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Historical child abuse in out-of-home care: Finland disclosing and discussing its past

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Abstract

The main focus in this thesis lies in the observation of how the public debate is formulating and developing in Finland in relation to the current implementation of the Inquiry on historical child abuse and neglect in out-of-home care. This thesis analyses the testimonies published around the investigation and on historical child abuse, in the public domain. The release of two documentaries broadcasted on National TV (YLE TV1) in 2013 and 2014 triggered a, however scarce, online public discussion with few newspapers' as well as magazines' articles covering informatively the inquiry. The online debate has so far seen the participation mainly of the victims themselves of historical abuse. Generally, I found a confirmation that the Finnish individualistic culture is hardly prompt to open discussion on such topics. As S.N., a care leaver, explains in the second documentary: (Lehikoinen, *Luurankokaappi*¹, 2014) "the culture does not give space"² though people have "the need to speak."³ My thematic analysis on this debate has nonetheless disclosed an urge to come to terms with a past of institutional abuse, framed in a general context of public mistrust in the Child Welfare⁴ system. The care-leavers, narrating their stories in the two TV documentaries, disclosed memories of neglect, violence and systematical isolation of the Poor. Their stories are interpreted through the debate on the media as stories of injustice. Their narration portrays a concept of "child care" very far from nowadays' standards of child welfare. Care-leaver H.S. points his finger on the Finnish child-care institution where he spent his childhood in the '50s: "Only a monster can send a child to such a place!"⁵ (Lehikoinen, *Varastettu Lapsuus*,⁶ 2013).

Key words: *out of home child care, historical child abuse and neglect, mistrust in Institutions, changed perception of Child Welfare.*

¹ In English: *Skeleton's closet*

² This and all the other citations from sources in Finnish have been translated and the Finnish original is reported in the footnotes. In Finnish: "Kulttuuri ei anna tilaa."

³ In Finnish: "...tarve puhua"

⁴ I chose to use the term "child welfare" to refer to the policies and practices applied by the Finnish State in respect to services aiming to provide care to children. In Finnish the correspondent term is "lastensuojelu", literally "child protection", but it is officially translated in English as "child welfare" in Finland (see, for example: <http://www.lskl.fi/en>, Lastensuojelun keskusliitto English webpage, or http://www.stm.fi/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=3320152&name=DLFE-16239.pdf, a publication by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in English of a campaign against violence on children)

⁵ In Finnish: "Vain hirviö lähettäisi semmoseen paikkaan lapsia!"

⁶ In English: *Stolen childhood*

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1 Introduction

Since the 1990s historical institutional abuse has entered in the political agenda of many countries, resulting in inquiries, official apologies and various redress packages. A corresponding investigation on historical child abuse in out-of-home care is ongoing in Finland. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has outsourced the inquiry: “Inquiry: deficiencies and abuse in Child Welfare’s foster care” (“Selvitystyö: epäkohdat ja kaltoinkohtelu lastensuojelun sijaishuollossa”, www.stm.fi, 06.2013) to Department of History & Ethnology at Jyväskylä University (in the East part of the country). The inquiry is instructed to conduct interviews to care leavers that voluntarily decide to share their experiences of abuse and neglect. Interviews have started in autumn 2014 and the final report on the Inquiry is due to be completed by spring 2016. The Finnish inquiry covers cases of possible abuse and neglect during the period 1937-1983. The period limits the inquiry to the timeframe between the implementation of the first law on child protection and its revision in 1983. Rather than focusing on the testimonies collected by the inquiry, this thesis analyses the reaction in the public domain. It is important to notice that in Finland a climate of constant and increasing public critique towards Child Welfare affairs has intensified in the very last years. In 2012 a new law favored placement for children in foster-families instead of institutions. In a blog forum on the online magazine *Keskustelu.Suomi24* it is commented:” Starting with this year child welfare has been changed and children are to be placed primarily in foster families and only if necessary into institutions”⁷ (“The Swedish model⁸,” 14.01.2012). Few blogposts followed this comment underlining the general opinion for which the overall lack of supervision in foster care is the major cause of cases of abuse. Those blogposts are posted less than 2 months after the official Apology Ceremony finalizing the inquiry on historical child abuse in out-of-home care in Sweden, which was held November 21, 2011. Finland is regarded as needing to come to terms with the failure of its Child Welfare’s system. ”The policies of Finnish family-homes’ care and its deficiencies allow the same tragic results as in Sweden”⁹ (“The Swedish model¹⁰,” 14.01.2012). The general public criticism towards Child Welfare, together with the international spread of similar inquiries from the 1990s, especially the Swedish one, serving as a prior model, have created the basis for the launch of the inquiry in Finland as well.

⁷ In Finnish: ”Vuodenvaihteessa lastensuojelulakiin tuli muutos, joka velvoittaa sijoittamaan lapset ensisijaisesti perheisiin ja vain pakkotilanteessa laitokseen”.

⁸ In Finnish: ”Ruotsinmalli”

⁹ In Finnish: ”Suomalaisen perhehoidon käytännöt ja puutteet mahdollistavat samanlaisen traagisen kehityskulun kuin Ruotsissa”

¹⁰ In Finnish: ”Ruotsinmalli”

2 Aim and questions

The aim of this thesis is to contextualize the ongoing Inquiry on historical child abuse and neglect in out-of-home care in Finland within the public debate. I discuss how the inquiry is debated in the Finnish public arena. Furthermore my reflection concentrates on the way in which the present understanding of the concept of “child care” and consequently “child abuse” has urged the inquiry itself, together with the activating influence of other countries’ previous experience. Among those, Sweden has primarily served as a model to Finland. I consider how the debate on the Inquiry is being led in Finland and which are the prevailing themes brought to light in this discussion. For achieving this, I will first briefly analyze the political and social settings which brought to the launch of the inquiry. The focus will consequently shift on the ongoing media coverage on historical child abuse, analyzing the public reaction through articles and comments on the web and identifying the main themes discussed.

John Murphy explains, considering Australian experience facing inquiries on abuse perpetuated against two groups of children minorities and a general inquiry on child abuse in out-of-home care (see chapter 4.2.1) : “The process in each of these three cases has some similarities – following a trajectory of advocacy, public inquiry, personal testimony, media coverage and official apology” (Murphy, 2010, p.299). My main concern is to identify this “trajectory” in the Finnish context, to observe which components of the trajectory defined by Murphy are present and to which extent and with which kind of significance those are defining the Finnish disclosure of its past of child abuse in the public sphere. The public debate in Finland is being substantially formed in reaction to the broadcasting of two TV documentaries, *Varastettu lapsuus* (2013) and *Luurankokaappi* (2014)¹¹ by Ari Lehikoinen. Therefore my analysis of the online public debate will center on the themes arisen from the documentaries and on the triggered discussion around them, together with themes emerging in general in the public discourse. The questions I have aimed to give an answer to are:

- 1) Whose narratives are available in the public domain? Which are the themes addressed in the newspaper articles, documentaries and blogposts?
- 2) Have the themes expressed in the two television documentaries been structuring the themes expressed in newspaper articles, blogposts etc.?
- 3) How do these themes relate to discussions that have taken place abroad? Which themes are present and which are absent when comparing to narratives of previous inquiries abroad?

¹¹ In English respectively: *Stolen childhood* and *Skeleton’s closet*

3 Literature and previous research

3.1 Inquiries into historical abuse - an emerging subfield within transitional justice

Historical abuse in out-of-home care has become a phenomenon of political interest in various nations. It is therefore essential to take into consideration the previous literature on this topic. By doing that it is possible to gain an adequate view of the international context in which the investigations on this form of abuse have taken place in the last decades and which kind of public debate has preceded and/or followed them. In the last twenty years (approximately), in fact, child historical abuse in out-of-home care has become a more and more discussed area of interest. As Johanna Sköld affirms: “I want to highlight the fact that historical inquiries and redress and reconciliation processes for abused and neglected children in out-of-home care are underway in several parts of the world and that studies of these processes may constitute a new interdisciplinary field (Sköld, 2013, p.7). Kathleen Daly states that: “Institutional abuse of children was ‘discovered’ in the 1980s, with concept diffusion in the 1990s” (Daly, 2014, p. 5) Inquiry model and consequent redress schemes for historical abuse in Public Institutions have been in fact launched internationally from the 90’s. This kind of inquiry can be seen, as explained by Sköld, as the mirror of a “new era of transitional justice” (Sköld, 2013, p.11) typical of a so called “politics of regret” (Sköld, 2013, p.11). The first case, in this sense, was the International redeem process started with the Nuremberg Trials, for giving justice to Holocaust victims. The political and culture background for inquiries into abuse and neglect in Public Institutions and generally foster-care has been the raising of the debate on Human Rights from the 70s, generating new focus on processes aiming for restitution against injustice. In this context, notably, many Truth Commissions and inquiries were launched to address injustices toward indigenous people, like in Australia and Canada, as reported by Murphy (2010) and Daly (2014).

Furthermore, the concept of “care” and in here more specifically “child care” has started being scrutinized in the last decades, pointing the finger on the authorities in charge of it. In countries like Canada or Ireland various religious congregations have primarily been responsible for the care of children, while in the Nordic countries the Welfare States have “substituted” parental care when needed, through child welfare and social welfare in a broader sense. A new wave of criticism towards authorities in charge of social welfare in the last two decades has generated the inclination towards inquiries. Using an affirmation of Sköld, in other words, a triggering factor has consisted in “A social climate or political discourse that allows challenges to certain hegemonic structures”

(Sköld, 2013, p.16). Moreover Sköld affirms that crucial has also been the creation of certain “linguistic prerequisites” (Sköld, 2013, p. 16): in recent decades child abuse and sexuality have gradually ceased to be a complete taboo.

In this international context, it is easy to notice how also in Finland an increasing attention on topics related to child abuse and neglect, both in in-home and out-of home contexts, has created the preconditions for the launch of the inquiry on historical child abuse in the Public sphere. Finland is implementing, adapting it to its own reality, an inquiry already carried out in several countries such as Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Holland, Australia, Canada, Norway, Denmark and Sweden. In addition an inquiry in Northern Ireland is operating now and an inquiry on sexual abuse in out-of-home care has just been established in the UK¹². Sweden has especially served as a model for the launch of the Inquiry in Finland, being both geographically, but most importantly historically, the neighbor country with which Finland cooperates at most, on various levels (just an example of the tight historical connection between Finland and Sweden is the number of children transferred to Sweden during the Second World War, an estimated 70.000¹³)

Institutional abuse is a complex phenomenon. Daly’s analysis of it is particularly comprehensive. Daly, in her research on 19 reported cases of institutional abuse in residential care in Canada and Australia, defines institutional abuse in the historical perspective as such: “If the focus of analysis is on historical institutional abuse, abuse is broadly construed as physical, sexual, emotional, and in some instances, cultural; and the types of institutions considered are ‘total’ (or not-so-total) in that they are segregated from the mainstream of society” (Daly, 2014, p.6). Her definition is developed further conceptualizing “core cases” and “core-plus cases”: Daly differentiate cases of abuse in a way that can include and generalize the concept of failure of the system in whichever context and historical period (Daly, 2014, p.7):

The response to institutional abuse can be conceptualized as a core with two concentric rings. Common to all cases, the ‘core’, is a failure of government or church authorities to protect and care for children. Of the 19 cases, 12 are ‘core’ cases in that this was the sole basis for the response. Five are ‘core-plus’ cases. In these, policy or practice wrongs were committed against certain groups of children (‘core-plus-one’ cases), or the wrongs against children were embedded in a more general discrimination against a group (‘core-plus-two cases).

Daly gives as an example of “core-plus -one” case in Australia the British “child migrants“ , who were children brought after the Second World War to Australia from Britain, Ireland and Malta. They were made believe that they were orphans and placed in institutions (Murphy reports that their

¹² Information on the inquiry in the UK available at: <https://childsexualabuseinquiry.independent.gov.uk/>

¹³ Source available at: http://www.migrationinstitute.fi/files/pdf/artikkelit/tutkimus_suomalaisten_sotalasten_historiasta.pdf, p.4

approximate number reached 7000-10.000). As “core-plus-two” cases the scholar gives account of the forcible assimilation of Native children in Indian Residential Schools in Canada and the correspondent so-called “Stolen Generation” of Indigenous children in Australia. A similarity is evident in the institutionalization of American Indians in the 1800/1900centuries (Daly, 2014, p.7).

Though I concentrate my analysis on media reaction to “core cases”, is nonetheless important to underline that in Finland as well, the minority of Romani community suffered a “special treatment” during the span of time the Inquiry researches cases of abuse in the public sphere and can be therefore considered the Finnish example of “core-plus-two” cases, in the broader phenomenon of historical institutional child abuse. As Maija-Leena Peura points out in her thesis¹⁴ (Peura, 2014, p.3):

Precise statistic on the number of Romani children as customers of the Child Welfare or of Institutions of care is almost impossible to find, but according to some estimations one out of two Romani child has been placed elsewhere than his home during the period 1950-1980¹⁵.

She gives furthermore reasons for the situation of the Romani community in respect to Child Welfare policy, in these terms: “The reasons for the placement of Romani [children] is claimed to have been both the forced assimilation policy and their living conditions”¹⁶. The assimilation policy was rather systematical and mainly entailed taking the children into custody already when they were very young. Peura let “Tanja” speak:” I was two days old when mum put me in a child institution”¹⁷ (Peura, 2014, p.39).

3.2 Public discourses about historical abuse: care-leavers going public

The aim of my thesis is to contextualize the inquiry on historical child abuse in out-of-home care in Finland in the public debate, to analyze which kind of participation is to be found by the general public and which themes are coming to light when comparing it to previous researches touching the same topic. Therefore I explore studies which analyze narratives of care-leavers in other countries

¹⁴ In Finnish: ”Kolme kokemusta Romanilastenkodista” (“Three experiences of Romani children homes”)

¹⁵ In Finnish: Tarkkoja tilastoja romanien lastensuojeluasiakkuuksista ja huostaanotoista on lähes mahdotonta löytää, mutta joidenkin arvioiden mukaan romanilapsista joka toinen on ollut kodin ulkopuolelle sijoitettuna 1950-1980 lukujen välisenä ajanjaksona (Peura, 2014, p3).

¹⁶ In Finnish: ”Romanilasten sijoituksen syiksi on esitetty niin pakkoassimilaatiopolitiikkaa kuin asuntolojakin pakkoassimilaatiopolitiikkaa kuin asuntolojakin”.

¹⁷ in Finnish: ”Mä olin kahen päivän vanha ku äitilaitto lastenkotiin”.

where the same inquiry has already taken place, showing which kind of general debate those narratives have triggered and which reaction in the political arena. I use literature from Australia, Ireland, Sweden and UK to demonstrate how heterogeneous the research on public discourse on historical child abuse in public care has been and how significantly the perspectives of the researches have varied, showing entire different angles of the same phenomenon. The comparison between those previous public discourses and the form of public debate is being shaped in Finland is most interesting.

3.2.1 The Australian case

Through in-depth interviews Murphy explores and collects the narratives of 40 care-leavers in the Australian State of Victoria (Murphy, 2010). In Australia the investigation on historical institutional child abuse had started focusing on “core-plus” cases, to use Daly’s definitions. In fact, in the 1990s both the inquiry on the deliberate and continuous removal of Aboriginal children, “The Stolen Generation” from their families (taken to Christian missions starting from the nineteenth century), and the inquiry on British child migrants brought to Australia in the post-war years and institutionalized opened up a past of systematical abuse of children minorities. On the wave of these investigations, Murphy reports that: “After 2001 Senator Murray went on to press for an inquiry into the third set of experiences, of institutional care in general” (Murphy, 2010, p.298). The investigation by a Senate Commission took the form of Public hearings of care-leavers and brought to the so called “Forgotten Australians report” In the report is underlined the courage of the care-leavers in coming out and disclose their stories to the public domain.

Murphy describes how in the Australian case a strong interdependency of involvement by care-leavers groups advocating their right to be heard, their consequent “coming out” and the media reaction has created the means to re-construct the identities of the victims. As affirmed by Murphy: “This is in part about composing one’s own story in the reflected light of the stories others narrate, and when one’s narrative of the self matches what circulates in the public realm, the resonances can be enriching and affirming” (Murphy, 2010, p.308). Through the *Forgotten Australians* report, many care-leavers, interviewed by Murphy after three/four years from the report, could identify one selves in a group, feeling solidarity towards the others, as having shared the same experiences of abuse, now recognized by the same nation that had previously forgotten them. The inquiry caused a strong reaction by the public opinion which helped the narratives of the care-leavers to become more powerful. This attention was projected on the victims themselves helping them to come to terms with their traumas and reconstruct their lost identity.

3.2.2 The Irish case

In Ireland the same investigation not only has triggered an intense public reaction but has also deeply affected the identity of the State. It has undoubtedly generated the need to reformulate the very basic fundamentals on which the Irish State is founded on, especially the family nucleus and the responsibility taken by the State to replace it when that was perceived as necessary, out of a policy of isolation of the weaker part of the population. John Smith well describes how this process unfolded (Smith, 2001), concentrating his attention on two main sources: P. McCabe's book "The butcher boy" (published in 1992) and the documentary by Mary Raftery's "States of fear" (broadcasted on TV in 1999). Smith defines them as: "A distinctive shift in Ireland's willingness to confront its past [...] Ireland began to "speak up" in the 1990's with a new openness most evident in media-generated controversies" (Smith, 2001, p.3) The inquiry and debate on historical abuse in Irish industrial and reformatory schools is shown to have reached the point of implying a reformulation of Irish identity as a whole. It traced back to its very traditional core values the origin of the failure in the care of what were called "children at risk" by Irish child welfare institutions. Those were mainly under the responsibility of various Irish religious congregations who traditionally provided facilities for the care of children, with State's approval. Ireland presented an "architecture of containment", as defined by Smith all throughout his article, finalized in hiding "problematic" children from the respectable Irish society. Smith summarizes the two main narration which caused the break-through for investigating this reality of detention that very often resulted in neglect and abuse of children set in out-of-home care. Moreover he reports how, in the political arena, the election of Mary Robinson favored this transformation and symbolized the negotiation of a new Irish identity, claiming "inclusiveness" as a sign of change and the necessity to apologize for past failures. The author underlines that in Ireland there had been three previous commissioned studies on child care in Industrial and reformatory schools, with reports respectively in in 1936, 1970 and 1980. Several autobiographies of survivors had been published in the '80-'90s. The State decided to ignore the records on abuse, physical, psychological and sexual and not even to interfere in condemnable practices implemented by the care-providers, in charge of child care. The Children Act, back in 1908, sanctioned that industrial schools and reformatories should provide "children at risk" what their parents could not. The ideology behind this care system is the idea of family as the fundamental and sacred unit of Irish society, substituted by the public care system whenever the family was not able to fulfill its primary functions. This Irish identity funded on the family is in clear contrasts with the very same idea of hiding the so called "children at risk" because of poverty or other negative circumstances from the "respectable Irish society" (Smith, 2001, p.14), forming a

national identity built by concealing reality of poverty etc. in structures of confinement. Francie the butcher boy is all of this, he tries to find a place in society and to get re-integrated all over again but the system pushes him back every time in its hidden structure till finally confining him in a mental hospital. The Irish apology to the survivors underlines that the community must remain “vigilant” for this not to happen again, and “survivors will have “spoken themselves back into the national family” (Smith, 2001, p.22). This only can assure the creation of a “Post-national narrative of Irish identity” (Smith, 2001, p.22), based on the awareness not only of a past of failure in the care of those children “at risk” but more deeply of their systematical isolation from the “decent” society.

3.2.3 The Swedish case

In the Swedish case such a reformulation of the identity of the National State has not resulted from the though very intense public debate on historical child abuse in out-of-home care. This shows in Malin Arvidsson’s analysis of the Swedish inquiry and redress processes (Arvidsson, 2015). The inquiry and consequent redress scheme have been accomplished in Sweden in two phases. The first, in 2005-2011, saw the establishment of a national inquiry, aiming, quoting Arvidsson from the Inquiry (Arvidsson, 2015, forthcoming): ‘to produce a report that provides both redress for the victims and lessons for the future’ (SOU 2009:99, p. 323)¹⁸. The second, 2010-2011, was triggered by an intense political debate reinforced by care-leavers requests, bringing to an official apology by the Swedish State with a ceremony on the 21st November of 2011 and reparation in terms of a financial redress. Arvidsson explains how progressively the public perception of the Swedish State has changed and become critical towards the social welfare: “The growing influence of neoliberalism in the 1980s changed the narrative again, constructing previously progressive aspects of the Social Democratic narrative as collectivist and potentially totalitarian” (Arvidsson, 2015, forthcoming) and she furthermore explains that: “This change in attitudes towards the Swedish welfare state created space for the reconsideration of different aspects of the country’s social policy”(Arvidsson, 2015, forthcoming). The investigation on historical child abuse in out-of-home care is to be placed in this general discourse in Sweden. The official National Apology in 2011 and the later decision for a financial compensation of the victims were the result of the combined pressure by care-leaver associations and the media and what Arvidsson calls “a certain responsiveness of the political elite” (Arvidsson, 2015, forthcoming). Especially in phase two the debate became more and more intense. A political initial decision for not allowing a financial

¹⁸Inquiry program available at: <http://beta.regeringen.se/contentassets/df5378e6513b4bc9b9cc3d16b4007461/vanvard-i-social-barnvard-under-1900-talet-hela-dokumentet-sou-200999>

redress to abuse victims brought to strong public critique and the reaction of some political parties. Associations of care-leavers together with the Social Democratic, Left, and Green parties were able to turn the decision and made the Government agree for granting it. What is interesting to notice is that the documentary *Stulen Barndom*¹⁹ (2005) triggered not only a strong public reaction but also the creation of a very active care-leaver organization named after the documentary (2006) itself. In this context many care-leavers brought up the question of why, in the first place, they were put into foster care or Institutions, while some others did not question that, considering themselves as having being in need of be placed in out-of-home care. As the author points out, the reparation process has in the Swedish case not included a questioning of the role of the State as care-provider overall. In contrast to the Irish case, in Sweden: “this more fundamental critique of the child welfare system has not had any major impact on the debate about redress” (Arvidsson, 2015, forthcoming).

3.2.4 Abuse, denial and consequent scandal: a British case

A different dynamic occurs when the threat of negative media attention influences the gatekeepers of sensitive information, and therefore crucial information is kept hidden. As explained by Walsh in “Ethical Research with Children”, “...negotiating access might be more difficult at one time than another. For example sensitivity about a topic is heightened because of media attention. No matter what the researcher’s intention, gatekeepers can perceive in some research the possibility of undesirable public attention” (Walsh in: Farrell 2005, p.75).

This is the case, for instance, of the scandal around a very popular British BBC celebrity, Jimmi Savile, accused post-mortem of sexual abuse. The accusations covered his 50 years long career as a public figure and as a philanthropist. The first documentary involving accusation, which triggered a previously unseen media interest and public scandal, came out one year after his death. In this case the gatekeepers, BBC as UK’s public service broadcaster, his colleagues, as well as the several friends involved in Politics and charity associations, have seemingly preferred to avoid to come to terms with the enormous scandal, which however eventually came to light after his death. “Savile’s sexual offending and its subsequent institutional cover-up triggered a ‘trial by media’ which in turn initiated the next phase in the scandal’s development” (Greer and McLaughlin, 2013, p.243). A spiral effect led in a timeframe of few months in 2012 to the complete disclosure of the scandal, starting from small circulation monthly news magazines and blogs to arrive to “mainstream news outlets and blogs” (Greer and McLaughlin, 2013, p.252), though there was a clear striving to submerge the

¹⁹ In English: *Stolen Childhood*

case again. When eventually the *Sunday Mirror* and *Mail on Sunday* officially reported that information had been gathered on Savile's pedophilia, and furthermore, in September 2012 "ITV announced that on 3 October *Exposure: The Other Side of Jimmy Savile* would name Savile as a prolific sexual predator" (Greer and McLaughlin, 2013, p.252) the scandal broke out. At this point allegations on his sexual conduct multiplied very rapidly and victims were ready to speak and come out with the truth, while colleagues of the BBC and his family and friends persisted in their denial. The authors of the article quote an impressive number of newspaper articles titled with sensational references to Savile as a rapist and child abuser with testimonies of victims, in a very short period of time in the autumn of 2012. BBC endured for years a "trial by media", needing to re-structure and require resignations from employees who were personally allegedly connected to Savile and the scandal, in order to regain credibility. A latent scandal of child abuse by a public figure representing a National service came out through the media which had a huge impact in the inquiry and the re-shaping not only of Savile but of the whole BBC as a public service.

3.3 Child abuse as a concept within out-of-home care

3.3.1 Definitions

My first concern while doing this research has been to clarify to myself fundamental concepts reoccurring while collecting data on historical abuse in out-of-home contexts. The definition given by David Wolfe et al. in their work prepared for the Law Commission of Canada fits very well the Finnish context of Institutional abuse: "Prolonged treatment, unnecessary removal from the home, misplacement and misdiagnosis due to inadequate assessment resources all may be viewed as forms of system abuse" (Wolfe et al., 2001, p.4).

I investigated the term abuse in the context of out-of-home care and I selected the definitions given by the Irish Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, which defines, as on its webpage (CICA, 2000), four types of abuse:

- Physical abuse – the willful, reckless or negligent infliction of physical injury on, or failure to prevent such injury to, the child;
- Sexual abuse – the use of the child by a person for sexual arousal or sexual gratification of that person or another person;

- Neglect – failure to care for the child which results, or could reasonably be expected to result in serious impairment of the physical or mental health or development of the child, or serious adverse effects on his or her behaviour or welfare;
- Emotional abuse – any other act or omission towards the child which results, or could reasonably be expected to result in serious impairment of the physical or mental health or development of the child, or serious adverse effects on his or her welfare. (CICA, 2015)

3.3.2 Major effects of Institutional abuse

Particularly interesting is the information gathered through studies done on the long-term effects of abuse on care-leavers in Public Institutions. The findings are useful to trace common themes in the narrations of care-leavers in Finland.

Murphy (2010), analyzing the report on the so-called *Forgotten Australian* inquiry, affirms (Murphy, 2010, p.302): “Combined with the deprivations and injuries of institutional ‘care’, the report argued the long-term damage was profound, asserting that care leavers had difficulty forming intimate relationships, were more likely to have their own children placed in care, and were over-represented in figures on suicide, mental illness, imprisonment, unemployment and drug and alcohol abuse”. He furthermore quotes (Murphy, 2010, p.302) the affirmation of a witness of abuse sadly describing the fate of her sister: “She was dying from her childhood”²⁰.

Meaningful and particularly adaptable to the data I encountered in the Finnish context is the list of long-term effects of abuse on children by Wolfe, Jaffe, Jette, Poisson (2001). The major themes summarized by the authors reflect how abuse uniquely affects children when occurring in public institution (Wolfe et al., 2001, p.8-9):

Loss of Trust, Fear of Intimacy, Shame, Guilt and Humiliation, Fear, Disrespect for Authority, Avoidance and “Vicarious Trauma”, defined as such: “Harm that occurs as a result of abuse within institutions and organizations is not restricted to the victims of trauma alone. Other children in the institution are often aware of the abuse, even if they themselves are not abused, and may exist in a state of perpetual fear of becoming the next victim.

²⁰ Submission quoted in SCARC, *Forgotten Australians*, p. 159.

4 Data and Method of research

4.1 Data

My data is gathered by searching through the main Finnish online newspapers and sector magazines articles and blogs regarding historical abuse in out-of-home care. I conducted the search by using the following keywords: “laitos / väkivalta”, (violence/institutions) “pahoinpitely / laitos” (abuse/institutions), “läimminlyönti/laitos” (neglect/institution), “*Varastettu lapsuus*” (stolen childhood), the title of the first TV documentary (2013) on abuse in Public institutions in the ’50-’60s and “*Luurankokaappi*” (skeleton’s closet), the title of the second documentary (2014) based on the story of one of the care-leavers, already narrator in *Varastettu Lapsuus*. I collected an interesting amount of data that says even by omitting a good deal about the discussion and the lack of it that characterizes Finnish society dealing with historical abuse. After collecting my data I ended up with miscellaneous sources, using all articles I had found on online magazines and national newspapers on the topic, this mirroring the limited coverage given in the media in Finland up to now. I used furthermore all the blog forums I found, where historical abuse in out-of-home care has been discussed, out of which I have selected the most relevant blog posts in order to respond to my research questions. My final data consists of:

- 2 television documentaries, *Varastettu Lapsuus* and *Luurankokaappi*, broadcasted respectively in 2013 and 2014, both realized by the Finnish documentarist Ari Lehikoinen.
- 4 online newspapers’ articles published between 2013 and 2015, from *Helsingin Sanomat*) dated 29.4.2013, 27.10.2013 and 29.12.2014; *Keskisuomalainen* (1), 07.11.2014 and *Oululehti* (1), 02.02.2015.
- 3 online magazines’ articles published between 2011 and 2015 from *Lääkärilehti* (04.09.2013), *Lapsenmaailma*, (09.01.2015) and *Kasvatus & Aika* (2011), this last a book review of the book *Käheä ääninen tyttö*.
- blogposts from 5 internet forums between 2011 and 2015 (to include the starting political debate previous and leading to the launch of the inquiry), out of which 2 linked to the broadcast of the documentaries on YLE TV 1, (see *YLE.fi/vintti* and *YLE.fi/aihe* in the reference list, dated 26.04.2013-, and 19.12.2014-), 3 respectively on the blog forums *puheenvuoro.uusisuomi.fi*, (12.06.2013), *keskustelusuomi24.fi* (14.01.2012-), with reference on the inquiry led in Sweden and *blogit.iltalehti.fi* (01.02.2011-), on the political debate on Finnish out-of home care previous the launch of the inquiry.
- 1 twitters ‘posts exchange in 2013 commenting the documentary *Varastettu Lapsuus*.

As I discuss further in my conclusions the lack of coverage of the topic is a relevant and interesting aspect emerging in my research: several Finnish major online newspapers has not reported on historical abuse and the relative ongoing national inquiry. Examples of such an omission are *Turun Sanomat* (from the city of Turku), *Savon Sanomat* (Kuopio), *Aamulehti* (Tampere), *Kaleva* (Oulu), to mention the largest circulating newspapers in Finland. In this respect, also, the research in internet gave me the access to an interesting overall view of the context of the media debate. As Silverman points out, in fact, “as a context of social construction, the internet is a unique discursive milieu which facilitates the researcher’s ability to analyze the structure of talk [...] and the construction of social structures as these occur discursively”(Silverman, 2011, p.253). Both by the presence and the relative lack of information on the topic I gained a context-rich perspective on the present state of the debate on historical child abuse in the public sector and the inquiry in Finland.

4.2 Method of analysis

Considering the method of analysis of my data, thematic analysis proved to be the most suitable method, fitting all forms of data I encountered, searching and examining themes without a fixed theoretical frame. As pointed out by Braun and Clarke (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.81):

In contrast to IPA or grounded theory (and other methods like narrative analysis DA or CA), thematic analysis is not wedded to and pre-existing theoretical framework [...] and can be used to do different things within them. Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, or it can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society.

Braun and Clarke in this paragraph give account of the extreme flexibility of thematic analysis and how, within this method, a constructionist approach, permits to give sense to themes as products of existing discourses present in society. Such a constructionist method, applied here to the themes emerging in the debate on child historical abuse in out-of-home contexts in Finland, makes it possible to use the themes present in the public narrations to see how they serve for forming the current discussion. The public debate is in fact shaping through the TV documentaries (realized after the proposition of Finnish scholars interested in the topic and inspired by other countries’ previous experiences), through the comments of the general public on historical abuse and finally through journal’s articles written informatively. All of those contribute to create a discourse and affect and are affected by the narratives emerging in that. In Sweden, as in other countries like Canada or Australia, the public debate proceeded and was parallel to the inquiries. The redress schemes and official Apologies were the result not only of the investigation itself, but of the way the public discourse was being built and affected the care-leavers themselves, who had a double role: actors in the narrating process but also witnesses of a public discourse around them.

David Carr (Carr 1986) writes about personal story-telling as a mean of perpetuating life, enacting it and sharing it through stories of the self: “The actions and sufferings of life can be viewed as a process of telling ourselves stories, listening to those stories, acting them out or living them through (Carr, 1986 p.126). In this respect, Murphy, in line with scholars of narrative identity like Carr, reaffirms the importance of story-telling for the construction of the self, and collocates the urge for this kind of narration within the public domain: “we locate ourselves within larger discursive communities” (Murphy, 2010, p.307). He poses two fundamental questions, well summarizing the core of a constructionist approach in the case of the debate on past abuses on children and the building of a relative narration in the public discourse: “How do we understand ourselves through the embodied memories of childhood?... a second group of questions is about how people locate themselves in larger public discourses about their experiences” (Murphy, 2010, p.299). In other words, how are the narratives of the care-leavers affected both by their own personal memory, with gaps and own later interpretation of the facts of childhood and, at the same time, by the public narratives built around them, in which they are collocated? Those questions are fundamental when analyzing the ongoing debate in Finland, where the public discourse is centered on experiences narrated by the care-leavers, especially in the documentaries, and, in the meantime, a more general discourse on the matter is formulated and provided by newspapers and magazines’ articles.

Furthermore, by making use of thematic analysis I could analyze my data and pinpoint both an “explicit level” of reoccurring themes and a meaningful “latent level” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.11). As the authors in fact explain: “a thematic analysis at the latent level goes beyond the semantic content of the data, and starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations – and ideologies - that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.11).

4.3 Ethical considerations

My data collection consists of documentaries, articles, blogs as well as a book review on child abuse and neglect in a span of approximately 50 years in Finland. By analyzing articles written in online newspapers and magazines, material published by the authorities and scholars on the subject, I have not needed to specifically take notice of ethical issues. On the contrary, my main ethical concern has been confined to the blogposts I have collected. The blogs discussing the Inquiry and the documentaries on abuse in Public Institutions posed me ethical questions in terms of whether I would need to ask permission to use the material in the blogs to the participants. Regarding this

issue Silverman explains: “there is no consensus among social scientists’ responses to the broader question of what is private and what is public online” (Silverman, 2011, p.108). Scholars have different positions on the matter and I adopted the position defined by Hookway²¹, quoted by Silverman (Silverman, 2011, p108) as “fair game-public domain”. In other terms, as blogs are available openly on the internet, they are exposed to the public sphere and therefore consent is not necessary. Borrowing Silverman’s explanation: “Blogs are firmly located in the public domain and for this reason it can be argued that the necessity of consent should be waived” (Silverman, 2011, p.108). I nonetheless chose to avoid using the names of the bloggers, whenever they are not using pseudonyms, and quote and refer to them by the initials of their names. I chose the same line with the narrators of the documentaries, as well as whoever chose to give his/her personal narration or comment on the topic. The role of bloggers in such a sensitive topic is particularly dense of meanings in respect to ethical concern: they constitute “natural occurring data”, but at the same time their post are an open request for respect and attention by the public. To find a balance between their personal need for their voices to be recognized and the extreme sensitivity and delicacy of their narrations, the use of their initials seem to be the most sensible compromise.

4.4 Ethical questions and historical perspective

Having such an historical asset, the Inquiry has to cope with the fact that the perception of “abuse” or “neglect” is changed during the period covered by the research: what is considered neglect now, was possibly a common “educational” practice 40/50 years ago. Ethics has an historical dimension. As Sköld explains (Sköld, 2013, p.13): “Since the inquiry commissions interview informants who tell of events in the past when the methods of discipline were different from today’s standards, the definition of what should be regarded as abuse or neglect, and what should not, is an undertaking of complex dimensions”. This is well expressed also in the Official Plan of the Finnish Inquiry, published by the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (STM, June 2013)²² in 2013: “The challenging question in the research is how to consider in today’s perspective Child Welfare’s issues that in the past were considered common practice in families or Institutions²³”.

²¹ Hookway, N., (2008), “Entering the blogosphere”: some strategies for using blogs in social research”, *Qualitative research*, 8 (1), 91-113.

²² Available at STM webpage: http://www.stm.fi/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=40880&name=DLFE-26806.pdf

²³ In Finnish: ”Haastava kysymys selvitystyössä on se, miten nykypäivästä käsin ymmärretään menneen lastensuojelun sijaishuollon kasvatuskäytäntöjä, jotka silloin olivat osa tavanomaista laitospäivä- tai perhekasvatusta...”

5 Analysis

5.1 Political debate previous the launch of the inquiry

From the beginning of the 2000s, the political debate on child welfare had been intensifying in Finland. General issues on the structure of child welfare has become central, especially in the political agenda of the SDP (Social democratic party). Simultaneously the public attention has been primarily centered on the critique towards the whole Child Welfare's system, during the last few years. The system is being accused of placing children either in Public Institutions or into private ones, such are small-scale homes for care and accommodation ("perhekoteja", literally family-homes), mainly out of economic gain. Those family-homes have rapidly spread the last decade in a model similar to the one adopted by Sweden from the 1990s, as explained by Sköld et al. (Sköld et al., 2012, p. 18): "some former foster homes were transformed into small-scale institutions knowns as the so called HVB-homes". Around those "perhekoteja", the public critique has grown more and more and the discussion has been focused on the little supervision those facilities are subject to. In 2011 the former Minister of Health and Social Services (Peruspalvelu Ministeri) Maria Guzenina-Richardson pressed for the recognition of the need of more surveillance. They were in fact seen to have become more a business than a solution in terms of a proper and professionally run accommodation and care for children whose families are not in condition to provide such.

Furthermore the public debate is mainly focusing on abuse within the family and in schools and very little attention has been given to historical abuse. Newspapers have followed for instance the development of the inquiry in a dramatically famous case of abuse (causing eventually her death) of an 8-year old girl by her father and stepmother, dated 2012. Many entries in the newspapers covered step-to-step the different phases of the inquiry and the ongoing trial. Child domestic abuse is definitely a very hot topic at the moment in Finland, seemingly triggering more and more intervention by child protection authorities when there is a suspect of abuse or neglect in in-home settings. Historical abuse seems to remain rather unnoticed in comparison²⁴.

²⁴ I report the hits in my search for articles on historical abuse from *Helsingin Sanomat*, the newspaper with the largest circulation in Finland (time span between 01.01.2012 and 25.04.2015) as an example to justify my conclusion: Keywords: "child" and "abuse" (lapsi, pahoinpitely in Finnish), 255 hits out of which none on historical abuse and 27 on the 8-year old girl's case. Keywords: "institution" and "abuse" (laitos, pahoinpitely in Finnish), 13 hits out of which 1 on historical abuse. Keywords: "institution" and "violence" (laitos, väkivalta in Finnish), 73 hits out of which 3 on historical abuse.

Finland has nonetheless followed the example of the other countries and stepped into the international debate on historical institutional child abuse. The Swedish inquiry has served in this respect as a prior model on one hand, and on the other the involvement of Finnish intelligentsia has been fundamental to put into motion the process in Finland as well. The fact that Finnish inquiry into historical institutional abuse has been designed as a research project, not directly under a State commission, distinguishes Finland from the other countries already involved in similar processes and shows the fundamental role played by scholars' advocacy.

I interviewed in writing Ari Lehikoinen²⁵, the director of the TV documentaries *Varastettu lapsuus* ("Stolen childhood") and of the successive documentary released in 2014, *Luurankokaappi* ("Skelton's closet"). Both Tv-documentaries were subsidized by the National service broadcaster YLE. The first TV documentary, following the model of the Swedish documentary broadcasted in 2005 *Stulen Barndom* (also, "Stolen Childhood"), was shown the first time on National Television (YLE TV1) the 29.04.2013 and is based on interviews with four victims of neglect and abuse. The second documentary, also broadcasted on national TV (YLE TV1), with the first show on the 29.12.2014, presents the life narration of one of the men participating in the first documentary, focusing on the long-term consequences which never ceased to affect the life of the victim of abuse. Lehikoinen explained how the involvement of Vesa Puuronen, Professor in the Sociology Department of Oulu University, has been crucial for the releasing of the TV documentaries. Puuronen has run interviews to care-leavers of Finnish so-called "koulukodit" (school-homes) to disclose a past of injustice, abuse and neglect in out-of-home care and the result of his research is a book²⁶, to be published in 2015, on the hidden history of violence characterizing Finnish Public Institutions in Finland in the '50-'60s. Puuronen had suggested the idea of a documentary to a journalist of Yleisradio (The National public service broadcaster including YLE TV) and Lehikoinen developed the idea and turned it into a documentary. Lehikoinen explained that this combined effort has "speeded up" (he uses the Finnish expression "antoi vähän vauhtia") the decision for a national investigation on historical abuse, noting that on September, the 7th, 2013 the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs had given

Keywords: "child custody" and "violence" (huostaanotto, väkivalta in Finnish), 34 hits out of which 1 on historical abuse. Furthermore no hit on historical abuse was to be found in several major online newspapers, like *Turun Sanomat* (from the city of Turku), *Savon Sanomat* (Kuopio), *Aamulehti* (Tampere), *Kaleva* (Oulu)

²⁵ In the Appendix there are reported the questions I posed to Ari Lehikoinen

²⁶ Vesa Puuronen is publishing in 2015 a book on the reality of the so-called: "koulukodit" (reformatory schools, literally: "school-homes"): Marjo Laitala, Vesa Puuronen: *Yhteiskunnan tahra. Koulukotien vaiettua historiaa*, Vastapaino. Tampere. (The book's title translated: "The stain on society: the untold story of the reformatory schools"). An article on the book and his participation in the documentary *Varastettu Lapsuus* is available at: http://yle.fi/uutiset/60-luvulla_koulukotiin_lahdettiin_poliisiautossa/6654258, (YLE Uutiset, 22.5.2013)

the first statement of the launching of the inquiry. The drafting of the terms of reference of the inquiry on historical abuse was concluded and published in June 2013.

How the political arena grew awareness on the topic is also reported by Ulla Järvi in an article dated 04.09.2013 on the online magazine *Lääkärilehti*²⁷. She explains that the initiative came from the former minister of Health and Social Services Maria Guzenina-Richardson (SDP), who announced that the inquiry on historical child abuse was going to be launched in Finland the following year with this purpose: “to map out Finnish Child Welfare’s experiences of injustice, maltreatment and violence in out of home care”²⁸ (Järvi, 2013). Peura specifies that even though Päivi Lipponen, as Member of Parliament in 2011, urged the research into historical abuse in Public Institutions in the country the inquiry was started only in 2014 (Peura, 2014, p.1):”the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health together with the Ministry of Culture and Education have started in 2014 the inquiry on maltreatment of children in foster care in the period in-between the two laws on Child Welfare²⁹” (in Finland 1937 and 1983). The previously mentioned minister of Health and Social Services (2011-13) Maria Guzenina-Richardson (Social democrat) would have been quite pressing for getting an inquiry in 2012. As furthermore specified by Järvi: ”the goal is to impact the present foster care in order to prevent mistreatment and to intervene promptly and thoroughly. There are reasons to believe, looking at the experiences in other countries, that such an inquiry has been greatly meaningful for the morality of the society as a whole.³⁰(Järvi, 2013). The trajectory of “advocacy” and “personal testimony”, to use Murphy’s terminology (Murphy, 2010), so far conducted with the involvement of the intelligentsia and the consequent releasing of TV documentaries, spurred the launch of the inquiry in Finland. Therefore my data, covering the media debate triggered mainly by the documentaries follows the traces of this process in Finland, up to now.

5.2 Thematic analysis on the ongoing debate

Murphy (2010) describes the debate that took place in Australia around a similar inquiry, launched in 2004, and culminated with the so-called “Forgotten Australian report” with formal apologies by the Government in 2006 and 2009. As reported in chapter 4.2.1, the Australian National Investigations focused on three different groups: the so called “Stolen Generation” (aboriginal

²⁷ In English. ”Doctor’s journal”

²⁸ In Finnish: ”...kartoittaa suomalaisen lastensuojelu sijaishuollossa koettuja epäkohtia, kaltoinkohtelua ja väkivaltaa.”

²⁹ In Finnish: ”Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö on vuonna 2014 yhdessä opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön kanssa käynnistänyt selvityksen huostaanotettujen lasten kaltoinkohtelukokemuksista ensimmäisen lastensuojelulain aikana.

³⁰ In Finnish: ”Tarkoituksena on vaikuttaa nykyisen lastensuojelun sijaishuollon toimintaan, jotta kaltoinkohtelua ei esiintyisi ja siihen puuttuminen olisi välitöntä ja aukotonta. Muiden maiden kokemuksista voi päätellä, että selvitysten tekemisellä on ollut myös suuri yhteiskuntamoraalinen merkitys.”

children forcibly assimilated through institutionalization), the group of children migrants sent to Australia and institutionalized after the Second World War and a general inquiry on injustices and abuse children in State care in the timeframe 1945-1983, which led to the “Forgotten Australian report”. Murphy states: ”The public discourse in Australia about growing up in care has largely been about institutional abuses, as a revelation of trauma and injustice. It is a narrative framed in terms of sexual and emotional abuse, denial of rights, loss, grief and restitution (Murphy, 2010, p.308). Is the public discourse in Finland bringing up similar themes? For answering to this question and observe which categories are being brought to light in the Finnish debate it is important to start by the two TV documentaries on child abuse in the post-war years in Public Institutions in Finland. The documentaries, in fact, represent the first signs of a more extended discussion on the topic, reaching the general public. Scholars have treated the matter in Finland too, and books had been released already decades ago, as for instance *Älä unohda minua*³¹ by the care-leaver Sirkku Talja-Larrivoire in the 70’s³², but they had no significant impact on the public opinion, as it similarly happened in the Irish progression towards large-scale public awareness and consequent debate and inquiry on historical child abuse in out-of-home care, as described by Smith (2010). For introducing the documentaries is furthermore relevant to mention that they both include narrations only of men, women are not represented in them. Their stories describe experiences of neglect and abuse only in public institutions, not in foster families’ contexts.

5.2.1 Two TV documentaries: *Varastettu Lapsuus* and *Luurankokaappi*

I was able to see the two Finnish documentaries broadcasted on National TV (YLE TV1) on experiences of abuse in child welfare institutions in post-war Finland and it was truly impressive to virtually walk with those elderly men in the places they had lived in as children, becoming young adults. Since the documentaries, as a result of a combined investigation by scholars and media on the topic, provided a breakthrough for the implementing of the inquiry and factually started the public debate, they served as the prior source of themes and the term of comparison to evaluate how those themes formed the following public debate or diverged from it. The documentaries framed my observation on the public debate. I focused on how they affected narratives in reaction or following their broadcasting.

³¹ In English: ” Do not forget me”

³² Talja-Larrivoire, Sirkku (1976), *Älä unohda minua*, Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiön laakapaino, Porvoo

Varastettu lapsuus (Ari Lehikoinen), broadcasted on YLE TV1, 15.04.2013

In this first 49 minutes long documentary, four men tell about their memories. They refer how they suffered being themselves victims of abuse and neglect and/or witnessing it in Finnish Public institutions. The camera follows them walking in a winter landscape through the institutions they were placed in as children, mainly empty buildings nowadays, and they present their stories to us, showing isolation rooms, the bedrooms, the yards so familiar to them. They explain the function of those places together with their emotional meaning, bringing memories of neglect and abuse. V.K., explains that “they were brought up in a more wicked direction”³³ and with a sad sarcastic comment remembers his periods kept in isolation, which was the way for “educating children”³⁴. V.K. has a long criminal record behind him. H.S. and J. S., brothers, recall their third brother who was forcibly taken with them to their first care institution (in Finnish is called “poikakoti”, literally “home for boys”) and never lived a normal life. He was beaten so hard he would never be, as H.S. affirms “fit for working”³⁵, for his entire life. H.S. says that literally “youth just went by”³⁶. He ponders that: “I knew I was not *that* bad”³⁷ (Lehikoinen, 2013).

H.S. summarizes his experience like this: “It was not really like living with dignity!”³⁸ He repeats several times how he felt a “deep, deep longing to get away!”³⁹. On many occasions the care-leavers repeated that the worst was “not knowing:” the uncertainty about if and when they would go away, together with their fearing for themselves and the others. Their narrations often point to the recollections of how guardians were addressed to the groups of boys, but their task was to make sure they would not escape. For this reason they were settled outside the building. Inside anything could happen. S.N. refers of an episode in which a boy was cursing loudly. The guardian saw other boys beating him and his reaction was to actually incite them into beating him as long as he would stop cursing.

Since the institutions shown in the documentary were meant for boys from 7 years of age to 18 and officially prepared for work, J.S shows old records reporting all the professional skills he would have officially achieved. He bitterly acknowledges that he was never taught those professional skills, he just spent the whole day in the potatoes’ fields and was sent to school few times a week.

³³ In Finnish: “Kiroutunempaan suntaan kasvattiin.”

³⁴ In Finnish: “lasten kasvatus paikka”

³⁵ In Finnish: “työkuntoinen”

³⁶ In Finnish: “Nuoruus meni.”

³⁷ In Finnish: “Tiesin, että ei *niin* paha ollut.”

³⁸ In Finnish: ”Ei oikein ihmisarvoista elämää ollut!”

³⁹ In Finnish: ”Ikävä, ikävä pois!”

His narration gives us a story of a child taken with his brothers to a care institution because the school teacher reported them for not being able to attend school regularly. H.S. recalls that sometimes they just did not simply have shoes to go to school. For their poverty they were sent to the child care institution “Pohjolankoti”, he explains. In the documentary parts of old black and white reportages are included in the narration, with images of children taken by trucks to Institutions in the ‘50s, visualizing what is reported to have been the standard policy of institutionalization at the time. Jukka .Kujala, who has been director of Pohjolankoti in recent times, claims in the documentary that those juvenile facilities are not yet providing proper care. He defines the public institution’s child care system as a “giant” (in Finnish “jättiläinen”), behind which so many economic interests are hidden that it is hardly to disappear. Placement in family-homes represents, in his opinion, a far better solution.

Luurankokaappi, (Ari Lehikoinen), broadcasted on YLE TV1, 29.12.2014

In the second 47minutes long documentary, *Luurankokaappi*, a single man’s history of violence, suffered and perpetuated, comes to light. He is the sole narrator of his life story and he takes the viewer to a journey through his present and past, in few days during a Finnish summer. He remembers episodes of his past and connect them to his present and his will to come to terms with sufferance and guilt, by confessing the secrets which have burdened him all his life. He admits having caused his father’s death, when he was a boy, due to the continuous threats by his father of killing him (the father was a violent war veteran keeping his rifles always with him). We see him visiting two sisters who have never known exactly how their father had died long before. He knew how the man had been killed and had decided to finally share this secret with them. He visits his cousin and recalls a summer of their youth in which, though he sensed that they had a bond, he felt nonetheless strongly that he did not belong to “regular society” and chose a vagrant life. Though he spent altogether just about five years in both a public care institution and in prison, he has never felt integrated in society. He describes himself as been a “criminal”⁴⁰. After experiencing so much violence both at home and in the child care institution, he felt that conventional life was, as he himself defines it, “boring”⁴¹. He ended up travelling around Europe dealing drugs for many years. He affirms that having always experienced strong feelings of, “helplessness”⁴² and “of not being up to anything” is “devastating”⁴³. He refers especially to his experience as a newly become father,

⁴⁰ In Finnish: “rikollinen”

⁴¹ In Finnish: “tylsä”

⁴² In Finnish: “osamattomuus”

⁴³ In Finnish: “murskaavaa”

how he felt not being able to take care of his own child and being overwhelmed and impotent in front of the baby crying. Symbolically the documentary ends with the 70 years old S.N., doing bungee jumping, freed from his secrets.

5.2.2 The main themes on historical child abuse in out-of-home care brought to light by the documentaries, the media and the online debate.

The TV documentaries present narrations of maltreatment in Finnish child institutions as perceived and experienced by the victims themselves. Ari Lehtikainen explains that his aim in the documentaries has been to give voice to people who have hardly been noticed or listened to. As he points out, allowing the care-leavers to personally narrate their stories in the documentaries gives particular emphasis and strength to their stories⁴⁴. The care-leavers tell their stories showing the places they have grown up in. The documentaries, through the episodes they share with the public, dramatize the general inadequacy of the “care” they were subjected to. What we are witnesses of in the documentaries is, adopting Murphy’s discourse on identity and narration, the reflection of past experiences by their narration (Murphy, 2010, p.300): “This image of talking the past ‘back into existence’ reflects the experience that narrative identity is developed and maintained through dialogue, in the telling of our stories.” This reflection is performed through nowadays’ perspective. Newspapers and magazines’ articles and discussion forums have mainly presented or adopted the same themes reflected in those told stories. After the research in the online debate it became in fact clear that the ongoing debate on historical out-of-home child abuse in Finland has been mainly concentrated on the documentaries. The themes brought to light in them find validation in stories from other care-leavers in blogs. In the media some of those themes are even further highlighted and only few more are elaborated. In general, fairly seldom, till now, people who have not personally been victims of historical abuse or are related to such, have participated in the online debate on the topic. It is relevant to note, furthermore, that in the context of the media discussion following the release of the two documentaries, in articles and in comments through blogposts or twitters, almost only men speak up and tell their stories, only rare blogposts in the debate on the second documentary are by commentators who use female alias.

This strikingly differs from comments displayed in the public arena on Finnish Child Welfare policy of nowadays. By searching for the media reaction to the historical inquiry on child abuse, in fact, I found that many blogposts and comments in criticism of present Finnish Child Welfare were

⁴⁴ The list of questions answered by Ari Lehtikainen are to be found in the Appendix at the end of the thesis. I here give report of his answers, given in Finnish, paraphrasing them.

written by female alias. It seems that women in Finland has become more prompt to discuss openly such matters than for instance women who experienced or witnessed abuse after the Second World War. Only by the results of the inquiry and the final report on the participation of women to the interviews it will be possible to have a confirmation of this hypothesis and see if women, victims of historical abuse, have participated in the inquiry but did not want to share publically their stories. An exception is earlier in 2011 with the review of the book *Käheä-ääninen tyttö*⁴⁵(2009) in the magazine *Kasvatus ja Aika*⁴⁶. The reviewer, Katja Yesilova, reports how the book is about the personal narration of a Romani girl who grew up in Public Institutions. The article precedes the documentaries and the inquiry. However, the ongoing public discussion is mainly run by men. The reason seems to be given by the fact that blogposts have been written in reaction to the documentaries, which represent male experiences. Furthermore, several blogposts commenting the documentaries are written by care-leavers who recognized the same institutional sites and at times knew personally the men narrators in the documentaries.

I pinpoint the themes and sub-themes I extrapolated from the stories present on the web and group them into categories, so reconstructing the narrations of abuse and neglect through them. The themes serve the purpose of describing the debate on historical child abuse in out-of home-care, in the way it is forming in Finland.

Life before institutional care

Highlighting subthemes related to the life before institutional care permits to disclose features of a reported past where poverty generally led to child institutionalization in the country.

Poverty

The care-leavers in the TV-documentaries share a past of poverty. Their families were not affording to send them to school regularly and needed their contribution in term of work for supporting the economy of the household.

Systematical isolation of the Poor: a standard practice in the '50-'60s

Poverty led to a social dynamic of segregation of the Poor and the Weak. *Varastettu lapsuus*, through the testimonies of the care-leavers, exposes stories in which poverty had as a general consequence the institutionalization of children. Child welfare authorities systematically placed children into public custody. The debate through the media further highlights the idea of forcible

⁴⁵ In English. "The hoarse girl"

⁴⁶ The magazine's title translated in English: "Upbringing and time"

isolation, exclusion of the Poor and the Weak. It is especially made explicit in newspapers' articles, as for instance in an article of 2013 (Virtanen, 2013). There Vesa Puuronen is interviewed by the journalist Leena Virtanen. Puuronen, who proposed the idea of a documentary on historical abuse in the public sphere to Lehtikainen, is also interviewed in *Varastettu Lapsuus* and he is moreover providing his expertise in the Commission of the inquiry. In the article the scholar explains the core idea of the Finnish reformatory schools ("koulukodit" in Finnish, literally school-homes), which was to "isolate 'the weaker element' from the view of society. In practice this element meant the children of poor families⁴⁷". Since the institutions were harsh places, the young adults coming out of those, presented not only psychological, but also permanent physical disabilities, reinforcing their weaker position in the eyes of the "respectable" society. Yesilova (2011) debates on the general policy of segregating Romani people from the "standard" Finnish society: "the way of living of the Romani community was experienced as disturbing, loud, inconvenient and troublesome in the post-war Finland – Romani people were weed in the eyes of authorities and the majority⁴⁸" (Yesilova, 2011, p.57). Her review of *Käheä ääninen tyttö* can be seen as a relevant example of how historical child abuse was becoming a discussable topic in Finnish society, which was confronting itself with the inquiries taking place in other countries, especially the neighbor country Sweden. Not only newspapers have debated on the concept of systematical isolation of the weaker elements in Finnish society: after the broadcast of *Varastettu Lapsuus* there was a, rather limited though, exchange of twitters (<https://twitter.com/alahdenmaki/>, 29.04.2013) where J.S says: "It makes one wonder, that society has thought of the Weak as monster with conduct disorder only just a little ago"⁴⁹. Previously, in June 2013, M.P. uses the blog space of *Puheenvuoro.uusisuomi* (Puheenvuoro.uusisuomi, 02.06.2013) to share his personal comments on the first TV documentary and to give his considerations more broadly about Finnish society in the past and present times. He ponders about the policy of systematical discrimination applied to the Poor and the Weak in society: "Violence is strongly bond to discipline...Such was everyday routine in the Finnish Child Care Institutions...the weak material had to be guided, or at least cleaned away from the eyes of the

⁴⁷ In Finnish: "heikomman aineksen" eristäminen muun yhteiskunnan silmistä. Käytännössä aines tarkoitti köyhien perheiden lapsia".

⁴⁸ In Finnish: "Mustalaiset ja mustalaiselämäntapa koettiin sodanjälkeisessä Suomessa häiritsevä, äänekkäänä, sopimattomana, ongelmallisena –mustalaiset olivat rikka virkamiesten ja valtaväestön silmässä."

⁴⁹ In Finnish: "Pistää ajattelemaan, että yhteiskunta on ajatellut heikoimmistaan kuin tunnehäiriöinen hirviö aivan hetki sitten."

decent people”⁵⁰. This theme has been a topic in other blogposts describing Finnish policy of Child Welfare in the post-wars period.

➤ Institution

The concept of “Institution” is strictly bond to the theme of systematical placement of children in out-of-home care. It seems that the standard practice regarding out-of-home care in the period pictured by the documentaries and by the comments reacting to them, was the placing of children in institutions; no experience in foster families is brought into the discussion. The only exception is given by the narration of the care-leaver T.N. (Nykänen and Niiranen, 2013). In the article of *Helsingin Sanomat* he is reported to have been placed first in a foster family but moved quite soon to a care institution for “correcting” his behavior, though he had bonded with the family. On the other hand, his personal story is placed a bit later than the ones narrated in the documentaries, in the ‘70s, when the practice of placing children in foster-families became more common. An explanation for the prevalence of institutionalization instead of placement in foster families is to be found in the situation during and after the Second World War, when the amount of children left orphans became dramatically high and on the other hand the remaining population suffered poverty. Institutions provided the most adequate solution under those circumstances. Peura provides a clarification in this respect: “The situation of children quickly developed in a catastrophic one, requiring a prompt reaction [...] Child Welfare’ development marked a boom from the point of view of foster care after the wars⁵¹” (Peura, 2014, p.19). Peura furthermore gives some relevant statistics (Peura, 2014, p. 20) about the dramatic increase in number of children without a family after the war: ”Since in the war died 86.000 soldiers and were left disabled around 200.000, were left as war orphans around 50.000 children and war widows were approximately 24.000)⁵².

Life at the institutions

The care-leavers in the TV-documentaries were seemingly to a great extend aware already at the time, when they were placed in institutional care, that the reality of the Institutions were not suitable for children. The documentaries give them the space to bring up their narrations and re-construct a

⁵⁰ In Finnish: ”Väkivalta liittyy vahvasti kurinpitoon... Tällainen käytös oli osa arkipäivää Suomen poikakodeissa... heikko aines oli saatava ojenukseen, tai ainakin siivottava pois tavallisten, kunniallisten ihmisten silmistä.”

⁵¹ In Finnish: ”Lasten nopeasti kehittynyt katastrofaalinen tilanne vaati äkillisiä toimia, ja niihin ryhdyttiin nopeasti [...]Lastensuojelun kehitys lähti sijaishuollon kannalta nousuun sotien jälkeen.”

⁵² In Finnish: ”Kun sodassa kaatui 86 000 sotilasta ja vammautui noin 200.000, sotaorpoja jäi noin 50 000 ja sotaaleskiä 24.000”.

personal identity through the disclosure of the past. Very often they express their distress in terms of their knowledge of an unjust treatment towards them. This awareness brings to light interesting sub-themes, mainly reinforced in following newspapers' articles and the online debate.

The “longing to get away” and an extreme uncertainty about their future

H.S., in *Varastettu lapsuus*, expresses his strong feeling of missing not just home but more the longing connected to the need of going away from the institution and the distress caused by the uncertainty around when this would happen. The same idea of uncertainty about the future expressed in the documentaries can be traced in the online debate. The feeling of “longing to get away” combined to the uncertainty regarding when this would happen is expressed by T.M. (Nykänen and Niiranen, 2013). He refers: “that the worst is that it was never said if and when you could go away from there”⁵³, making even jail more appealing to him in comparison.

Violence

Portrayed in the TV-documentaries as both physical and psychological, violence is constantly present in the narrations. In 1965 physical punishment was officially abolished in Finland but the victims report that it was nonetheless continuously present. There are narratives dating back to the 70's describing the violence in institutional care. The book *Älä unhoda minua* by Sirkku Larrivoire, for instance, draws a constant comparison between the time when the Head of the child-care institution was the caring and affectionate Hanna and the period when the new Principle, Amalia, set a regime of fear and violence in the child-home. The violence she personally perpetuated on the children is represented in the book as indiscriminate, often very sudden and unpredictable. Already in the 70's both care-providers and care-leavers felt the necessity of disclosing such a past of abuse in Finnish out-of-home care. As in the Irish context only in more recent times the matter has become of public dominion. A current example of the theme of violence is given in an article reviewing the second documentary, *Luurankokaappi*. The journalist Panu Hietaneva uses an eloquent title: “The abandoned child's reckoning”⁵⁴ (Hietaneva, 2014). He introduces the new documentary by reporting its relation to the first one, *Varastettu lapsuus*, and by stating its powerful description of the horrible conditions present in the reformatory schools in Finland in the 1950-1960's. *Luurankokaappi* concentrates on the general climate of violence in those years, both within in- and out-of home contexts, through the narration of S.N.: “One of the interviewee was a 70years old man originally from Lappenranta, S.N., whose childhood was signed by violence both at home

⁵³ In Finnish: ”Pahinta oli, ettei sanottu koskaan, pääseekö sieltä pois tai milloin pääsee”.

⁵⁴ In Finnish: ”Hylätyn pojan tilinteko”

and in the child care institution where the family abandoned him”⁵⁵ (Hietaneva, 2014). The author points out clearly that we lack information on the topic and very little has been discussed. Markkola underlines how after the Second World War almost anybody could work as a care-provider for the children within the child welfare, with often disastrous results.

Also the general public has participated exposing the theme of violence. In the spare twitters’ exchange followed (twitter.com/alahdenmaki, 29.04.2013) the broadcast of *Varastettu Lapsuus*, a twitter focuses on abuse and violence. A.L. writes: ”The documentary project *Varastettu Lapsuus* shows brutal abuses of fundamental Human Rights, in the 1960s in Finland.”⁵⁶ Blogposts on the online forum consequent the broadcast of *Varastettu lapsuus* (YLE TV1, 29.4.2013) focus on the theme of violence. There a care-leaver with the Username: “Child from children’s home”, writes (29.4.2013): ”I lived in a children’s home in the 70-80’s in Finland...sure it was a change from home-hell to institution-hell.”⁵⁷ Username: *Anonymous*, 17.05.2013, vividly reports: ”We, children-prisoners, got to experience through our own eyes the hell on earth and many have not survived”⁵⁸.

➤ Adult-to-child violence

The care-leavers in the TV-documentaries tell of having been subjected to both psychological and physical violence by the adults. In an article published on the online magazine *Lapsen Maailma*,⁵⁹ titled “Vaioletut tarinat”⁶⁰ (Siljamäki, 2015), the journalist Tuija Siljamäki reports the explanation given by Pirjo Markkola, in charge of the inquiry, as well as Professor of History at Jyväskylä University. Markkola refers about the standard use of violence as a form of discipline in Finnish Institutions in the ’50s (Siljamäki, 2015):

”Whip, forced labor and (isolation in) a potato cellar were normal educational methods in orphanages and especially in so called “school homes”. Discipline was seen as beneficial but at times it was brought to the extremes but very little we still know about people’s experience, as affirmed by Pirjo Markkola, Professor of History at Jyväskylä University and in charge of the Finnish Inquiry on abuse.”⁶¹

⁵⁵ In Finnish: . ”Yksi haastateltavista oli seitsemänkymppinen lappeenrantalainen Severi Novala, jonka lapsuutta sävytti väkivalta yhtälailla kotona kuin laitoksessakin, jonne perhe hänet hylkäsi.”

⁵⁶ In Finnish: ”Dokumenttiprojektin *Varastettu lapsuus* kuvaa törkeitä ihmisoikeusloukkauksia 1960-luvun Suomessa”

⁵⁷ In Finnish: ”Lastenkodissa asuin 70-80luvun Suomessa... kyllä se oli muutto kotihelvetistä laitoshelvettiin”

⁵⁸ In Finnish: ”Me, lapsivangit, saimme kokea maanpäällä helvetin omin silmin moni ei selvinnyt!”

⁵⁹ *transl. Child’s World*, a Central Union for Child Welfare” monthly publication (“lasten suojelun keskusliitto kuukauslehti” in Finnish)

⁶⁰ In English: ”Untold stories”

⁶¹ In Finnish: ”Piiska, pakkotyö ja perunakellari olivat vielä 1950-luvulla tavallisia kasvatustenelmiä lastenkodeissa, ja varsinkin koulukodeissa. Kurin ajateltiin olevan hyväksi, mutta joskus sen kanssa menttiin

The article states that certain forms of abuse and neglect have been “common practice”⁶², (Siljamäki, 2015) in child care public institutions. The author points out clearly that we lack information on the topic and very little has been discussed. Markkola underlines how after the Second World War almost anybody could work as a care-provider for the children within the child welfare, with often disastrous results. In the article on *HS* by Virtanen (Virtanen, 2013), the journalist asserts that the documentary *Varastettu Lapsuus* is at most eloquent when it shows the four elderly men, previously victims of abuse in the institutions, visit the places and remember their lives and punishments, and the violence. In the article it is stated that physical punishment was officially abolished in foster care in Finland in 1965 but this mainly meant that those were replaced by “mental violence, in practice isolation”⁶³ (Virtanen, 2013).

➤ **Lack of supervision: Child-to-child violence**

The general lack of supervision in Finnish out-of-home care in the post-war years is shown to have resulted in a series of dramatic consequences for the ones who have experienced it. It is easy to deduce watching *Varastettu Lapsuus* how the standard practice of leaving the children alone, especially by night, unguarded in the institutions, facilitated a regime of violence among them. This system limited the violence by adults, who “conveniently” could use isolation and other forms of psychological abuse as more suitable means of punishment, though preserving de facto physical abuse in within the institution, behind closed doors. Siljamäki (Siljamäki, 2015) confirms that often violence was perpetuated among children, since the guardians would allow them to maintain their own hierarchy based on fear, with no intervention.

➤ **Lack of supervision: The fear of violence**

The lack of supervision not only served to spur a regime of violence among the children, but had the second dramatic effect of keeping children in a constant fear of violence. The TV-documentaries and the following media reaction reflect continuously on how children were both victims of violence and witnessed it on others. The same fact that the children were left to solve their conflicts by themselves in fact, increased enormously the awareness that nobody would interfere, or, even worse, would facilitate or spur it.

Sexual abuse

liiallisuuksiin..... Ihmisten kokemuksista tiedetään kuitenkin vasta vähän, sanoo selvityksen johtaja, *Jyväskylän yliopiston* historian professori Pirjo Markkola”

⁶² In Finnish: ”tavallisia kasvatustapojen menetelmiä.”

⁶³ In Finnish: ”Henkistä väkivaltaa, eli käytännössä eristämistä”

This theme is touched in the first documentary, but only to a very little extent. The care-leavers mention that it was occurring but do not specify episodes and we understand that it was perpetuated both by adults and among the boys. It seems that, compared to the themes emerged in other countries, with recurrent testimonies of sexual abuse, the same theme is not easily brought to light here. It is no coincidence that S.N. is the most explicit about it. He addresses Finnish society as being generally unable to touch sensitive topics, in the second documentary on his life. In the blogposts following the documentaries he will actively reinforce his standpoint and present parts of his diary corroborating his assumption: the need to speak up and share for elaborating and deal with past traumas and sufferance. Murphy refers to it as the ontological urge of telling personal stories for being able to understand one self: “it is about the sense ordinary people make of their lives, when telling their story of who they are and what has happened to them” (Murphy, 2010, p.301). This is well represented in the disclosing of chapters of his life-diary by S.N in the blog forum developed around *Luurankokaappi*.

➤ Lack of supervision: sexual abuse

Markkola (Siljämäki, 2015) comments that the lack of supervision, especially at night, increased the occurrence of sexual abuse among the children. She specifies that child sexuality was a taboo at the time. There are, according to Markkola, only rumors about that and by now very little information. This would explain why my search on the subject has not proved to give consistent results. The theme of sexual abuse is touched explicitly in the narration of T.M. (Nykänen and Niiranen, 2013). After being placed in an institution, he was sent to a psychiatrist facility, with adults suffering from severe psychosis and, later on, to a prison, where he was sexually abused.

Lack of love and attachment

This sub-theme is present on a latent level throughout all the narration of the documentaries. Even though the care-leavers do not hint directly to those feelings, through their narrations it is strikingly evident how not only they had been abused, but they also lacked human attachment to the care-providers. By watching the documentaries we are presented to a childhood within institutions that had no room for any form of affection. This theme, latent in the documentaries, is made explicit in the online debate. The journalists report care-leaver T.M.’s consideration: “the treatment was cold and cruel”⁶⁴(Nykänen and Niiranen, 2013) during his childhood in Finnish public care and mental care institutions. His narration is defined repeatedly as “horrible”⁶⁵, for our nowadays perception a “standard protected childhood”. *Käheä-ääninen tyttö* touches themes strongly re-occurring in the

⁶⁴ In Finnish: ”Kohtelu oli kylmää ja julmaa.”

⁶⁵ In Finnish: karmea

two TV documentaries and the debate around them. Yesilova reflects in her review on the particular situation of the Romani communities in terms of Child Welfare: “Even though from the beginning of the 1950’s the adequacy of children out-of-home care was being disputed and breaking the attachment between mother and child was considered more a risk than a safety, the separation of a Romani child from his mother was not criticized at all⁶⁶” (Yesilova, 2011, p.57). Also in the public online debate the lack of love and attachment is explicitly pinpointed. M.P., commenting *Varastettu lapsuus* in his blogpost, explains how he was at most impressed by the clear” lack of compassion by the care-providers.”⁶⁷ (Puheenvuoro.uusisuomi, 02.06.2013). A general mistrust and criticism towards Finnish society both then and nowadays is clearly expressed.

Neglect

The theme of neglect is not clearly expressed either in the TV-documentaries or in the following online debate, but it is brought to light all through the narrations. The perspective on the care-leavers gives us the picture of individuals neglected by society, their families, which more or less voluntarily left them in the institutions, by their care providers, who abandoned them systematically at the mercy of a state of violence within the child hierarchy.

Bonding and friendship

In the documentaries we are presented with stories where there is no space for affection or bonding, neither among the children, nor to the care-providers. No one expresses the idea that he would have bonded with any one of the other children in the institutions they were placed. Only one episode in *Varastettu Lapsuus* constitutes an exception. S.N. recalls a boys’ couple: they were clearly intimate and showed what he defined “real love”. He explains how the boys were covered by the others against the possible castigating interference of the care-providers, so offering an example of affection and at the same time of a protective behavior by other children confronted with love.

Life after institutional care

The life in institutions is shown to entail dramatic consequences in the lives of the care-leavers.

Impossibility of re-integration in society

⁶⁶ In Finnish: ”Vaikka 1950-luvulta alkaen oli kiistelty huostaanottojen tarkoituksenmukaisuudesta ja nähty lapsen ja äidin erottaminen ja kiintymyssuhteen rikkominen pikemminkin riskinä, kuin pelastuksena, ei mustalaislasten erottamista äideistään kritisoitu lainkaan”.

⁶⁷ in Finnish: ”henkilökunnan myötätunnon puutetta.”

In *Varastettu Lapsuus* the care-leavers blame the care institutions' model of care for their future problems, for bringing them to a constant struggle to enter in the "regular" society, failing, in most of the cases. Lynch (2001), debating on the fate of Aboriginal children in Canada, provides us with a clear description of the long-term vicious circle implied in a policy of systematic discrimination and isolation of a category of people and so exemplifies (Lynch, 2001, p.504):

First Nations children, torn and secluded from their cultural identity and heritage, are five to six times more likely to commit suicide than the general Canadian populace. According to one commentator, in 1991 only 10 per cent of First Nations youth graduated from high school, whereas 35-40 per cent engaged in alcohol abuse and 20-25 per cent in substance abuse.

Drawing a parallel, the Finnish system of institutionalization of poor children as well as of children belonging to the Romani community, has contributed to the shaping of a future at the margins of society, with a tendency to criminality.

Deep and lasting feeling of unworthiness

This is well expressed by the care-leavers in the TV-documentaries. S.N. especially, in *Luurankokaappi*, explains how he felt unworthy as a member of the society, and as a father. He doubts himself once more when his son gets mixed in a fight where another person gets killed. S.N. considers himself as partly the cause of what happened to his son.

Lack of sense of belonging and a sense of "broken identity"

This sub-theme is strictly connected to this previous one. The care-leavers express explicitly, S.N. in particular in the second documentary, the continuous feeling of not-belonging anywhere, neither at home, where violence and neglect represented the way of living, nor in the institutions or in the society later on. He cannot identify himself with the rules given by society and he searches a way to build his sense of identity both by going against the law and, quite on the opposite, by helping the others. In *Luurankokaappi* he recalls both having smuggled drugs and having worked in a Crisis call center. He comments the high rate of suicide that dramatically is present in the country, ascribing it to the extremely individualistic and withdrawn Finnish culture. The theme of lack of sense of belonging and sense of broken identity, so vivid in the documentaries, is traceable in the book review of *Käheä-ääninen tyttö*, example of a woman's story: Yesilova affirms that this Romani woman's story represent children in a broader sense⁶⁸ confronted with common experiences of segregation: "the hoarse girl is also the personal story of how if coming from

⁶⁸ Riikka Tanner & Tuula Lind (2009), *Käheä-ääninen tyttö*. Kaalengo tsaj. Helsinki: Tammi

institutional care one does not belong anywhere ...it is the description of the influence and consequences of custody, the sense of lack of identity and nothingness”⁶⁹(Yesilova, 2011, p.56).

Disrespect for authorities and rejection of society

Those are rendered particularly evident in reference to the criminal records of two of the care-leavers and by the narration of one of them about his brother, left as a crippled by the treatment he received in the child-care institutions. The care-leaver T.M. (Nykänen and Niiranen, 2013) describes how he is being under constant treatment against depression and panic attacks and having had an alcoholic and a criminal history. He explains: ”Many just drink for covering the wounds. You cope with this also by doing stupid things. By committing crimes you show you do not care about rules, because society has not cared about me”⁷⁰ (Nykänen and Niiranen, 2013). He explains that he decided to finally “come out” and share his story after watching the documentary by Ari Lehikoinen, *Varastettu lapsuus*.

Deep mistrust in society

Society is shown to have let the care-leavers down. This theme is present at a more latent level in the TV-documentaries. This, together with the strong feeling of not belonging, facilitate a future of non-integration. S.N., in the second documentary, recalls a summer he had a holiday from the institution and visited his cousin. Though they could bond, he felt at the same time that he did not belong there and had to leave. He is shown for having conducted a restless life, on the margins of society. Those experiences are very similar to the ones described in the Irish book “The Butcher Boy” as reviewed by Smith (Smith, 2001). S.N. never gives up trying to find a place in society, he even works in a Crisis Call Center and differently to Francie Brady in “The Butcher boy”, who ends up in a mental asylum, he eventually settles down and makes his voice be heard through the documentaries, in the same society that had rejected him and he himself rejected. His mistrust in society leads to a critical approach, making him very active nowadays in blogs and in informing others about the development of the inquiry. A blogger later on (YLE Aihe, 13.03.2014), expresses mistrust that even after the documentary an inquiry would start, despite the fact that STM (The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health) had already officially published the plan of the inquiry. Username: “One in a thousand”⁷¹: ”I start believing that this time too the matter will be silenced”⁷²

⁶⁹ In Finnish: ”*Käheä-ääninen tyttö* on myös henkilöhistoria siitä, miten huostaanoton seuraksena ei kuulu minnekään...Se on kuvaus huostaanoton vaikutuksista ja seurauksista, identtömyyden ja mitättömyyden tunteista”.

⁷⁰ In Finnish: ”Monet vain juovat viinaa peittääkseen haavat. Asiaa käsitellään myös tekemällä töllöntöitä. Rikoksilla osoitetaan, ettei välitetä säännöistä, kun yhteiskunta ei ole välittänyt minusta”

⁷¹ In Finnish: Yksi tuhannista

⁷² In Finnish: ”Alan uskoa, että tämäkin asia lopulta hiljaisuudessa haudataan.”

Blogger S.N. answers in a later blogpost with full information about the inquiry and keeps this blogger and the others updated on the proceeding of the inquiry, using this online forum. Another blogger sent an eloquent comment on this theme (YLE Aihe, 13.03.2014) : Username “Anonymous”, 12.5.2013:” My father was taken to war too and wounded remaining a war invalid, then the society revenged on him and destroyed his children in the torture Institution of Muhos.”⁷³⁷⁴

A changed perception of child welfare

The TV-documentaries show narrations indicating an undeniable changed perception of child welfare: by exposing the constant use and acceptance of violence, the neglect and lack of empathy towards the victims of abuse and the practice itself of separating children from their families as standard procedure, the documentaries disclose consequently, in a vivid and dramatic way, how the same concept of “child welfare” has drastically changed in the last 50 years. “Child care” entailed in the post-war period, as portrayed in the documentaries, a rough form of discipline and both physical as psychological punishments. What was considered as acceptable upbringing and care practices then, are seen nowadays as unhuman and inadmissible. The newspapers’ and magazines’ articles I have collected, as well as several comments in blog posts, reinforce this narration and indirectly pose the attention on the dilemma of how to consider certain past rearing practices in nowadays’ perception of child wellbeing. On an explicit level a consideration on the changed perception of child welfare is to be found in the article on *HS* by Nykänen and Niiranen,(2013). Here the narration about the care-leaver T.M. includes both his interview given in 2013 and pieces of an article written on him with an interview to his then care-provider. Reports are transcribed on his experiences in an institution in the 1970, when he was 10 years old. Those show an awareness of the brutality and unjust treatment children suffered when placed in out-of-home custody, but no further public reaction arose. The older article already describes his experience as “shocking/immoral”⁷⁵. The article of 2013 states that the previous one aimed to show: “to which horrible extend child welfare can treat a child”⁷⁶ (Nykänen and Niiranen, 2013). The article describes the story of a child moved from a custody placement to another because considered not

⁷³ In Finnish: ”Minunkin isä vietiin sotaan jossa isäni haavoittui ja jäi sotainvalidiksi,sitten yhteiskunta kosti isälleni ja tuhosi lapset kidutuslaitoksessa Muhoksella.”

⁷⁴ Muhos is a small municipality in the province of Oulu

⁷⁵ In Finnish: järkyttävää

⁷⁶ In Finnish: ”Miten hirvittäväällä tavalla lastensuojelu voi kohdella lasta.”

disciplined as a child. Taken away from his family on the grounds of his parents' separation, he was placed in a foster family. Even though there he settled quite well, at school the teacher was very rough on him and openly threaten him "scaring him"⁷⁷ (Nykänen and Niiranen, 2013) to teach him discipline. No wonder, it is stressed by the journalists, that the boy showed an opposite reaction. T.M. was eventually placed in a "poikakoti" (child care institution, literally: "home for boys") and the then director Erkki Tiusanen described him "screaming out of fear for the things which had been done to him"⁷⁸. Tiusanen is moreover reported to have written in the records: "A strong faith and love are needed"⁷⁹ (Nykänen and Niiranen, 2013) to help him overcome that. T.M. confirms himself that tragic reality in 2013: "there one witnessed indiscriminate violence and cruelty"⁸⁰ (Nykänen and Niiranen, 2013). He refers to an isolation room, completely soundless, as the worst form of punishment.

Child labor

Under this theme the explicit narration of the hard work the care-leavers needed to perform, in various forms (in cement factories, potato fields etc.), provides a picture in which child work was not only considered acceptable, but was hardly regulated and not definitely rewarded. They were shown to have been taken away from their families, so depriving those from valuable working force, often because they were reported for not attending school. They were settled in a sort of "labor camp" as defined by them, even so attending school only now and then. Puuronen (Virtanen, 2013) describes also the child-care institutions of the '50-'60s were, as labor camps, (in Finnish "työleirit"). The terms *child-prisoner* and *child-slave* (in Finnish: "lapsivanki", lapsiorja") are constantly repeated by victims of historical abuse in their narrations in the blog forum opened after the broadcasting of *Varastettu Lapsuus* (YLE TV1, 29.4.2013). Bloggers/care-givers often introduce the terms with the inclusive personal pronoun *we* ("me" in Finnish), underlining their belonging to a special group: for example Username: *Forced labor child prisoner*⁸¹, 5.6.2013: "we child prisoners are the most harshly treated group of people in Finland"⁸². This theme discloses a reality of children forced to work in very hard conditions, as in a "labor camp", expression very often used both in blogposts and in the documentaries as well.

⁷⁷ In Finnish: pelottelemalla

⁷⁸ In Finnish: "...huusi kauhuissaan ja pelkäsi asioita, joita hänelle oli tehty".

⁷⁹ In Finnish: "Tarvitaan vahvaa uskoa ja rakkautta..."

⁸⁰ In Finnish: "Siellä näki silmitöntä väkivaltaa ja julmuutta."

⁸¹ In Finnish: pakkotyö lapsivanki

⁸² In Finnish: "Me lapsivangit olemme kaikista kovimmin kohdeltu ihmisryhmä,joita on kohdeltu Suomessa."

Acknowledgement of the care-leavers' courage in "coming out"

A theme which is not present in the documentaries but it is in fact a direct reaction of the public opinion to their intense narration is the acknowledgement of the care-leavers' courage in "coming out", narrating their personal stories. The theme is frequent in the online debate. In an article on the *Helsingin Sanomat*, reviewing *Varastettu Lapsuus*, the documentary is said by the journalist Leena Virtanen to show the story of four men who: "remember painful experiences bravely and openly"⁸³ (Virtanen, 2013). Blog forums have discussed it as well, as in blogposts following the broadcast of *Luurankokaappi*, (YLE Aihe, 19.12.2014), Username: "Boy from foster care"⁸⁴, says: "A brave man this S"⁸⁵, in recognition of the courage of S.N. for coming out and tell his story. Username: Jaana, (one of the few female-alias) participating to the discussion, comments: "Thank you dear people, you came and brought up openly the unconceivable horror"⁸⁶ (Her mother had been forcibly put in a closed psychiatric hospital). In the exchange of twitters commenting the broadcast of *Varastettu Lapsuus*: (twitter.com/alahdenmaki, 29.04.2013), touching this theme there is the comment by J.S.: "Shocking, but somehow beautiful. The guys are so solid, cool, like if they were raised above the horror. Thanks."⁸⁷

Shame

The fact that their courage is so highlighted represents the other side of the same coin. In fact themes of neglect and shame come to light in the public discourse to show how this bravery has a strong counterpart in a common feeling of shame, which did not permit the care-leavers to speak up all those years. Markkola (Siljamäki, 2015) affirms that often the victim of abuse wondered and still wonders: "Why did nobody notice? Why did nobody do anything?"⁸⁸, explaining that many have felt a strong feeling of shame.

⁸³ In Finnish: Miehet muistelevat kipeitä kokemuksiaan rohkeasti ja avoimesti

⁸⁴ In Finnish: poikakotilainen

⁸⁵ In Finnish: "Rohkea mies tämä S(...)"

⁸⁶ In Finnish: "Kiitos Teille rakkaat ihmiset, tulitte ja sanoitte julkisesti käsittämättömän kauheuden..."

⁸⁷ In Finnish: "Järkyttävää, mutta jotenkin kaunista. Äijät on niin solideja, tyyniä, kuin kauhujen yläpuolelle nousseita. Kiitos"

⁸⁸ In Finnish: "miksei kukaan huomannut? Miksi kukaan ei tehnyt mitään?"

6 Conclusions

I start my final considerations with a general observation on the participation to the public debate till now in Finland, I then draw conclusions in respect to my main questions regarding: how the public online debate on the inquiry and on historical child abuse in Finland is unfolding until now, who is entering the debate, which are the themes highlighted in the debate and finally I draw a comparison to similar discourses in countries where the inquiry has already taken place.

Participation in the debate

First of all, considering the level of participation and the intensity of the current public debate on the inquiry on historical child abuse in out-of-home care in Finland, my research on the internet has shown a fairly little awareness or will of participation, up to now, by the general public. The Media have not treated the matter if not with sporadic articles. In fact, as previously mentioned (chapter 6.1), many newspapers and online magazines have hardly or not at all covered the topic. For instance, the online magazine *Lokakuun Liike* (“October Movement”), which is, as reported on its own webpage: “A human rights organization aiming to raise public awareness and discussion about human rights and their violations in family politics, foster and mental care and other forms of institutional care”, has seemingly until now not covered the inquiry on historical child abuse in the public sphere. Many entries discuss abuse in foster care, while a critique to the child welfare in toto is very frequent, but the inquiry on historical child abuse is still remaining unnoticed. No reviews or comment is to be found on the two documentaries broadcasted on National TV on the subject.

The factual participation to the inquiry is seemingly by now (April 2015) not answering the expectations. Articles and columns in the second part of 2014 and in the beginning of 2015 prompt people to voluntarily go to the interviews and tell their stories of abuse. Few relevant examples are given by a column on the online magazine *Lapsenmaailma*, of the Finnish *Central Union for Child Welfare* (“Lastensuojelun Keskusliitto”), where Seppo Sauro, executive director of the latter, writes informatively about the inquiry, posting the main phone number directing to the Jyväskylä University’s group in charge for the interviews. The intention is to spur people to tell their “stories of survival”⁸⁹ (Sauro, 2014). In the article: “Violence- isolation- coercion: in Jyväskylä an inquiry on violence in foster care”⁹⁰ (Nykänen, 2014), on the *Keskisuomalainen*,⁹¹ in November 2014,

⁸⁹ In Finnish: selvitymistarinoita

⁹⁰ In Finnish: ”Väkivaltaa, eristämistä, kiinnipitämistä: Jyväskylässä selvitys väkivallasta sijaishuollossa”

⁹¹ Regional news of the province of Jyväskylä, where the inquiry is implemented

Kirsi-Maria Hytönen, researcher of Jyväskylä University and involved in the process of the inquiry, is interviewed. In the article there is a direct invitation for participating and the link to the inquiry plan and the contact details of the researching group. Hytönen especially addresses the request for participation to the Romani community and to disabled people, whose stories have hardly been heard and given voice to. By the time this article was published it is said that 60 persons had been interviewed. The documentary *Luurankokaappi* was broadcasted on TV1 on the 29.12.2014 and in the later article “Vaioletut tarinat” it is reported that approximately 200 persons had been enrolled to the interviews. The second documentary seems therefore to have constituted a real breakthrough in terms of raising public attention. The online forum following it has seen an intense participation, though mainly restricted to care-leavers or people having close relation to them. Finally in the journal *Oululehti*,⁹² an article provides the link to the plan of the inquiry on the STM (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health) on the 02.02.2015. The article informs that people have volunteered for interviews mainly from South Finland and that “more interviewees would be required from the region of Pohjanmaa.”⁹³ Siljamäki (Siljamäki, 2015) reports in her article that at that point, January 2015, the amount of interviewees has increased to around two hundreds persons. Compared to a total of 866⁹⁴ interviews led in Sweden during the corresponding Inquiry it is so far a rather small figure. The media, differently from the previous experiences in other countries, where there has often been an escalating coverage of the topic and a progressive public involvement in the inquiry, is aiming to raise attention and awareness in the general public.

Emerging narratives

Concentrating on the types of narrative I have encountered, it comes to light that the debate is seeing the participation mainly of men and care-leavers, narrating their personal experiences in Public Institutions, not in foster-families. The online debate, triggered mainly by the documentaries, who expose only men’s stories, is also limited in time to the post-war years, covering only partly the time of the inquiry (1937-1983). Only few testimonies, one previous to the launch of the inquiry, discuss realities in the 70’s. The public debate is restricted to a niche of participants and their narrations are very similar, disclosing a strong familiarity of experiences. It seems like it has

⁹² Oulu is settled in the region of Pohjois-Pohjanmaa (Northern Ostrobothnia)

⁹³ In Finnish: ”lisää haastateltavia kuitenkin kaivattaisiin koko Pohjanmaan alueelta”.

⁹⁴ Sköld et al., 2012, p. 19

been easier for men to find the courage and identify oneself in the narrations of other men. A further explanation can be assigned to a cultural and gender difference, speculating that Finnish women of the generations covered by the inquiry might not be as open as men to discuss certain issues.

Nowadays women in Finland are generally more outspoken than men and, according to general discussions I encountered online, even more on sensitive issues. If this hints to a possible historical change in the dynamic per gender, it is to be confirmed both by the participation to the investigation and the kind of narratives that this will produce, and by continuing to follow the online debate. The other fundamental characteristic of the online debate, is that all the stories told, both in the documentaries and in articles and blogposts, are placed in Institutions. Once more the central role displayed by the documentaries (which presented stories only in public institutions) set the stage for the following narrations.

Emerging themes in the ongoing public debate

Considering which main themes are emerging in the Finnish public debate on historical child abuse in out-of-home care, a clear attention is given to what is perceived as a past of injustice and discrimination. Many themes presented in the TV-documentaries are reinforced by the media and the public debate. Few are made explicit or newly elaborated but generally the public critique is uniformly addressed to the Child Welfare as a whole, to the Finnish system for failing in taking care of the children, but more deeply, for enacting policies of systematical isolation of the Weak and the Poor in Finnish society. In the Finnish debate the strong opposition to Child Welfare policies as a whole by the public opinion, comes to light also in the discussion on the historical perspective. Tightly connected to this awareness of a past of injustice is the latent acknowledgement by the general public and its exemplification by scholars of a changed perspective on child care and therefore on child abuse, if comparing child rearing practices of nowadays with the ones in the timeframe investigated by the inquiry. The themes presented in the two documentaries *Varastettu Lapsuus* and *Luurankokaappi* have to a large extent constructed the types of narratives present in the following public debate and are being at the same time validated and at times highlighted by the debate itself. The debate explicitly stresses the lack of attachment and love care-leavers in Public Institutions had to suffer in the timeframe covered by the documentaries and pinpoint their courage for sharing their stories. An evident reoccurrence of the same themes is shaping the debate so far.

Comparison to the international discourse

Placing the ongoing Finnish discussion on historical child abuse in out-of-home contexts within the international discourse, the Finnish process by now reminds the patterns of the Irish one. In both,

stories on child abuse in public care had been publically exposed already in earlier decades but the topic had remained generally silent. Institutional care is central in both discourses as well. In Finland a fairly similar “architecture of containment” as the one described by Smith (2001) in the Irish case, has served to systematically isolate the poor part of the population. Such forms of segregation, more specifically of minority groups, are evident in the Australian and Canada’s cases. Other features are more peculiar of the Finnish debate. Finnish culture, individualistic and reserved, is showing particular appreciation for the care-leavers who are displaying their stories, pinpointing their courage in coming out to public attention. Sexual abuse, in this context, is on the contrary hardly discussed. This is in contrast to the prevalence of this theme in other countries, as for instance in Australia, where it became a main topic. Daly defines the numerous allegations of sexual abuse as “storms” which escalated, inflaming public debate on repeated occasions (Daly, 2014, p.13-14). There are no associations of care-leavers so far formed in Finland, bringing up their rights as a group, differently to the situation seen for instance in Australia (Daly, 2014), Canada and Sweden (Sköld, 2013, p.13-14 and Arvidsson, 2015). In those countries care-leavers associations strongly pushed and participated to the inquiry and redress schemes. The trajectory of “advocacy”, “personal testimony” and “media coverage” as outlined by Murphy (2010), in other words, is restricted to a intermingling group of individuals, scholars and care-leavers, giving their voice and expressing a request for attention and recognition. A unique form of solidarity and community among the care-leavers is to be found in the blog forum following *Luurankokaappi*, where bloggers share their past experiences and update one another on the development of the inquiry.

A political involvement, following the Swedish model, where the inquiry had just taken place, has brought to the launch of the inquiry in Finland as well. Public attention seems nonetheless not to have been triggered by the political discussion as such, but mostly by the involvement of the Finnish intelligentsia and the consequent release of the documentaries on child abuse in Finnish public institutions in the ’50-60’s. Irish debate on the same model of Inquiry had favored, as Smith affirms, a reconstruction of Irish identity on the basis of “inclusion” instead of past exclusion of “children at risk” (Smith 2001). Finnish debate focuses on the failure of the State in providing care and rejects the idea of violence as a standard practice for rearing a child. Public opinion takes distance from a past of neglect and systematical isolation of the poorer part of the population. It will be extremely interesting to observe whether the inquiry will arrive to a reformulation of the Finnish National Identity, like in the Irish case. This will depend mainly, I think, on a very crucial factor. Following the debate, it is in fact evident that, to these days, the inquiry has not reached the larger public, involvement has been shown mainly by care-leavers themselves and scholars. If the

exposure of the inquiry reaches the public attention, it is open to question to which extend the redeeming process will involve a deeper reformulation of Finnish identity. It will be furthermore interesting to observe whether, thanks to the documentaries, the public debate and the launch of the National Inquiry, the victims of historical abuse will be able to face their past and let their voices finally be heard also in the Finnish context. The narrations in the debate express ideas of discrimination and cultural exclusion, perpetuated in Finnish society against the Poor and, as a minority group, against the Romani community, together with the awareness of the implications that those have had in the future of their victims. Such an awareness represents the starting point for redeeming society from the systematic neglect and abuse of those children in Finnish institutions and generally in foster care. Finnish society extensively debates nowadays on issues of failed Child Welfare and abuses. The historical perspective can serve as a tool for understanding and correcting the present through the past.

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8 Appendix

Written interview by email to Ari Lehtikainen, director of the two TV documentaries *Varastettu lapsuus* and *Luurankokaappi*, 03.06.2015.

Questions:

-Your documentaries *Salainen sotilastie länteen*, *Varastettu Lapsuus* and *Luurankokaappi* concern narrations of single individuals' perspectives in our recent history. Could you explain why you are interested in individual's point of views?

-Professor Vesa Puuronen has participated in the realization of the TV documentary *Varastettu lapsuus*. How your cooperation did started and where did the idea of a documentary on Finnish "school-homes" originate from?

- Which institutions/companies/authorities subsidized the two TV documentaries?

Finnish original questions:

- Dokumenttisi *Salainen sotilastie länteen*, *Varastettu lapsuus*, *Luurankokaappi* käsittelevät suomalaisia kertomuksia yksityishenkilöiden näkökulmasta lähihistoriassa. Voisitko kertoa hieman taustaa miksi olet kiinnostunut tästä näkökulmasta ?

- Prof. Vesa Puuronen on ollut mukana kehittämässä *Varastettu lapsuus* dokumenttia. Kuinka teidän yhteistyönne on alkanut ja mistä idea dokumenttiin koulukodeista sai alkunsa?

- Mitkä tahot rahoittivat dokumentit *Varastettu lapsuus* ja *Luurankokaappi*?