‘‘An Imperial War Experience in the Grand Duchy of Finland:

Perceptions of Local People and Correspondents in Finnish Newspapers during the Russian-Ottoman War (1877-1878)’’

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1 Introduction

The Russian-Ottoman War in 1877-1878 (known as '*Turkin sota*' in Finnish literature), which lasted for almost eleven months and was fought on Balkans and Caucasian fronts, was decisively a war that that changed the international equilibrium and gave rise to universal consequences. Alongside the socio-cultural, demographic, economic, and political depressions brought upon the Ottoman Empire, the war substantially reshaped the Caucasus and the Balkans, resulting in the foundation of new states in the Balkans where nearly six million people now live.[1] The Russian-Ottoman War constituted a transformative moment, not only for the empires involved but also for peripheral regions of the Russian Empire inhabited by non-Russian populations. Notably, it profoundly affected both ethnic majorities and minority groups serving in the imperial army, including Finns, Estonians, and Prussians, reshaping political loyalties, social experiences, and emerging national consciousness.

The Grand Duchy of Finland was one of fourteen military districts within the Russian Imperial Army's administrative system: the others ranged from Saint Petersburg to Eastern Siberia.[2] During the Russian-Ottoman War, Finland contributed soldiers through two waves of conscription. Firstly, 900-1,114 soldiers[3] of the 3rd Finnish Infantry Battalion Lifeguard departed from Helsinki in September 1877, travelling via St Petersburg to the Danube.[4] Secondly, 150 reserved soldiers travelled to the Balkans in January 1878.[5]

Numerous scholars have discussed the Russian-Ottoman War from a variety of perspectives; however, these have not been directly linked to public experiences of war from Finnish perspective by using newspaper letters as articles which are based on experiences (and other things, represented or viewed such as feelings, rumours, 'knowledge' provided from various sources, etc.). War experiences in general that brought questions of nationhood, solidarity, welfare, and nation-building to the fore have been examined primarily in the context of Finland's independence period, while the socio-political impact of the Russian-Ottoman War to the Grand Duchy has largely been overlooked.[6] Although a small number of studies address the Russian-Ottoman War experiences of Russian society, these examine certain facets of this educated society's perspective, power, and public opinion from different regions, as well as local administrative institutions and public organizations responsible for the treatment of wounded soldiers, accommodation of prisoners, and assistance for the families of servicemen, along with the activities accompanying these war efforts.[7]

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[1] V.A. Zolotarev, *Rossiya i Turtsiya. Voina 1877-1878 gg.*, [Russia and Turkey. The War of 1877-1878], Moskva: Nauka, 1983; M. Hakan Yavuz & Peter Sluglett, (Ed.) *War and Diplomacy, The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 and the Treaty of Berlin,* Utah University Press, 2011.

[2] Francis Vinton Greene. *The Russian Army and Its Campaign in Turkey in 1877–1878.* New York, 1879, 88.

[3] According to Laitila, one thousand Finns also participated in the Russo-Turkish war, both within the Russian units and in the Finnish Guard. Teuvo Laitila, *Soldier, Structure and the Other. Social Relations and Cultural Categorization in the Memoirs of Finnish Guardsmen Taking Part in the Russo-Turkish War 1877-1878*, University of Helsinki, 2001, 17. For details about different parts of the unit, see Aytac Yurukcu, "Finns and Turks," First Encounter and Cultural Interaction in Eastern Europe; Finnish Soldiers' War Diaries on the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78". In *Social and Economic History of Eastern Europe*, (Eds), Vol: 8/2, December (2022), 15-19.

[4] Teuvo Laitila. *Soldier, Structure and the Other,* 2001, 52.

[5] *Tapio* 19.01.1878 No 6, 3.

[6] Pauli Tapani Kettunen, "Wars, Nation and the Welfare State in Finland," in *Warfare and Welfare: Military Conflict and Welfare State Development in Western Countries,* (eds). Herbert Obinger, K. Petersen, and P. Starke Oxford University Press, 2018, 260-89.

[7] V.N. Vinogradov. "Russko-Turetskaya voyna 1877-1878 Godov Vlast' i Obshchestvo," *Славяноведение*

None of these works mention the Grand Duchy of Finland and how the war was experienced, represented or viewed by local people within the Grand Duchy. This chapter therefore asks the following question: How local people's views, opinions, feelings and experiences about the war were represented in readers' letters published in newspapers from a variety of locations throughout the Grand Duchy of Finland in 1877-1878? Finland formed part of the Russian Empire, the war was experienced largely at a distance, not only mediated through newspapers, letters, and local debates that shaped Finnish understandings of politics, identity, loyalty, and belonging, while also experienced the impact of wartime situations on communities from national, economic, and psychological perspectives. By analyzing local correspondence published in the press, this study examines how ordinary people perceived and discussed the war, thereby illuminating how wartime experiences intersected with emerging notions of Finnish nationhood between nation and empire in the late nineteenth century.

In recent decades, digital technologies have transformed the ways in which historians approach their sources. What once required physical access to archives and libraries can now be explored from a computer screen: manuscripts, books, photographs, newspapers, diaries, letters, and journals are all increasingly available online.[8] Among these sources, digitized newspapers are particularly valuable, offering historians a unique lens through which to examine both the broad currents of social and political life—such as community dynamics, public opinion, and cultural representation—and the details of specific events, from festivals and fairs to revolts and wars. There exists a variety of repositories that focus on particular parts of newspapers for specific reasons, and this chapter focuses on one such resource, the Translocalis database. More than a repository, Translocalis provides access to nineteenth-century Finnish local letters published in Finnish-language newspapers, showcasing a rich tradition of correspondence that connected local voices to the national sphere and collectively shaped debates about society, politics, and identity.[9] Thus, engaging with Translocalis brings the study into dialogue with current approaches to the use of digitized newspapers in the humanities, particularly in history.

This study situates Finnish wartime letters within broader theoretical debates about war, civic communication, and nationhood. In particular, it suggests that Finland's emerging sense of distinctiveness as a state and nation was influenced by the ways in which war was narrated in the press and by newspaper readers. This process contributed to the emergence of an ''imagined community'' of Finns.[10] The research methodology combined both computational and traditional approaches. First, a keyword search was conducted to extract the letters from the data, using terms such as "war" (*sota*), "war time" (*sota-aika*), and "Turkish war" (*Turkin sota*). The authors of these

(Slavyanovedeniye), No 5, 2008: 3-11; S. Kochukov. "Otnoshenie obrazovannogo obschestva Rossii k russko-turetskoy voyne 1877-1878" *Власть (Vlast)*, 11, (2011), 163-166; N. I. Gorskaya. "Vlast' i obshchestvo v usloviyakh Russko-turetskoy voyny 1877–1878 gg.: po dokumentam Smolenskogo gosudarstvennogo arkhiva" *Вестник архивиста (Vestnik Arhivista)*, No. 3, 2024, 685-702.

[8] Eva Pfanzelter, Simon Oberbichler, Jani Marjanen, Pierre-Carl Langlais, and Stefan Hechl. "Digital Interfaces of Historical Newspapers: Opportunities, Restrictions and Recommendations." *Journal of Data Mining and Digital Humanities*, January 11, (2021), 1-26.

[9] Jani Marjanen, Ville Vaara, Aki Kanner, Hannu Roivainen, Eetu Mäkelä, Leo Lahti, and Mikko Tolonen. "A National Public Sphere? Analyzing the Language, Location and Form of Newspapers in Finland, 1771–1917." *Journal of European Periodical Studies* 4, no. 1 (2019), 54-57.

[10] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* Verso, 1991.

letters were local writers from different locations throughout Finland. Second, 64 overtly war-related letters, from roughly 40 locations across the country, all of which were sent to 16 Finnish-language newspapers, were identified and analyzed. Using mixed-method narrative analysis, the study examines and highlights the value of locality and how local letter writers and correspondents represented and viewed war-related experiences—from scarcity and aid collections to political reflections and emotional responses—between nationalism and imperialism through a qualitative analysis of local voices.

By focusing primarily on published letters in digitized newspapers, the analysis privileges the perspectives of literate and politically engaged groups. Although numerous letters from farmers, villages, and workers were retrieved, the experiences of illiterate populations and marginalized communities, whose voices did not reach print, remain less visible. Furthermore, although newspapers and letters reveal how war was represented, imagined and narrated, they cannot fully capture the war-related lived experiences of all social groups in the home front. Nevertheless, they provide a useful overview, and they depict the war experiences of society from a variety of perspectives derived from different locations and social-strata in Finland. Most notably, the letters accessed through Translocalis offer distinctive viewpoints about how the Russian-Ottoman War was lived, imagined, and narrated at the grassroots level—perspectives often absent from official state archives. These sources demonstrate the power of vernacular writing, not only to document war related lived experiences but also to construct collective identities.

2 Local Letters in their Historical Context: 'as the Voice of the People'

The Russian-Ottoman War, from the Finnish perspective, took place during a period of Finnish national Fennoman movement and Diet meetings in 1877, marked by a growing emphasis on education and knowledge, alongside active engagement in social, economic, and political affairs in the Grand Duchy of Finland.[11] Political conditions in the country became more liberal when a new emperor, Tsar Alexander II, assumed power in the Russian Empire in 1855. In addition, the Finnish Society for Popular Education was founded in 1874, which aimed to edit and disseminate useful, affordable, and popular literature, as well as foster knowledge and a desire for education through other appropriate means. Interlinked with processes of industrialization, politicization, and a social inclination toward various matters of interest were the following developments: the establishment of elementary schools; the wide variety of societies; the creation of Finnish-language newspapers, associations and libraries, as well as reading and literary evening clubs ("*huwiseurat*" in Finnish); the commencement of the formation of the nation.[12]

In the 1870s, the Grand Duchy saw the development of a Finnish-speaking intelligentsia, and the educated class understood the importance of nationalism in terms of nation-building—which is why they pushed for the strengthening of popular culture. Nationalism and popular culture were significantly linked, and the Finnish press was crucial in promoting popular culture and knowledge

[11] Ilkka Liikanen, *Fennomania ja kanssa. joukkojärjestäytymisen läpimurto ja Suomalaisen puolueen synty,* Helsinki, Suomen Historiallinen Se2–14 1995, 179-182.
[12] Risto Alapuro, "Chapter 5 Finnish Nationalism." In *State and Revolution in Finland.* Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, (2018), 79-93.

transfer.[13] Within the program of the Finnish Fennoman national movement, the general culture of the people was the central basis for greater development. The Finnish movement also viewed popular culture as a crucial prerequisite for political debates and criticism of loyalty for a strategy of state-making and identity.[14] At that time, the Russian-Ottoman War marked a turning point in the Finnish press, both in scale and public engagement.

In the Grand Duchy of Finland, the Russian-Ottoman War was followed with great interest across nearly all of the towns, villages and parishes through the newspapers and journals such as *Suomen Kuvalehti* regularly reported on the Russian-Ottoman War with illustrations. The Finnish Diet assemblies in 1877 also profoundly influenced the media and demand for news in the Grand Duchy. These illustrate not only the increasing politicization of the press because of the Finnish Diet assemblies, but also the role of the war as a catalyst for expanding the Finnish reading public through the establishment of six new Finnish newspapers (*Kaiku, Savonlinna, Länsi-Suomi*, and *Päijänne* in 1877, *Ahti* and *Vaasan Sanomat* in 1878). This development was underscored by the growth in readership: newspaper subscriptions more than doubled during the war years, with Finnish-language newspapers even surpassing their Swedish-language counterparts by 1878. A notable example is *Uusi Suometar*, which served as a mouthpiece of the Fennomans and it was considered a pioneer of the Finnish newspapers, which had 2,600 subscribers in 1875[15] but reached 6,500 by 1877-1878.[16]

Letter culture in Finnish media was recognized by the pioneer of historical newspaper research, Päiviö Tommila, in the twentieth century.[17] Tommila conceptualised local letter culture as a practice through which public opinion was shaped and guided by the intelligentsia. Scholars have previously studied the large-scale usage of local letters to newspapers as source material and raised the important impact of this local and translocal network on Finnish media.[18] But, broader scale and significance have really been highlighted only more recently, especially since the 2010s with the help of digitisation of newspapers by Laura Stark and Heikki Kokko, who is establisher of the Translocalis letter data base with Pertti Haapala. The evidence indicates that people from a few different social levels wrote letters to newspapers, and in the 1870s most of the letters that appeared were published anonymously.[19] At the core of this phenomenon lay a new form of social interaction that extended beyond face-to-face communication to a hybrid style of translocal and societal mass media communication.[20]
The existence of Finnish phenomenon of sending letters to newspapers as a distinct local letter culture was already observed by D. E. D. Europaeus, a Finnish linguistics (and collector of Karelian oral poetry), who contributed and worked as for to the Fennoman *Suometar* newspaper as a permanent

[13] Ilkka Liikanen. "Light to Our People: Educational Organization and the Mobilization of Fennomania in the 1870s." *Scandinavian Journal of History*, Vol:13, No. 4, (2008): 421–426.
[14] Ilkka Liikanen. "Light to Our People: 429-431.
[15] Päiviö Tommila, Lars Langren and Pirkko Leino-Kaukiainen, *Suomen lehdistön historia I: Sanomalehdistön vaiheet vuoteen 1905,* Kustannuskiila Oy, Kuopio, (1988), 320.
[16] *Uuden Suomettaren muistojulkaisu:1869–1918,* Helsinki, 1919, 185.
[17] Päiviö Tommila, "Yhdestä lehdestä sanomalehdistöksi 1809–1859." In *Suomen lehdistön historia 1. Sanomalehdistön vaiheet vuoteen 1905*, (eds.). Päiviö Tommila, Lars Landgren, and Pirkko Leino-Kaukiainen. Kuopio, 1988.
[18] Heikki Kokko, "Temporalization of Experiencing: First-Hand Experience of the Nation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Finland", In *Lived Nation as the History of Experiences and Emotions in Finland, 1800–2000,* V. Kivimäki et al. (eds.), Palgrave Studies in the History of Experience, (2022), 109-133. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-69882-9_5.
[19] Heikki Kokko, "From Local to Translocal Experience," *Media History*, 2022, 28:2, 181-183.
[20] Heikki Kokko, "From Local to Translocal Experience," *Media History*, 2022, 28:2, 193-195.

assistant worker in the early 1850s and writing letters became a self-sustaining civic engagement as a Finnish characteristic in 1860s with his *Kansakunnan Lehti* newspaper in 1863-1864.[21]

The local-letter culture, characterized by the writing and circulation of local letters, emerged as a wartime phenomenon with historical roots tracing back to the beginning of 1850s, before the earlier major conflict, the Crimean War of 1853-56 (see Figure 1 below). This war occurred in Finland during a period of strict censorship starting from the beginning of 1850s, marking the beginning of local letter writing as a means of resisting the censorship of foreign news and promoting Finnish language local news and local letter writing.[22] However, these letters primarily reflect the sentiments and goals of their individual authors and their local company, as well as newspaper editors.

The local letters in Finnish-language newspapers, which serve as a source material for this chapter, highlight the pivotal role that newspapers played in shaping public opinion during that tumultuous period for both readers and non-readers. It was evident that the desire for information transcended literacy, as communities gathered to share and discuss unfolding events, fostering a sense of unity, togetherness, and shared experience such as constructed war related perspective and other views from miscellanoeus sources (news, rumours, previous knowledge, etc.). The widespread practice of jointly newspaper subscriptions by pooling their limited money, along with the common habit of reading newspapers aloud, significantly broadened the audience for both newspapers and local letters. This expansion reached far beyond individual subscribers and even impacted on those who were illiterate.[23]

In Finland, newspapers held a traditional role as public educators in the 1850s-1880s and as gatekeepers and policy-makers from the 1890s onwards.[24] However, due to censorship laws, newspaper editors suppressed local letters to avoid being punished by censorship committees. For example, newspapers announced many different straightforward rules to urge local letter writers not to write in a way that caused extreme offense: it was deemed inappropriate to mock the authorities, criticize public school matters, provocative for government or write negatively about laws, and warned them to keep their letters short.[25]

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[21] Heikki Kokko, *"*Lehdistön paikalliskirjeilmiön historiografia: marginaalista osaksi demokratisoitumisen yhteiskunta- ja kulttuurihistoriaa*",* In *Työväki ja paikallisuus,* T. Juuri, & V. Suominen (Eds.), Väki Voimakas -vuosikirja; Vol. 38, (2025), 26–28. http://hdl.handle.net/10138/602004

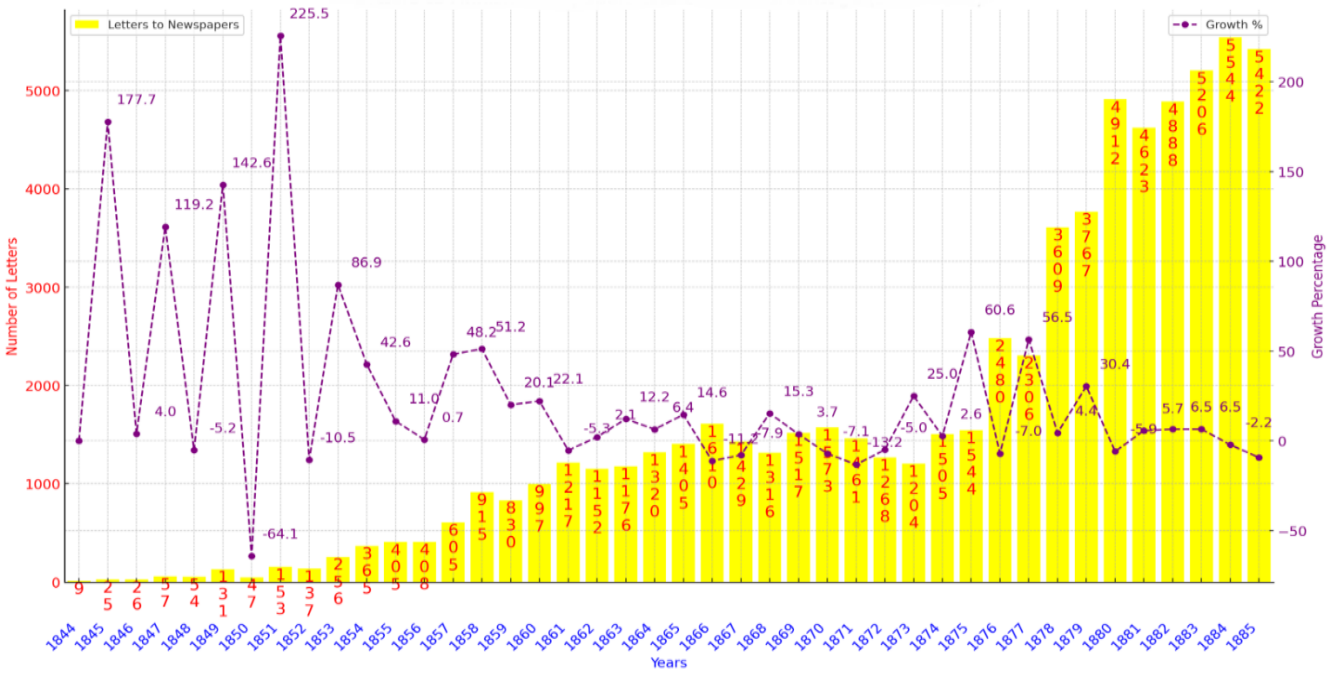
[22] Laura Stark, "The Rise of Finnish-Language Popular Literacy Viewed Through Correspondence to Newspapers, 1856–70", In *Vernacular Literacies - Past, Present and Future* A.-C. Edlund, L.-E. Edlund, & S. Haugen (Eds.), Umeå Universitet. Northern-Studies Monographs, 3. (2014)*,* 262-266.

[23] Heikki Kokko, *"*Village gossip or voice of the people? The culture of letters to the press in the grasp of transnational ideologies in mid-1800s Finland*",* In *Mediated Ideologies: Nordic Views on the History of the Press and Media Cultures,* J. Kortti, & H. Kurvinen (Eds.), Vernon press. (2024), 3-20.

[24] Satu Sorvali, "Kaustinen Akaka's: 1890-luvun suomalaislehdistön valta ja vastuu riitakirjoitusilmiössä", *Media & viestintä,* (2023), 46(1), 26-29. https://doi.org/10.23983/mv.128224

[25] Päiviö Tommila, "Maaseutukirjeitä Tutkimaan" In *Suomen sanomalehti historia (SSLH), Toimitustyön historiaa Suomessa. Suomen sanomalehdistön historia -projektin julkaisuja 13*, 1979: 10, 2-14.

Figure 1 Local letters to Finnish newspapers between 1844-1885[26]



The number of letters to newspapers dramatically increased in 1876, from 1544 to 2480 (60.6%), and remained at 2306 in 1877 (during the war and Diet meetings). However, from 1878 onwards, although the Diet meetings were over, the number of letters to newspapers continued to accelerate sharply, rising from 2306 to 3609 (56.5%) by showing the importance of war. The war in 1877-78 helped the newspaper editors to make people conscious of the power of public opinion (that its, local letters), and that they therefore continued to try to influence the authorities via media.

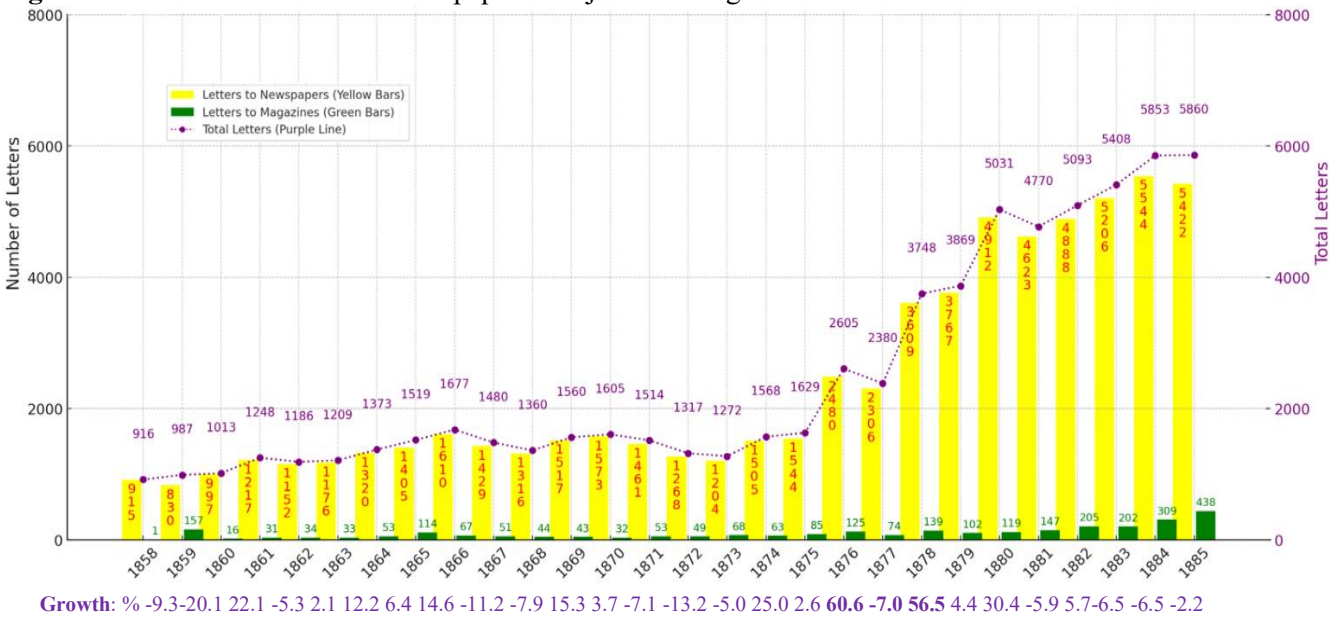
Table 1 Temporal periodization of analyzed letters for the chapter, during the events of the war (1877-1878)

	Time and Events 1877-1878 of ROW	Letters
1.	Pre-War Discussions and News (Early 1877 - April 24, 1877)	6
2.	The ROW Begins: War Developments (April 24 to Sept 1877)	12
3.	First Finnish Unit's Participation (September 1877 to January 1878)	12
4.	The Second Finnish Unit Joins to Treaty of San Stefano (January to 3 March 1878)	15
5.	From San Stefano to the Treaty of Berlin (3 March to July 13, 1878)	19
Total		64

To provide a comprehensive understanding of letter circulation, the below bar chart includes letters to newspapers and journals from 1844 to 1885. However, the study focuses of only those local letters to the newspapers (not the letters to the journals) which dramatically increased in number between 1877 and 1878, and the research was limited to the Russian-Ottoman War related letters.

[26] Data from the Translocalis repository database (Access date 30.12.2025). Year-by-year data were extracted from the Translocalis database and used to calculate the letters and generate the data for the graph, which created by the author. https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/collections?id=742&set_language=en

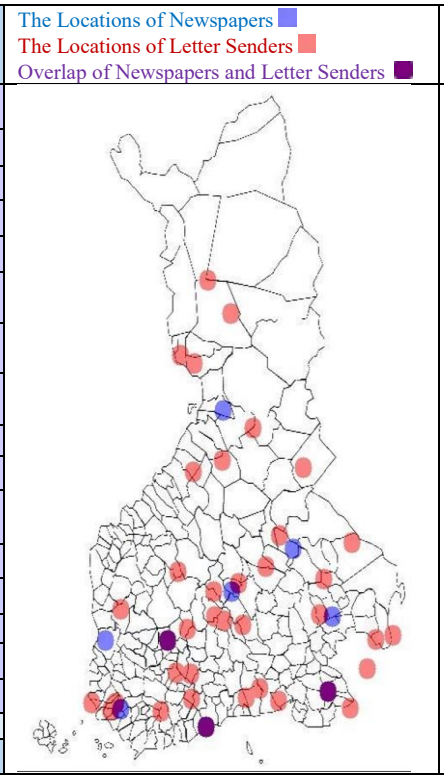
Figure 2 Local letters to Finnish newspapers and journals/magazines in 1858-1885[27]

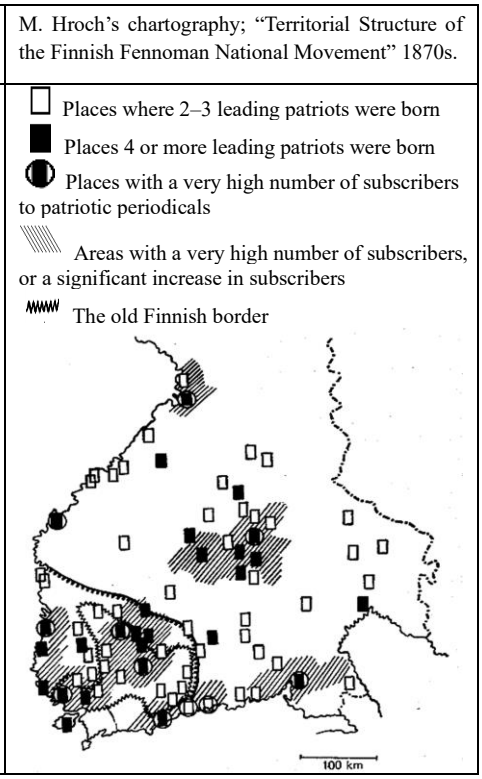


Growth: % -9.3-20.1 22.1 -5.3 2.1 12.2 6.4 14.6 -11.2 -7.9 15.3 3.7 -7.1 -13.2 -5.0 25.0 2.6 **60.6 -7.0 56.5** 4.4 30.4 -5.9 5.7-6.5 -6.5 -2.2

Table 2 Translocal letters from locals to Finnish newspapers that included the war topic in 1877-1878

	Utilized Finnish Language Newspapers	1877	1878	All
1.	*Uusi Suometar*	4	7	11
2.	*Satakunta*	4	3	7
3.	*Ilmarinen*	3	4	7
4.	*Keski-Suomi*	5	2	7
5.	*Kaiku*	-	5	5
6.	*Sanomia Turusta*	1	4	5
7.	*Oulun Wiikko-Sanomia*	2	3	5
8.	*Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti*	3	1	4
9.	*Pohjois-Suomi*	1	2	3
10.	*Päijänne*	-	2	2
11.	*Tampereen Sanomat*	1	1	2
12.	*Savonlinna*	1	1	2
13.	*Ahti*	-	1	1
14.	*Pietarin Lehti*	1	-	1
15.	*Karjalatar*	1	-	1
16.	*Tapio*	1	1	2
	Total for year	28	36	
	Total			64





When the locations of the letter senders are compared with Miroslav Hroch's work *A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations*, in which he generally mapped "core areas" of Finnish nationalist and pro-Finnish patriotic activity in the 1870s, clear overlaps emerge between those regions most active in national movements and the areas

[27] Data for the graph were gathered from the Translocalis repository database (Access date 30.12.2024). https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/collections?id=742&set_language=en

from which pro-Finnish letters were sent and in which newspapers circulated. As this correlation suggests, newspapers not only reported on local affairs but also acted as intentional platforms for disseminating Fennoman ideas across regions. In this way, the letters' and newspapers' locations of my research, and Hroch's general cartography of "Territorial Structure of the Finnish (Fennoman) National Movement" in the 1870s, although less detailed but very clear, together overlap and underscore the spatial dynamics of Finnish nation-building where locality, press activity, debates, and national ideology were closely circulated and intertwined.[28]

3 Local Letters for War, Solidarity, Public Debates, National/International Consciousness

3.1 From Silence to Speech: Local Nationalism and Collective Solidarity through Donations

The survey conducted for this study revealed that the authors of letters could talk about many different topics related to war. In order to categorize these local letters, they were clustered around two main ways of experiencing the war from Finland. First, correspondents framed the war as a moral and civic imperial cause, expressing national sentiment through donations, public meetings, speeches, songs, humanitarian work, and national symbolic rituals. Second, they interpreted the war as an imperial and national Finnish experience, as well as a political and economic event that reshaped everyday life through shortages, hunger, monetary uncertainty, trade, and debates about conscription, taxation, and Finland's vulnerability in great-power politics.

The authors usually began their letters with an introduction saying that no one writes from their region. Below are some compelling examples of the writing culture that was viewed as a necessity to communicate and share daily life from their region with the entire country via newspapers. Although the war started in April 1877, and the Finnish Guard departed in September 1877, war-related topics had in fact begun circulating in early November 1876, just six months before the war. One of the letters that highlighted the war was published in February 1877. It was written from Petäjävesi (near the Jyväskylä) and sent to the *Keski-Suomi* newspaper, the letter partly quoted below:

> The war clouds hanging over Southeast Europe have drawn our attention as well, by participating in the sufferings of our Christian brethren on the Balkan Peninsula, for whom voluntary donations were also collected here; surprisingly, I have not seen any mention of these collections, although they occurred as early as last November… …With amazement, we followed the developments of the peace talks...[29]

Agathon Meurman, leader of the Fennoman peasant estate (one of the four estates at the Diet) in the Diet in 1877-1878 and later the president of the Society for Popular Education between 1885 and 1905, described the war not as a diplomatic failure but as a necessary and justified response to escalating tensions. He praised Russia's sacrifice while insisting that Finland, too, must nobly bear its share of the burden "without complaint."[30] This was typical of conservative Fennoman politicians, and Meurman's rhetoric combined both patriotic fervor and loyalty to Russia, portraying war as a necessary sacrifice: whilst the Russian people would fulfill their historical calling with blood and wealth, Finland, though small, was also expected to carry its share.

After the declaration of war on April 24, 1877, Finnish correspondence shifted to themes of solidarity,

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[28] Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations "Nations Integration Without Revolution: the Finns."* Translated by Ben Fowkes, University of Cambridge Press, 1985, 73.
[29] *Keski-Suomi* 22.02.1877 No 8 p.4.
[30] *Keski-Suomi* 05.05.1877 No 18 p.2.

Christianity, humanity, shortages, as well as way to negotiate Finland's position vis-a-vis to Russian Empire, and these were also discussed by the local initiatives such as municipal meetings, literary evening clubs and lotteries to raise funds for sick and wounded soldiers. At the beginning of the war, one active local letter writer, David from Elimäki, reported in *Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti* (the newspaper, publishing official and governmental information) on local council efforts to organize communal aid and lottery as well as the role of newspapers for the knowledge circulation[31], like *Oulun Wiikko-Sanomia*, in keeping readers informed about military obligations, the war, and national political debates about the Finnish Red Cross.[32] During the early months of the Russian-Ottoman War, despite the lack of a definitive decision regarding the conscription of Finns, General Georg von Alfthan[33] and Professor Estlander[34] convened a public meeting at Helsinki Town Hall on May 7, 1877 to establish an association for the care of wounded and sick soldiers. This initiative led to the founding of the Finnish Red Cross, which subsequently issued appeals for support through newspapers across the country.[35] General Georg von Alfthan wrote a long article to the *Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti* to make a powerful appeal to the emotions and moral conscience of the people, emphasizing both national solidarity and a broader Christian humanitarian duty.

> Remembering the great poet "referring Runeberg" who sang of the Finnish soldier's brave sufferings, and thinking of all those whom conscription will one day call to the same sufferings and the same need for tender care, the Red Cross urges you as Christian citizens and friends of humanity to participate in the Society's efforts, to support it with financial resources and necessary means of assistance, according to instructions that will be announced to the public.[36]

Being governor of Uusimaa, he acted from a governmental position. Thus, his 'letter' indicated official line, not a local view. However, his writing could be interpreted as an attempt to dovetail national and imperial views and goals. (Emphasis on Runeberg, Finnish heroism, Christian care, etc.). Such writing from Alfthan was characteristic of wartime humanitarian mobilization, merging patriotism, religion, and collective solidarity into a single persuasive narrative. In response, numerous public gatherings—including public meetings and church ceremonies—were held in early May, just after the declaration of war, and these continued until mid-1878, at which the Finnish national song and national anthem, "Maamme" was performed thousands of times all over Finland.[37] The most intensive ceremonies were organized in September 1877, when Finnish soldiers departed from Helsinki and made a short stop in Viipuri. In this town, as in the eastern part of the Grand Duchy closer to St. Petersburg, the war conditions and deployments were experienced emotionally and

[31] *Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti* 12.05.1877 No 56 p.2.
[32] *Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti* 09.06.1877 No 68 p.2.
[33] Lieutenant General Georg von Alfthan (1828 – 1896) In 1873 von Alfthan was appointed governor of Uusimaa, in 1879 he was promoted to Lieutenant General and in 1882 commander of imperial troops stationed in Helsinki. https://www.finlandatwar.com/594-2/ He was a key figure in the early history and founding of the Finnish Red Cross. His son A[nton] Reinhold von Alfthan (1858-1925) was part of the Finnish Lifeguards units in 1877-1878. Teuvo Laitila. *Soldier, Structure and the Other,* 2001, p.25.
[34] Carl Gustaf Estlander (1834–1910) was a Finnish literary scholar, professor of aesthetics and modern literature at the University of Helsinki, and a member of the Finnish Diet, founder of the Swedish Literature Society in Finland in 1876–1877. https://375humanistia.helsinki.fi/en/humanists/carl-gustaf-estlander
[35] Erkki Kansanaho, "Punainen Risti ja Turkin sota. Suomen Punaisen Ristin syntyvaiheita," *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* 63, (1965), 198-205.
[36] *Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti* 12.05.1877 No 56 p.2.
[37] *Uusi Suometar* 27.08.1877 No 103 pp.2-3.

intensely, and the ceremonies were especially influential. A baker from Viipuri described one such public meeting for the Finnish soldiers: "*In the company of the commanders, where a group of townspeople was also present, ... followed by the band playing the Imperial Anthem, and the sound of the national song 'Maamme'....*"[38]

The war evidently was one reason why "Maamme" started to spread and was played/performed in various occasions. Before the 1870s, it was not played at large, although probably many Finns knew it. From Orivesi, in the north of Tampere, a month after the participation of Finnish units in the war, one writer admitted that even rural communities closely followed the progress of battles such as Plevna and Shipka (People learned almost all of the details about the war by various war related news in media): "*Almost everyone's attention is solely focused on some important place in Turkey, whether it be Plewna, Shipka, or wherever else. As the war draws such great attention, especially now that Finland's small troop begins to perhaps play its valiant role on the stage of war*," hence there was also room for reports of everyday war experiences.[39] By reading the whole letters, it appears that some of the letter writers, both educated elites, workers, and teachers as well as common people, felt compelled to explain the silence from their regions and wrote to encourage people to write and break this silence. From Lapinjärvi, in the eastern part of Uusimaa, came the reminder that life and the pursuit of knowledge went on, even if little of this reached the newspapers.[40] In the Rymättylä archipelago, it is located in the province of Western Finland and this rural area is part of the Southwest Finland region, a correspondent suggested that the "dark cloud of sorrow" cast by the war had dampened local spirits and discouraged contributions.[41]

There were strong emotional letters from village women; nevertheless, although rural voices found a place in the press, women's voices were rarely heard, and only a few of the letters utilized for this chapter were written by women. One letter written by two sisters, "R... and S...," from Huittinen to *Sanomia Turusta* newspaper (which indicated that Finnish women were reading newspapers, engaging in public discourse, and conscious of their visibility—or lack thereof—in the media), articulated the sometimes neglected contributions of women throughout wars and offered a unique representation of female civic involvement, emotional labor, and patriotism:

> We aim to convey, even in a few imperfect sentences, that women are actively participating in society and are not passively sitting with their hands folded. The ongoing war between Turkey and Russia has also drawn our attention, as there too… our brave young men… shed their blood… crossing over the snow-covered hills… our dear soldiers… drink from the victory cup and greet their loved ones.[42]

This letter reveals a deep emotional bond between those on the home front and soldiers far from home. This connection was shaped by a sense of shared sacrifice and national belonging, the women consciously used emotional language to make the point that women's help was needed in war. The correspondence also highlighted women's material contributions to the war effort, such as providing winter clothing for soldiers. Girls and women were raised to be modest and conscientious, and to

[38] *Satakunta* 13.10.1877 No 41 p.5.
[39] *Tampereen Sanomat* 23.10.1877 No 43 p.5
[40] *Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti* 14.03.1878 No 31 pp.6-7.
[41] *Sanomia Turusta* 23.03.1878 No 24 p.2.
[42] *Sanomia Turusta* 03.04.1878 No 27 p.2.

remain in the background, they reflected the emotional impact of the war and subsequent social interactions, not only on soldiers but also on families and communities.[43] Although Finland was still under Russian rule, the letter revealed a distinct sense of Finnish identity emerging among women. The repeated use of "our brave young men" and "our dear soldiers" shows a national perspective that transcends mere imperial loyalty to Russia as their support was for Finnish soldiers, not the empire, and the tone reflects an early national sentiment built on shared experience and emotional connection as seen through the lens of gender.[44]

War related news was followed by readers even from the small villages of Turku's parish where the newspapers reached, and the letter writers' intention for the news from their location was articulated as follows: "*Reading the News from Turku (Sanomia Turusta), I haven't seen anything mentioned about our parish in the columns of the news, it seems as if there are no penmen.*"[45] This means writers were also encouraging the community to exercise their voice. For instance, from a parish in Central Finland, a letter from Joutsa mentioned the silence of the writers of the town and wrote a letter to give voice to this region: "*Have Joutsa people then fallen into a deep slumber, with no news emerging in the newspapers; hasn't even the thunder of war awoken them.*"[46]

In late December 1877, the second conscription of the Finnish soldiers was also followed with great enthusiasm, even from small villages like Pienpuro, close to Viipuri province in the eastern part.[47] People demonstrated notable engagement with these public gatherings and literary reading clubs which may be interpreted as an early manifestation of a "civil society" response to war. These initiatives fostered social cohesion by bringing together individuals from diverse social strata in a shared sphere of civic participation and national sentiment. A letter from Rantsila, a small parish near Oulu, described a literary reading club gathering on November 2, 1877, held only a month after local soldiers had departed for war. The tragic events of the Turkish conflict were read aloud between songs, drawing such a large audience that the venue could scarcely hold everyone. A collection was also taken for the Red Cross, with attendees giving voluntary donations.[48]

These public meetings were typically held in schools and public buildings and were supported by the town's leading figures, bringing together participants from a wide range of social, economic, and political backgrounds. These venues were decorated with the Red Cross and displayed mottos such as "Christian love" or "Long live Christian love" ("*Eläköön kristillinen rakkaus!*" in Finnish) which evoked religious, nationalist, and humanitarian sentiments. Those participating were also surrounded by portraits of H.M. Emperor Alexander II, the Russian imperial flag, and the coat of arms of Finland with its golden lion, stars, and sword on a purple background, alongside the traditional Finnish harp, the kantele, the axe and sickle, and photographs of national actors and artists such as Professor Z. Topelius and Professor Yrjö Koskinen, a key figure in the Finnish Fennoman national movement,

[43] Reeta Eiranen, "Gendered personal nationalism: National cause as a resource of self-construction in Finnish nineteenth-century letters," *Nations and Nationalism,* 31*(*1), (2025), 245-261. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.13028
[44] Alex Snellman and Kristiina Kalleinen, "Introduction Finland Imperial Context", *Journal of Finnish Studies* 25, 2, (2022), 143-153.
[45] *Sanomia Turusta* 18.05.1878 No 40 p.2.
[46] *Uusi Suometar* 24.04.1878 No 49 p.3.
[47] *Ilmarinen* 29.12.1877 No 101 p.2.
[48] *Oulun Wiikko-Sanomia* 05.01.1878 No 1 p.2.

thus representing the fusion of Finnish nationalism and loyalty.[49] The programs continued with lotteries and songs and concluded with a choral and orchestral rendition of the Finnish national song, "Maamme", and shouts of "Long Live Finland! ("*Eläköön Suomi!*" in Finnish)"—through which the audience passionately expressed their support for the Finnish Red Cross and for the Finnish soldiers, known as the "Hercules" and "Heroes."[50] The role of a national "hero"—a symbolic Hercules—representing Finnish identity and the Grand Duchy of Finland, though far removed from their hometowns, served as encouragement to support or feel them through their hearts. Heroes could be part of armies or communities, illustrating Alfred Rieber's examination of the pivotal role of armies in imperial state-building within the Habsburg, Romanov, and Ottoman empires, where military rivalry influenced the mobilization of elites and broader populations[51], as well as Anthony D. Smith's assertion that collective rituals, symbols, and traditions enable individuals to engage emotionally and morally in their community and to reaffirm their dedication to its collective fate.[52] In Finnish case, Heroic tradition goes back to the Thirty Years War (from 1618 to 1648) and is known as "*Hakkapeliitta*", which comes from a Finnish battle marsh. The Heroic tradition still continues now.

For example, a letter from Rautalampi, a small parish midway between Jyväskylä and Kuopio in central Finland, indicates that war enthusiasm had also ignited in that area. The farmers planned to set off to besiege Plevna.[53] The image of farmers setting out for Plevna links the fields; even the quiet parish of central Finland were stirred by the echoes of imperial war. Furthermore, it demonstrates that national and imperial consciousness was not confined to the center, urban, or elite circles but also permeated rural and local communities, where it spread through newspapers and local letters, as well as oral communication.

These public meetings, which also featured the national song "Maamme," which was performed thousands of times throughout the Grand Duchy in 1877-1878, were largely akin to those organized by the Society for Popular Education and Fennomans in at least 35 localities and 20 communes, all with the aim of fostering aid for heroes, nation-building, solidarity, togetherness, and patriotism in the 1870s.[54] According to Liikanen, several Fennoman national meetings were held in the Grand Duchy of Finland and more than 300 public gatherings and lotteries, performances, literary reading clubs and outdoor events were organized, with the peak of the so-called mass movement activities being reached in 1874-1876.[55]

A member of the Finnish Society for Popular Education from Pertteli, near Salo, provided *Uusi Suometar* with a brief overview of local conditions, including settlements, taxes, educational activities, and reflections on the war, its aftermath, and the soldiers' strength as 'heroes'.[56] It was not an accidental letter because these were galvanized by the Finnish Society for Popular Education,

[49] *Savonlinna* 12.01.1878 No 2 pp.1-3.
[50] *Savonlinna* 12.01.1878 No 2 pp.1-3. *Satakunta* 10.11.1877 No 45 p.3.
[51] A. J. Rieber, 'Nationalizing Imperial Armies: A Comparative and Transnational Study of Three Empires'. In *Nationalizing Empires,* edited by Stefan Berger, and Alexei Miller, Central European University Press, (2015), 593.
[52] A. Smith, *National Identity*, 1991, 78.
[53] *Keski-Suomi* 06.02.1878 No 11, p.2.
[54] Ilkka Liikanen. "Light to Our People," 422-424.
[55] Ilkka Liikanen, "Light to Our People," 435.
[56] *Uusi Suometar* 01.04.1878 No 39, pp.6-7.

which was promoting the circulation of pro-Finnish ideas via newspapers and meetings. Lengthy discussions took place about conscription with several letters mentioning this matter and how it would be positive for society. Indeed, letters about conscription were increasingly patriotic.

> ...We see great deficiency in our lives. Therefore, we can eagerly hope for the implementation of conscription to eliminate this flaw and teach us military tactics, for truly, in every true Finn's heart lives still the valiant spirit of our fathers, and there are still heroes in Finland who, upon the enemy's arrival, can raise hand and show the water's edge and say: this land is a land redeemed by the spirit, by the blood of our fathers, and they have left it to us, their children, as an inheritance, and we too will defend it to the last drop of blood....[57]

Consequently, the Russian-Ottoman War created a significant opportunity to unite people and raise awareness of national consciousness, patriotism, Finnishness, and so forth, due to the thousands of meetings, gatherings, and lotteries that had been organized to support the newly established valuable association, the Finnish Red Cross, in aiding sick and wounded soldiers, by the Finnish Red Cross's mobile ambulances that supported both Caucasian and Balkan fronts. Motivated by Fennoman members, the Diet convened in 1877 and resolved to allocate one million marks, raised from the Finns through a per capita levy, to the Russian Red Cross. However, Snellman subsequently allocated these funds to the establishment of the Finnish Red Cross. As a result, the Finnish Red Cross Society garnered extensive support and encountered no challenges in fundraising.[58]

At the war's outset, municipal and state funds were directed toward relief efforts. A letter from Jaakkima parish to *Pietarin Lehti*[59] described how 1,000 marks were allocated from common funds to the care of sick and wounded soldiers, with voluntary collections organized in response to similar appeals by imperial authorities also attracting widespread donations.[60] Local communities responded generously to fund these. From Jämsä parish, a letter to the newspaper *Keski-Suomi* reported that 212 marks, along with shirts and bandages, had been prepared for soldiers wounded in the Russian-Ottoman War,[61] and from Petäjävesi parish it was noted that nearly 300 marks had been raised for the Red Cross.[62] Correspondence from Helsinki to the *Satakunta* newspaper, based in Pori, southwestern coast of Finland, offered further insights into the industry, manufacturers, wartime shortages, and the collecting of funds and clothing for the soldiers: "*Like everywhere in Finland, the call to provide woollen clothes for our soldiers has been well received here too. The government has allocated 25,000 marks for purchasing coats for the guards and Finnish Red Cross Society*."[63]

Table 3, derived from the letters and their authors' observations, functions as more than a record of charitable donations; it is a very brief snapshot that captures Finnish society in action, united by a shared sense of humanitarian, collective solidarity, and patriotic duty during a distant yet emotionally resonant war, these tons of donations and thousands of meetings were all over the Grand Duchy for

[57] *Päijänne* 05.04.1878 No 28, p.3.
[58] Erkki Kansanaho. "Punainen Risti ja Turkin sota.," *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja,* 63, (1965), 207.
[59] *Pietarin Lehti* 23.04.1877 No 17 pp.3-4.
[60] Lauri Hyvämäki. *Suomalaiset ja Suurpolitiikka:* 63.
[61] *Keski-Suomi* 30.06.1877 No 26 pp.2-3.
[62] *Keski-Suomi* 22.09.1877 No 38 p.3.
[63] *Satakunta* 10.11.1877 No 45 p.3.

their soldiers, heroes and collective solidarity in 1877-1878. This sentiment extended from urban elites in Helsinki, shared by the Finnish Red Cross announcements and articles within the newspapers, to rural communities as well as with local letters across the Grand Duchy.

Table 3 Examples of common donations for the Finnish soldiers and Finnish Red Cross Association

Location	Money	Clothes
Lapland region[64]	172 marks	66 pairs socks, 97 pairs mittens, wristlets, 40 woolen scarves, linens, 9 woolen shirts.
Helsinki[65]	25,000 marks	Used for the establishment of the Finnish Red Cross.
Gustav's Chapel, (in Kivimaa) [66]	514 marks	Several articles of clothing
Masku[67]	465 marks	Donations, or prizes for the lottery, were received at six places
Rantsila[68] and Anjala[69]	-	Voluntary donations and prizes are collected.
Salo[70]	500 marks	Not mentioned.
Oulu[71]	119 marks 25 pennies	A whole bunch of woolen jackets and socks.
Jämsä[72]	212 marks	A whole bunch of shirts and bandages for wounds.
Petäjävesi[73]	300 marks	-
Elimäki (near the Kouvola)[74]	1000 marks	-
Laitila[75] (near the Turku)	613 marks 50 pennies	Collected for the wounded soldiers and the Red Cross.
Vironlahti[76]	3,000 marks	900 different items for this purpose, comprising handicrafts by men and women.
Savonlinna[77]	330 marks	Textiles and sewing, with supplies including over 30 bedding items, 40 garments, 30 pairs of socks, a dozen scarves, and over 200 bandages.
Virolahti[78]	3,000 marks	-

3.2 Imperial War Experience and Daily Politics in Wartime Grand Duchy of Finland

Wartime politics in the Grand Duchy of Finland unfolded not only in imperial institutions but also in everyday life, as news, rumors, and economic anxieties circulated through local letters, newspapers, and local communities. These daily experiences shaped wartime politics at the local level, revealing how international conflict was translated into concrete social and economic concerns across different regions of Finland. Unlike other regions, the Eastern part of the Grand Duchy received news clearly and promptly due to its proximity to the Empire's capital, St Petersburg. The prewar situation was primarily conveyed by letter writers from the east. For instance, in Eastern Finland, a letter from Sotkamo, situated between Kajaani and Kuhmo, succinctly summarized the circumstances and war's

[64] *Sanomia Turusta* 07.11.1877 No 87 p.3.
[65] *Satakunta* 10.11.1877 No 45 p.3.
[66] *Sanomia Turusta* 10.04.1878 No 29 p.2.
[67] *Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti* 22.12.1877, No. 152 p.2.
[68] *Oulun Wiikko-Sanomia* 05.01.1878 No 1 p.2.
[69] *Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti* 22.12.1877, No. 152 p.2
[70] *Pohjois-Suomi,* 14.11.1877, No 89 p.2.
[71] *Pohjois-Suomi*, 17.11.1877, No 90 p.2.
[72] *Keski-Suomi* 30.06.1877 No 26 ppp.2-3.
[73] *Keski-Suomi* 22.09.1877 No 38 p.3.
[74] *Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti* 09.06.1877, No 68 p.2.
[75] *Sanomia Turusta* 18.05.1878 No 40 p.2.
[76] *Ilmarinen*, 29.08.1877, No. 67 p. 2.
[77] *Savonlinna*, 03.11.1877, No 44 p.1; *Savonlinna*, 29.12.1877, No 52 p.1.; *Savonlinna*, 28.12.1877, No 51 p.1.
[78] *Savonlinna*, 08.09.1877, No 36 p.2.

consequences, highlighting that the fear of war had garnered significant attention. It stated that in Sotkamo, "*the fear of war has also been aroused there to such an extent that it was reported that the price of salt had risen sharply in local marketplaces, leading wealthier individuals to start stockpiling it amid concerns about escalating prices*."[79] In the southern part, in Helsinki, correspondents closely followed foreign newspapers and financial developments, showing that Finns did not passively absorb imperial narratives but critically engaged with multiple perspectives, such as what happened in war but what happened at home as well.[80] Letters highlighted growing economic uncertainty: the fall of the Russian currency, confusion in trade, and the weakening of Finnish industry, which was losing its market in Russia.[81] These observations linked international politics directly to local economic hardship, demonstrating how the war's impact was interpreted and debated among Finland's locals in eastern parts, as well as in central and western parts.

In a few letters from the local parishes, such as from Orivesi near Tampere, it can be inferred that in 1877, there was a significant food shortage in the Tampere region during the war.[82] Although the general shortage was strong this could not stop the fundraising, because fundraising was part of national emotions. The correspondence published in *Keski-Suomi, Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti,* and *Uusi Suometar* reflected both strong local support for soldiers and the hardships faced by communities during the war. In Rautalampi, in the north of Jyväskylä, a letter writer known as "---rlo" noted that although life continued, there was an unprecedented money shortage, which worsened after rubles ceased circulating.[83] In Lapinjärvi, the lack of money troubled farmers, merchants, and households alike. Men wandered in search of work, often renting rooms and then disappearing without paying, using poverty as an excuse.[84] A letter from Joutsa described the same problems: despite having six active traders, money was so scarce that even the wealthy could not recover loans, leaving both rich and poor in need.[85] According to the letter, wartime scarcity often intensified class divisions; yet in this case from Joutsa, a rural municipality in central Finland, the crisis temporarily levelled social hierarchies, at least in terms of liquid assets. The suggestion that even creditors could not recover loans or interest undermined trust and disrupted the basic financial functioning of the local economy, creating an invisible yet destabilizing crisis. This example illustrates how the war unsettled not only state finances and supply chains but also everyday economic relations—salaries, rents, and mutual obligations—within small communities. In some cases, these wartime difficulties and food shortages created very specific examples for bountiful and generous people. Regarding daily needs, the price of food, including staples such as bread and flour, increased. One letter from Raahe, gave an example of hunger and local heroes during the war.

> In Raahe, there is a merchant named Lumberi (Lundberg), who during these times earns the same honour as Osman Pasha did in the Turkish War at Pleven. This is because Lumberi has saved thousands of people from the clutches of the terrible enemy—the hunger king—by being the only merchant in Oulu Province who has sold flour at the old price without seeking personal profit, for which he truly deserves

[79] *Karjalatar* 19.01.1877 No 3 pp.3-4.
[80] *Satakunta* 21.04.1877 No 16 pp.1-2.
[81] *Satakunta* 10.11.1877 No 45 p.3.
[82] *Tampereen Sanomat* 23.10.1877 No 43 p.5.
[83] *Keski-Suomi* 06.02.1878 No 11 p.2.
[84] *Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti* 14.03.1878 No 31 pp.6-7.
[85] *Uusi Suometar* 24.04.1878 No 49 p.3.

> it!... God in the afterlife will reward him.[86]

Such narratives of generosity and moral heroism illustrate how wartime hardship was interpreted not only as an economic crisis but also as a matter of collective responsibility, which in turn fed into broader political debates unfolding at the national level. For example, the Finnish Diet parliamentary sessions commenced in 1877, where discussions were held about conscription, war, tax, language and school matters, and meetings took almost a year to conclude, the Diet also discussed, or debated, about the establishment of new Finnish-language secondary schools. Writers' letters mainly focused on two topics: war and diet meetings. At the same time, political leaders sought to frame the war conflict and Diet conflict in national terms. Many writers wrote letters about the events, especially the Diet meetings, and Matti (prominent as a local letter writer) wrote a number of letters about the meetings to the *Uusi Suometar* newspaper. In April, when the Diet meetings began, his hope was that they would last more than four months, but then mentioned that they could be over during the autumn of 1877.[87] One letter writer from Helsinki, who closely followed foreign newspapers, captured the tense atmosphere: people felt suspended between war and peace, with the outbreak of war seeming increasingly inevitable.[88] A letter from Lapland also drew attention to the war and parliamentary meetings:

> The two significant current issues are the war and the parliamentary sessions… this is evident when two or three old men come together, and they soon start discussing the war or parliament. And sometimes, the women talk about such matters, of which even newspaper writers seem unaware. …it's rumored that the Russians have supposedly made a swap deal with America, where it gives a piece of land in exchange for military supplies and ammunition.[89]

This letter exemplifies how the war was not merely a military or political event but also a cultural phenomenon, filtered, interpreted, and reimagined through collective storytelling at the local level. It illustrates how rumors, imagination, and oral traditions contributed significantly to the development of popular understandings of war. One of the most important discussions concerned tax matters, as the budget of the Grand Duchy of Finland was supporting the soldiers and war-related supplies, and considerably more money was required. One specific letter was written from Pertteli, a small municipality close to Turku, to the *Uusi Suometar*, emphasizing the possibility of extra tax, even for the living creatures of the settlements. Some old men speculated, "*What will this bring about? Probably a tax increase*." However, women were concerned that even the number of chickens needed to be known: "*You have to chop off the chickens' necks; they might be counted for tax too*."[90]

There was a prevailing suspicion toward imperial wars, particularly those driven by the "interests of England", which suggests a skepticism about conflicts waged in the name of abstract great-power strategies. For instance, in April 1878, a letter from Helsinki to the *Ahti* newspaper articulated significant worries about imperialism and national interests:

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[86] *Pohjois-Suomi* 18.05.1878 No 40 p.2.
[87] *Uusi Suometar* 20.04.1877 No 48 pp.2-3. They concluded in late January 1878; *Uusi Suometar* 25.01.1878, No 11 p.7.
[88] *Satakunta* 21.04.1877 No 16 pp.1-2.
[89] *Sanomia Turusta* 07.11.1877 No 87 p.3.
[90] *Uusi Suometar* 01.04.1878 No 39 pp.6-7.

> Hard times, ...The recent peace has not brought improvement in this respect, as the threat from England remains, and it is all the frightening to us as it directly concerns us. If a war breaks out "for the sake of England's interests," Finland's interests are primarily at risk. Our trade, maritime, and fleet, which is larger than that of the entire Empire, will be devastated, and there is no guarantee that our coastal towns will not suffer from enemy bombardment.[91]

This letter interweaved global politics with local concerns, illustrating how deeply interconnected even remote regions like Finland were with world affairs. It also presented a civilian-centered, peace-orientated narrative that contrasted with state propaganda and glorified accounts of war. Additionally, it revealed a growing political awareness among the Finnish public, who experienced the Crimean War from 1853 to 1856 during which British fleets bombarded Finnish coasts. The event was an early sign of civil society grappling with empire, modern imperial war, and their own national identity. Another letter from Joutsa to the *Uusi Suometar* also focused on war and dangerous expectations and speculation after war, writing:

> …Whose attention wouldn't have been drawn to the tumult where our noble ruler, though peace-loving, has had to let the blood of his loyal subjects be shed for a just and holy cause and the honor of his kingdom? Finnish sons too, in that perilous yet gloriously victorious campaign, have bravely fought and sacrificed their lives, though their numbers were small. …even the old man in the wilderness, who usually cares little for world events as long as he has a warm cabin to gnaw on his crust — yes, even he, upon encountering someone known to read newspapers, has been ready to ask, "What's the news from the war?"…although His Majesty's victorious arms have forced Turkey into peace, the threatening storm clouds of war still loom over Europe's political sky — and who knows when the 'western electric fish' might test its strength against the "eastern horse"?"[92]

The writer's image of "the old man in the wilderness" asking for news of the war was both romantic and symbolic. It suggested that the war's resonance extended far beyond towns and cities into the most isolated corners of Finnish life. There existed a profound awareness that imperial conflict was not distant in emotional or psychological terms—everyone was drawn into the drama, regardless of geography or class. Despite the patriotic tone—"…Finnish sons"—there was a subtle but telling undercurrent of anxiety. The metaphorical reference to "storm clouds" over Europe and the imagery of the "Western electric fish" (British Empire), often viewed with suspicion by Finns during and after the war, versus the "eastern horse" (Russian Empire) was disseminating people's awareness of the international debates and risks.

In conjunction with this, the war panoramas, shown across Finland during the war for small fees to sustain people's attention, offered dramatic depictions of the conflict and attracted large audiences.[93] In Kurkijoki, a parish on the north-western shore of the Lake Ladoga, north of St. Petersburg, two war panoramas displayed vivid Russian war images for 15-25 pennies, prompting one writer's ironic remark about the absence of bashi-bazouks.[94] The popularity of these exhibitions highlighted the public's insatiable appetite for dramatic portrayals of conflict, reflecting a society captivated by the spectacle of war. There were more than 100 broadsheet ballads and war songs that influenced people's

[91] *Ahti* 06.04.1878 No 5 p.1.
[92] *Uusi Suometar* 24.04.1878 No 49 p.3.
[93] *Pohjois-Suomi* 16.03.1878 No 22 p.3.
[94] *Uusi Suometar* 29.03.1878 No 38 pp.6-7. *Uusi Suometar* 09.11.1877 No 135 pp.6-7.

ideas and opinions about wartime propaganda, boosting national sentiments and emotions in everyday life. A correspondent from Masku, near Turku, observed a generational divide: while elders longed for peace, the youth embraced war with enthusiasm, often through popular songs. According to *Uusi Suometar*, Anton Järvinen collected and published war songs and these circulated widely, juxtaposing the grief of women and older generations with the younger generation's readiness to sacrifice for their "brothers' sake."[95]

Local people, merchants, workers and factories in different towns experienced the war in their everyday life in different perspectives, during the Russian-Ottoman War, workers from the Finlayson Tampere cotton mills fought alongside Russian forces. Because it was customary at the time to name new Finlayson structures after notable contemporary events, in late 1877 the weaving hall was designated in honor of a battle that occurred in the Balkan town of Plevna during the conflict, reflecting the contemporary impact of the battle on Finnish industrial and urban culture.[96] According to *Tampereen Sanomat*, a new restaurant or "cellar" had been opened in the center of Tampere by the Esplanade under the name of "Plevna."[97] During the war, Jyväskylä's tobacco factory, owned by I. K. Toiwainen, drew on contemporary events in its marketing by producing brands named after battles, most prominently the "Plevna Papyrossia" cigarettes. Repeatedly advertised in the central Finland area with factory-price discounts, these products exemplify how commercial practices appropriated wartime symbolism and integrated it into everyday consumer culture.[98] In Jyväskylä, the surrender of Plevna was celebrated in the city center with fireworks, and some people in a festival mood expressed their excitement in the streets by shooting their guns.[99] Such letters from remote communities add important nuance to wartime Finland, revealing how iconic battles were perceived far from the front.[100] The relief brought by peace was strongly felt; one writer from the Rymättylä archipelago in southwestern Finland summed up this joy: *"...with the end of 'terrible blood flows' came hopes for a better future and a heartfelt blessing—Long live Finland!*"[101]

As a result of these local nationalism and everyday life experiences discussion, the Russian-Ottoman War in 1877-1878 was experienced in Finland not only as a distant military conflict but also as a catalyst for civic mobilization, cultural production, and local identity formation. Whilst Finland remained under Russian imperial rule, the war stimulated a remarkable level of local participation—through soldiers' service, Finnish Red Cross initiatives, newspaper correspondence, public meetings, and grassroots donations as well as implicit critiques in form of complains about the economic setbacks of the war. These activities brought together diverse social groups, creating new forms of solidarity that transcended class and region. The letters and press coverage reveal how ordinary Finns engaged with international events, interpreted imperial loyalties, and expressed a distinct sense of belonging. Women's contributions, community gatherings, and the symbolic power of music, literature, and national symbols all underscored how everyday life became intertwined with broader political and cultural currents.

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[95] *Uusi Suometar* 04.03.1878 No 27 p.1.
[96] The Finlayson factory building is now hosting the "Plevna Brewery and Restaurant" and cinema "Finnkino Plevna."
[97] *Tampereen Sanomat,* 23.10.1877, No 43 p.1.
[98] Paavo Tommila. *Keski-Suomen Lehdistö 1864–1885 (1)*, Jyväskylä: Keskisuomalainen Oy, 1970, 153.
[99] Paavo Tommila. *Keski-Suomen Lehdistö 1864–1885,* 1970, 200–201.
[100] *Ilmarinen* 28.11.1877 No 93 p.1.; *Keski-Suomi* 06.02.1878 No 11 p.2.; *Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti* 14.03.1878 No 31 pp.6-7.
[101] *Sanomia Turusta* 23.03.1878 No 24 p.2.

4 Conclusion

By examining these local voices and practices, this study demonstrates that Finland's war experience was not confined to battlefields but was deeply embedded in the rhythms of local society. In doing so, this research highlights how the war provided a stage for the negotiation of imperial allegiance and national identity. The Finnish case thus illustrates the significance of peripheral war experiences in nineteenth-century northern Europe and laid important foundations for the later emergence of an independent nation-state. The evidence from the 1870s demonstrates that national practices—media consumption, collective mobilizations, symbolic rituals, and popular discourse—were already embedded in everyday life during this earlier period. In this respect, the Finnish experience aligns with broader European patterns where wars served as accelerators of nationalism, yet it also underscores the particularities of a semi-autonomous borderland negotiating its position within the Russian Empire.

Despite being distant from the actual battlefields in the Balkans, Finns clearly felt the repercussions of imperial conflicts in 1877-78. Writers expressed their concerns regarding trade, instability, and both material and spiritual hardship. However, this study has two limitations that must be acknowledged. For instance, although there are a few examples from the experiences of illiterate populations, marginalized communities, and soldiers whose voices did not reach print remain less visible. Furthermore, although newspapers and letters reveal how war was imagined and narrated, they cannot fully capture the lived experiences of all social groups. These limitations, however, also suggest directions for further research, such as comparative studies with other peripheral societies of the Russian Empire—or with small nations elsewhere in Europe—to clarify whether similar dynamics of local mobilization and national expression occurred under imperial rule. In addition, a more systematic use of private correspondence, diaries, or material culture could further enrich our understanding of how war penetrated everyday life beyond the public sphere.

In Finland, the Russian-Ottoman War became an arena where imperial loyalty and national identity were actively negotiated, developing civic practices and cultural repertoires that contributed to the longer trajectory of nation-building. Kivimäki argues that nationalism continues to persist and flourish in many different forms, (as appeared in this chapter; various activities, including buying food, watching theater or war panoramas, reading newspapers aloud, purchasing newspapers together, enjoying music, following war songs, receiving education, participating in symbolic rituals, singing national songs, undergoing military conscription, and engaging in fireworks or shooting guns, along with many other routine practices and emotions), and may sponsored by institutions and representatives (as discussed in the chapter by the local letters, newspapers editors, Finnish Red Cross Association and prominent figures such as Agathon Meurman), but it is also consumed and produced at the grassroots of people's personal lives[102], just like this chapter exemplified people's lived experiences through the lens of local letters and different forms of nationalisms, namely banal, hot, and everyday nationalism.[103] Yet many of these elements had already emerged in the late nineteenth

[102] V. Kivimäki, S. Suodenjoki and T. Vahtikari, 'Today's Nationalisms and Their Challenge to Historians' In *Lived Nation as the History of Experiences and Emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*, V. Kivimäki, S. Suodenjoki and T. Vahtikari (eds) Palgrave MacMillan, (2021), 2-3. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-69882-9

[103] Rhys Jones & Peter Merriman, "Hot, banal and everyday nationalism: Bilingual road signs in Wales," *Political Geography,* 28:3 (2009), 164–73.

century. It is important to underscore that the war provided a critical opportunity for the Finnish-language press to disseminate nationalist ideas with unprecedented intensity, while simultaneously enabling the Finnish community to perform national song 'Maame' thousands of times more frequently than before.

In this context, newspapers, meetings, movements, collective rituals, philanthropic initiatives, public assemblies, and civic forms of cooperation played a decisive role in socially constructing Finland as a nation, but among those, the culture surrounding local letters and these letters' communicative practices built around them played a crucial role for the broader civic and cultural processes of nationalism as well as well as fostering community brainstorming. Their wide circulation and the way they connected dispersed communities to shared conversations, whether anonymously or not, directly contributed to what Benedict Anderson would call the formation of an "imagined community." Taking all of these factors into account, during the war, local letter culture contributed to strongly inform, influence, and enlighten Finns, much like a national sun that warmed sentiments, or like pure water fostered a sense of nationhood, and taught them to care for common or special national and imperial affairs as well as the future of the country, for the will of people.[104]

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[104] Risto Alapuro and Henrik Stenius. "Kansanliikkeet loivat kansakunnan." In *Kansa liikkeessä*, Eds. Risto Alapuro, Vaasa: Kirjayhtymä, (1989), 50-51.