Only the victory of the White Army enabled the birth of this independent and democratic Finland in which we have had a chance to live for 90 years. The victory of the Reds, in light of everything we have later learned, would have deemed Finland as part of the Soviet Union.¹

Our goal was clear: we wanted to bring into the cultural dialogue the dark side of Mannerheim, a picture of the butcher watching the inferno of Tampere from the safe distance and to whom the means of clutching the victory was irrelevant.²

These two quotations concerning the Finnish Civil War of 1918 were both published in 2008, 90 years after the war. The first one is a reader’s letter in a leading Finnish newspaper, written by a retired history professor, and the second one is a description given by a Finnish film director of her motives for making an animated short movie on the topic of C.G.E. Mannerheim, commander-in-chief of the White Army. The quotations address different aspects of the war. In the reader’s letter, the war and its end result are analyzed from a general viewpoint, whereas the film director focuses on a single battle, the one fought around Tampere at the turn from March to April 1918. Most significantly, the quotations differ in their attitude towards the war, the former perceiving it from quite a positive perspective, despite warfare’s destructive aspects, and the latter from an opposite perspective. The quotations summarize central – and conflicting – elements of the discourses that have prevailed – and still prevail – in the Finnish post-Cold War popular memory culture of the Civil War. This memory culture encompasses interpretations expressed in various public

forms and fields, including, for instance, newspaper debates, website controversies, novels, theater plays, and films.

Sorrow concerning the irreversible is part of human legacy the world over, and this burden can only be lightened by grieving together and sharing the pain. What is needed, are places and occasions loaded with meanings where emotions are allowed to surface and can be displayed.3

This third quotation also reflects upon the 1918 war. It is written by an author of historical fiction who in April 2013 participated in a public performance in Lahti, southern Finland, to commemorate the fate of Finns who in 1918 descended into a tragic war against each other. The place of the event was a former field where more than 20,000 thousand Reds – men, women, and children – gathered in the end phase of the – from the Red perspective – failed uprising. The 2013 event itself and the author’s description both express a new way to approach the war. Both evidence a perspective that underlines the global aspects of (civil) wars and their repercussions, such as suffering and revenge, but also efforts of reconciliation. In contrast to the two first examples, this new approach strives for a shared memory of the war that acknowledges that the 1918 war was not a monolithic event in which the divide between the guilty and the right-minded was clear and unproblematic. Instead, the new approach opens up perspectives for historical polyphony.

This chapter will show that the debate on the meaning of the Finnish Civil War is still, despite the temporal distance, lively. One could also argue that, due to political transformations in Finland, it has strengthened during the last two decades. The political transition following the collapse of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe from 1989 onwards reconstructed memory production in the respective countries. Even if Finland had not been under direct Soviet rule, Finnish society was affected in many ways by the end of the Cold War. In 1990, historian Jukka-Pekka Pietiäinen wrote in the leading Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* that the turmoil in the Soviet Union had in Finland ushered in a need to rethink and rewrite national history, the year of 1918 included. He contrasted the new situation with the 1980s, when the Civil War seemed to have transformed from a national trauma that aroused strong public emotions into a historical event that could be analyzed objectively.4