & Jonas M. Nordin (eds.), *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity: Small-Time Agents in a Global Arena* (New York 2013) pp. 3–16.

Jukka Nyssönen, "Sami Counter-narratives of Colonial Finland: Articulation, Reception and the Boundaries of the Politically Possible", *Acta Borealia* 30:1 (2013) pp. 101–121. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/08003831.2013.776738>>; Lehtola (2015).

to nature.³¹ There are no individual graves at the cemetery, but a granite mausoleum under which the remains of approximately 2,700 fallen German soldiers are buried and where all their names, military ranks, and time and place of death appear carved in the stone. There is also a memorial consisting of stone and a large cross made of iron, standing to commemorate the lives of unknown and disappeared soldiers.

Although the Norvajärvi cemetery has received many German visitors over the 50 years of its existence, the main visitor group consists of Finns. Every year, the site receives about 10,000 visitors. Approximately 20 per cent of them are foreign and only half of these German.



³¹ Since the First World War, fallen German soldiers have been buried to large hero cemeteries located at the battlefield. These cemeteries were meant to be as simple as possible, symbolizing wartime in the new German nation. They were placed in natural environments as part of the forest landscape. The use of natural materials such as carved stone was also advocated. See George L. Mosse, "National Cemeteries and National Revival: The Cult of the Fallen Soldiers in Germany." *Journal of Contemporary History* 14 (1/1979) pp. 1–20.



Images 6 and 7. The Mausoleum of the Norvajärvi German Cemetery. Photo 6 by Suzie Thomas, photo 7 by Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, 2015.

When I studied visitor responses to the German WWII military cemetery in Finnish Lapland, I learned that for the Finnish visitors who ended up writing about their visitor experience in their personal blogs or travelogues, engagements with dark heritage enforced critical reflection over the universal consequences of war in the history of mankind.³² The mausoleum at the cemetery embodies death, but also grief and commemoration. Encountering these brings the abstract and distant war close and concrete. As Lindsey Freeman, Benjamin Nienass, and Rachel Daniell note, “we rarely remember through ideas only, but rather through our encounters with things and through embodiments and dis embodiments collected in material traces and objects”.³³

Another way of grasping the experiential side would be to analyse the visitor experience by applying sensory ethnography, an approach that puts the emphasis on the researcher’s own sensory participation and imagination.³⁴ As mentioned before, we visited a number of the WWII sites located in the wilderness Lapland. The experience of accessing the sites, being there and sensing the atmosphere, is important and indeed affective, and adds a significant embodied layer of knowledge to the analysis of encounters with contested heritage. There are, however, many limitations to this approach, one being the difficulty of becoming aware and verbalizing the multisensory experiences.³⁵

Conclusions

It is important that we do not erase and forget history that is somehow negative or difficult. Cangbai Wang uses the term *ambivalent heritage* to describe heritage that is “unsettled” and confusing.³⁶ According to him, *ambivalent* is a better term than *contested* when people do not know how they should interpret and represent the physical remains of the past. “Ambivalent heritage” confuses people more than it pains them. Recent research on affects and emotional engagements with

³² See Koskinen-Koivisto (2016).

³³ Lindsay A. Freeman, Benjamin Nienass & Rachel Daniell, “Memory, Materiality, Sensuality”, *Memory Studies* 9:1 (2016) pp. 3–12.

³⁴ Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (Sage, 2009); Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto & Tytti Lehtovaara, “Embodied Adventures: An Experiment on Doing and Writing Multisensory Ethnography”, in Tuuli Lähdesmäki, Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, Viktorija L.A. Čeginskas & Aino-Kaisa Koistinen (eds.) *Challenges and Solutions in Ethnographic Research: Ethnography with a Twist* (Routledge, 2020) pp. 21–35.

³⁵ Koskinen-Koivisto & Lehtovaara (2020).

³⁶ Cangbai Wang, “Ambivalent Heritage: The Im/Possibility of Museumifying the Overseas Chinese in South China.” *Modern China* 46:6 (2020) pp. 559–584.
<<https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700419878801>>

cultural heritage has emphasized that materiality and object can help us to make sense of the painful and difficult issues of the past.³⁷

The embodiment of history and understanding of abstract issues of the past is also one of the motivations driving visitors to physical sites related to war heritage. Much of the physical traces of the past are still visible in the landscape, and difficult experiences live in the stories of communities, as among the Sámi villages of Finnish Lapland. Both local people and visitors (tourists) wish to engage with these traces and narratives. It seems that especially the local communities wish to reach beyond the silences around the WWII German presence and the traumatic destruction of the area caused by the Lapland War between Finland and Germany. Many museums have also long neglected the WWII history of the area. There are also very few monuments embodying and bearing witness to the past. However, some individuals and communities are seeking ways in which they could make their history visible, e.g. by setting information signs at historical war sites. These concrete physical renderings of the dissonant and ambivalent history are important if we wish to expand the national narratives of WWII to include experiences in peripheral areas, and find nuances, including hope to overcome simplifying and denoting historical narratives. I believe that people of different generations and backgrounds visiting Lapland are ready to encounter and experience sites embodying the contested and difficult heritage of WWII. Unfortunately, contested heritage and reuse of WWII history is a hot topic in today's Europe. When considering all this, we can agree that it is of the utmost importance that scholars studying the uses of the past should continue to engage especially with difficult and ambivalent issues when discussing the varied interpretations and understandings of the past, and the ways in which the past experiences continue to affect communities throughout the world.

³⁷ See e.g. Sarah De Nardi, *The Poetics of Conflict Experience: Materiality and Embodiment in Second World War Italy* (Abingdon 2016); Koskinen-Koivisto & Seitsonen (2019).