CHAPTER 6

Sacrifice, Service and Reciprocity: The Moral Economy of Resettlement in Post-war Finland

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"The Karelians have fought and shed their blood not only for their fellow citizens and the Finnish state, but also for themselves. Since the law has obliged us to make such far-reaching sacrifices, the state too, according to our laws, has obligations towards its citizens and their property. Obligations cannot be only one-sided."[1]

With this powerful phrasing, a war veteran belonging to the Karelian minority of Finland advocated for the rights of Karelian refugees after the Finnish-Soviet War of 1939–1940, also known as the Winter War. As a result of the war, Finland was forced to cede around 10 per cent of its pre-war territory, primarily the Finnish Karelia[2] in Southeastern Finland, displacing a population of approximately 400,000 people.

In his long and eloquent letter, published in the newspaper *Karjala*, in May 1940, the Karelian veteran emphasised that the Finnish state was responsible for taking care of the Karelians since they had sacrificed their homes and lands for

the wellbeing of the rest of the Finnish nation. In articulating his demands, the Karelian veteran did not appeal to charity but to reciprocity, framing wartime sacrifice as the basis for legitimate claims and demands on the state. Read in this way, such interventions reveal how experiences of war and displacement informed a shared moral understanding of rights, duties, and entitlement in wartime and postwar Finland—what this chapter conceptualizes as a moral economy of the nation-state, in which sacrifice and service for the nation reinforced reciprocal expectations toward the state.

This chapter explores demands for reciprocity and recognition by examining the resettlement of displaced Karelians[3] and demobilised soldiers after the wars affecting Finland from 1939–1945. It shows how experiences of displacement and military service shaped the moral expectations through which citizens articulated claims and right to state support. Rather than treating these groups merely as recipients of social policy legislation, the chapter emphasises their role as active interpreters and articulators of wartime sacrifice and entitlement.

The relationship between war and the expansion of social policy has been extensively examined in existing scholarly literature.[4] Influential studies have linked the nature of total warfare to the growth of welfare states by emphasising increased social need, strengthened state capacity, and the legitimisation of state intervention in all aspects of economic and social life.[5] In Finland, the wars of 1939–45 have similarly been interpreted as formative events for national integration and welfare-state development, as wartime needs compelled the state to assume responsibility for broad sections of the population.[6] These developments strengthened the state's legitimacy as "an economic actor, regulator, redistributor, and provider" and the increased frequency of state intervention was only partially reigned in after the war.[7]

While this existing scholarly body of work has convincingly demonstrated the structural and institutional consequences of war, it has paid less attention to how these transformations were understood and negotiated by those who were most directly affected by them. By shifting attention from policy formation to claims-making and experience, this chapter reorients the discussion towards the moral foundations of the relationship between the state and its citizens in the post-war era. The Finnish case that is examined here illustrates a broader post-war phenomenon in which veterans, refugees, and other war-affected groups across different societies demanded recognition and compensation after the Second World War.[8]

The resettlement of displaced Karelians, demobilised soldiers, war invalids, war widows and others was an example of the increased need for social protection and state intervention in the aftermath of total war. The majority of the existing literature regarding the resettlement of these groups has primarily been defined by a top-down perspective, dealing with the organisation, implementation, and outcomes of the resettlement effort, as the resettlement constituted and propagated large-scale social reforms with long-lasting consequences. Through voluntary sales and expropriation from private businesses and large private estates, the resettlement led to the creation of over 42,000 new farms and around 51,000 new residential plots from 1945-1958.[9]

Less attention, however, has been given to the perspectives of those who were subjected to these policies. This chapter therefore adopts a bottom-up perspective, examining how resettled Karelians and demobilised soldiers themselves interpreted, embodied and justified the responsibility of the state in the aftermath of total war. I argue that the experience of total war made visible a previously implicit moral economy of the nation-state, grounded in reciprocity between sacrifice for the nation and entitlement to state support. Drawing on the concepts of experience and moral economy, this chapter shows that resettlement functioned not merely as a policy response to social need, but as a moral settlement in which popular expectations of recognition and obligation were negotiated.

EXPERIENCE AND MORAL ECONOMY AS ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

By "experience," this chapter refers to a mediated and historically defined process through which individuals make sense of events and give them meaning. Experience is thus not treated as a direct reflection of reality, but as something articulated through language and shaped by cultural narratives, social structures, and available interpretive frameworks. Understood in this way, experience is both individual and social: it emerges in the interaction between people and their surroundings and can, in turn, inform action and future claims directed at society.[10]

Building on this approach, I examine how displaced Karelians and soldiers interpreted their experiences of war and displacement, and how these interpretations were mobilised in order to articulate moral notions of rights, duties, and state responsibility within the resettlement process. Drawing on inquiries, complaints, petitions and newspaper writings in which these experiences were articulated, I argue that the war reshaped not only the reach of the Finnish state but also the expectations of its citizens.

To conceptualise these expectations and the emergence of claims to state support, this chapter employs the concept of moral economy, originally formulated by the British historian E.P. Thompson. For Thompson, moral economy refers to shared beliefs about customary rights, social norms, and reciprocal obligations that structure relations between ordinary people and the authorities.[11] Crucially, these beliefs were not imposed from above but emerged from everyday practices and shared understandings, becoming visible in moments of crisis when established norms were perceived to be violated. Building on this insight, Johanna Siméant emphasises that the concept of moral economy draws attention to the expectations people have towards authorities—expectations that are often implicit and unspoken during ordinary times but surface when individuals appeal to, or demand, the upholding of what they understand as legitimate rights.[12]

Following this framework, I interpret the resettlement of displaced Karelians, demobilised soldiers, and others affected by the war as an expression of a wartime moral economy in Finland. For these groups, resettlement was understood not as charity or discretionary assistance but as a right earned through sacrifice and suffering as citizens who had fulfilled their wartime duties—an obligation that the state was morally bound to recognize.[13]

EXPERIENCE EXPRESSED IN THE SOURCES

As source material for analysing the experiences of Karelian refugees and war veterans, this chapter draws on letters and comments published in newspapers, as well as correspondence addressed to the Land Settlement Bureau between 1945–1947. These materials document how individual people articulated their interpretations of war, displacement, and entitlement in public and semi-official settings.

The Land Settlement Bureau, which was responsible for implementing the post-war resettlement program, operated through local settlement authorities in almost every municipality. Although these local bodies were formally tasked with handling applicants' concerns, the central bureau was flooded with inquiries, complaints, and petitions from the summer of 1945 onward.[14] Such correspondence provides insight into how displaced Karelians and veterans framed their expectations towards the state and justified their claims to land and support.

In addition to administrative correspondence, the chapter analyses letters to the editor and selected newspaper articles published in the aftermath of the Winter War in 1940 and during the Continuation War when public debate

over resettlement was particularly intense.[15] Read as attempts by their authors to articulate, construct, and share experiences of war, displacement, and loss, these sources illuminate the moral language through which rights, obligations, and state responsibility were negotiated and formulated in wartime and post-war Finland.

This chapter proceeds to accomplish this in three steps. The first section briefly outlines the impact of the Second World War on Finland and the political and social background behind the post-war resettlement. It then turns to the two principal groups affected by the resettlement: displaced Karelians and demobilised soldiers. This second section analyses how these groups came to understand themselves as national heroes who believed they had shouldered a disproportionate burden of the wartime suffering. Building on this, the third section explores how their experiences were translated into moral claims levied on the post-war state, tracing the emergence of a moral economy in which sacrifice and service generated expectations of recognition, reciprocity, and entitlement. Taken together, the chapter illuminates how the lived experience of total war reshaped the relationship between the state and its citizens in post-war Finland.

THE POST-WAR RESETTLEMENT

The roots of Finland's post-war resettlement effort sprang from the two wars fought by the country against the Soviet Union during the Second World War, namely: the Winter War of 1939–1940 and the Continuation War of 1941–1944. As mentioned, in the aftermath of the Winter War, Finland was forced to cede the Karelia region to the Soviet Union. As Karelia constituted the main conflict zone of the Winter War, large parts of its population had already been evacuated during the fighting. Following the armistice of March 1940, the remaining inhabitants were transferred within the bounds of the new Finnish borders, leaving more than 400,000 people without homes or livelihoods by the spring of 1940. In response, the Finnish government moved quickly to draft plans for resettling and compensating the displaced population under the Prompt Settlement Act.

The outbreak of the Continuation War in the summer of 1941 interrupted these efforts. As Finnish and German forces advanced into Soviet territory, many evacuated Karelians returned to their former homes. This return was particularly common among the agrarian population, for whom access to land and livestock was essential for their subsistence and prosperity. Urban evacuees, by contrast,

often found it easier to secure housing and employment elsewhere in Finland and were therefore less inclined to return to Karelia.

During the Continuation War, proposals to grant land to soldiers in recognition of their military service increasingly gained support. The abandonment of farms and land plots established under the Prompt Settlement Act further fuelled these discussions. Although soldier settlement plans were debated throughout the war, they were never fully implemented. In the summer of 1944, the Soviet Union launched a major offensive against Finnish and German forces, prompting a second mass evacuation of Karelia. When the war ended in September 1944, Finland was again forced to cede sovereign territory—this time including not only Karelia but also the sparsely populated Petsamo region and other, smaller areas in northern Finland. As a result, Finland yet again faced the urgent task of resettling approximately 400,000 displaced Karelians alongside a large number of demobilised soldiers who felt that their wartime service had entitled them to support from the state.

To address this, the Land Acquisition Act of 1945 granted displaced Karelians, war veterans with families, war invalids, and war widows the opportunity to buy reasonably priced farmland or residential plots with government assistance. The right to land was also granted to any tenant farmers or agricultural workers who might lose their homes and employment because of the application of the Act, basically encompassing the workforce of large manor houses and estates whose lands were expropriated by the state.[16]

It is important to note that the Land Acquisition Act did not emerge in isolation or as a result of the wars alone, but built on land policies introduced after the Civil War of 1918, which were intended to restore social peace and stabilise the young Finnish state. These earlier land reforms enabled tenant farmers to purchase their holdings and promoted the settlement of landless rural populations, advancing the ideal of an independent peasantry as a central social and ideological foundation of Finnish nationhood and citizenship.[17] This vision of national integration rooted in the continuity of rural society strongly shaped the resettlement policies that were enacted following World War II and was further reinforced by the public's wartime experiences of food scarcity and economic vulnerability. Together with a strong and shared sense of a "debt of honor" owed to those who had suffered during the war,[18] it helped legitimize the idea of large-scale land reform.

The scale of the resettlement programme highlights its significance as a formative social and societal experience in post-war Finland. The Land Settle-

ment Bureau received approximately 150,000 applications for land, of which around 113,000 were approved.[19] Of these, roughly 45,000 applications came from displaced Karelians and about 60,000 came from former soldiers. Most rejected applications were submitted by soldiers who were excluded from the resettlement programme because they were unmarried. When the households of successful applicants are considered, it has been estimated that resettlement directly affected the lives of approximately 700,000 people in a country of only 3,7 million inhabitants in 1940.

As noted earlier, much of the existing research on post-war resettlement has focused on policy design and implementation. Studies that address the lived experiences of individuals who went through the resettlement process have largely drawn on oral history materials collected decades after the fact, focusing in particular on Karelians and questions of cultural and social assimilation.[20] Much less attention has been given to the perspectives of former soldiers, who constituted the majority of resettlement applicants. Research based on retrospective memories has also struggled to fully capture the total lived experience of a historical moment that was neither wartime nor fully post-war, but rather a liminal and transitional in nature. This limitation is due, in part, to the rapid integration of the resettlement efforts into the larger national narrative of successful reconstruction—a narrative that has shaped collective memory by smoothing over very real tensions, conflicts, and personal hardship during this period.[21] By drawing on contemporary sources, this chapter seeks to elucidate and exemplify some of the conflict, uncertainty, and frustration that has been largely marginalised in later accounts.

An important dimension that is obscured by the national narrative is the strong sense of entitlement that emerged among both displaced Karelians and demobilised soldiers at the end of the war. For members of these groups, wartime suffering and sacrifice were central pillars to how they understood their position in society. Many came to see themselves as bearing the primary burdens of the war and, on that basis, articulated claims of compensation and recognition grounded in shared experiences and collective identities. It is these communities of experience which shaped how displacement and service were shared, understood and embedded within a moral economy of the nation-state that are examined next.

THE SHARED EXPERIENCE OF DISPLACEMENT

For displaced Karelians, the experience of permanent loss and evacuation formed the foundation of a community of experience through which claims for recognition and compensation were articulated. Finnish historians Aapo Roselius and Tuomas Tepora have argued that the Winter War marked the moment when Karelians first emerged as a group distinct from the rest of the Finnish population. The experience of evacuation and temporary accommodation united Karelians from different backgrounds and social positions, laying the foundations for a shared sense of belonging that developed into the modern Karelian identity.[22]

Of course, Karelians were not the only Finns displaced by military operations during the wars. During the Winter War alone, nearly half a million people fled their homes, and at the time, no clear distinction was made between those who were evacuated from frontline areas and those who left urban centers due to the threat of aerial bombardment.[23] All those who moved—whether by official order or for voluntary reasons—were collectively and commonly referred to as evacuees (evakot) or, later, as forced migrants (siirtoväki). Initially, these terms did not denote a specific regional or ethnic identity. Rather, they described a temporary condition shared by diverse groups of people whose displacement was thought of as reversible.[24]

It was only after the wars that these categories became associated almost exclusively with permanent displacement.[25] Following the publication of the final peace terms in September 1944, it became clear that large parts of the evacuated population would never be able to return to their homes. As more than ninety per cent of the permanently displaced Finns came from the ceded Karelia region, the meanings attached to evacuation and forced migration increasingly converged with the Karelian identity. In this sense, the foundations of a distinct Karelian community and modern identity were laid during the evacuations, but it only solidified once it became clear that the displaced Karelians had permanently lost their homes and livelihoods.

The loss of homes and local communities, prolonged "refugee life" in temporary accommodations, and the uncertainty about the future created a sense of liminality and alienation that those who had not shared these experiences could not always understand.[26] In their correspondence with authorities, displaced Karelians frequently described their situation using expressions such as "wandering in a new land," "evacuation," or "migrant life," all of which conveyed a condition of being out of place and outside the norms of settled existence. Scholarship on displacement has conceptualized refugees as liminal figures and as social "matter

out of place,"[27] and the language used by displaced Karelians suggests that they recognized similar aspects in their own situation.[28]

I argue that this experience of permanent loss and prolonged displacement formed the basis of what can be described as a Karelian *community of experience*. Members of this community recognised the similarities between their experiences and began to identify themselves as a distinct social group.[29] While much of Finnish society began to transition back towards peace-time routines following 1944, Karelians remained in a prolonged state of uncertainty. Their experiences increasingly diverged from those of the rest of the population, fostering a shared sense of identity rooted in loss, dislocation, and exclusion from normal social life. This community of experience provided a framework through which individual hardships were interpreted as collective and historically specific.

The perception of Karelians as a group whose experiences fundamentally differed from those of other Finns is evident in the way they articulated their experiences. In a letter to a radio programme dealing with the problems concerning the evacuated population, a young Karelian woman who had lost her position at a war hospital in 1944 framed her situation in explicitly moral and legal terms:

"Now, however, our open positions are being filled with local people who have been able to keep their homes and their land while we, in order to save our common fatherland and independence, have lost everything that was unspeakably dear to us, and which we had once again managed to build anew after the Winter War. Inevitably, the question arises whether we can be treated in just any way, and whether this is right and lawful."[30]

Her complaint juxtaposed "local people" with evacuees, framed displacement as a collective sacrifice made for the nation and raised questions containing components of justice and legality. In doing so, she articulated a moral claim grounded in shared experience and national contribution rather than individual misfortune. As the complaint illustrates, the community of Karelian evacuees was itself a product of wartime experience. Collective formulations such as "we evacuees" or "we migrants" emerged during and after the war, and especially once it became clear that it would be impossible for them to return to the land that was conquered by the Soviets. This shared sense of belonging shaped how Karelians experienced resettlement: through it, they sought—and demanded—recognition and compensation for losses that were framed and understood as sacrifices made on behalf of the Finnish nation.

Although the experiences of displaced Karelians were shaped by loss of home and livelihood, they were not unique in producing strong communities grounded

in a collective wartime experience. Soldiers likewise developed a shared sense of community rooted in military service, sacrifice, and exclusion from daily life enjoyed by civilians. Examining this community of experience highlights both parallels and contrasts in how different war-affected groups articulated moral expectations toward the postwar state.

THE FRONTLINE BROTHERHOOD

Among frontline soldiers, shared experiences of combat and sacrifice similarly produced a community of experience that informed expectations of post-war entitlements. Historian Ville Kivimäki has argued that during the Winter War and the Continuation War, Finnish soldiers formed a frontline community defined by the exceptional conditions of combat and military life. The intensity of this sense of community varied over time. During periods of heavy fighting, soldiers often experienced their personal hopes and fears as inseparable from the fate of the nation, producing a powerful sense of collective brotherhood. In its more everyday form, the frontline community manifested as camaraderie: an awareness that frontline soldiers bore the main burden of wartime sacrifice, removed from their civilian lives, while life on the home front appeared toto continue relatively undisturbed. According to Kivimäki, these forms of community were crucial for the longevity of the soldiers' mental endurance, providing meaning in the senseless fighting and a shared framework within which even extreme events of violence could be shared and endured.[31] Traces of this frontline community are visible in the letters that former soldiers sent to the resettlement authorities following the war, where wartime experiences shaped the expectations of the post-war future and of reasonable compensation for military service.

Finnish soldiers were not alone in holding such expectations. In their comparative studies of veterans of the First and Second World Wars, Martin Crotty, Mark Edele, and Neil Diamant uncovered that demands for recognition and material compensation were a global phenomenon. The soldiers that endured and experienced total war, which was characterised by mass mobilisation, prolonged military campaigns, and heavy casualties, often felt a strong sense of entitlement.[32] Notably, similar hopes and demands emerged in both the victorious and defeated societies, highlighting the cultural power of wartime experience itself.[33] For Finnish veterans, special treatment was not framed as a discretionary reward, but as a shared right that had been earned through service. This understanding is evidently seen in the complaint of a former soldier whose resettlement application was rejected for being submitted too late:

"I myself feel dismissed by the law. I have earned what thousands of other frontline soldiers have, for I have been with them through everything."[34]

Describing the frontline soldiers as a community of experience pushes the boundaries of the concept, given that the wartime experiences of individual soldiers could vary greatly depending on their backgrounds and the tasks they performed. In the Finnish context, it is also true that the sense of solidarity experienced at the front weakened after the war when former soldiers returned to civilian life.[35] Yet the sources suggest that former soldiers nonetheless recognised similarities in their experiences and identified with one another because of them. This is visible in their correspondence with authorities, in their mobilisation for benefits, and in the shared moral language through which they justified their claims.

Following the concept of moral economy, it is important to note that Finnish soldiers formed a community based specifically on experience rather than legislation or organisation, even if such a sense of community was only temporary. As Norbert Götz and Emilia Palonen have noted, "only popular demands that draw on common sense adequately reflect a moral economy".[36] Together, the Karelians and soldiers comprised more than a quarter of Finland's wartime population, and in the immediate aftermath of the Continuation War their demands for recognition and support enjoyed broad legitimacy among the broader population. [37] Although this consensus eroded as the practical challenges of resettlement became apparent from the spring of 1945 onwards, it is clear that the moral economy underpinning these claims was not only confined to the communities themselves.

I argue that the communities of displaced Karelians and soldiers functioned as key sites through which broader moral sentiments were articulated and made visible. Through them, shared experiences of sacrifice and service were incorporated into the moral economy of the nation-state and translated into legitimate claims of reciprocity. The following section of this chapter examines how these claims were articulated through appeals, petitions, and public discourse.

THE DUAL NATURE OF THE KARELIAN SACRIFICE

The displaced Karelians' sense of entitlement was built on the experience of sacrifice, as exemplified by the following passage from a letter published in the Karelian newspaper *Laatokka* after the Winter War:

"Has not all this happened for the sake of our common fatherland? And is it not precisely the lands of Karelia that may be regarded as the ransom price by

which the independence of what remains of Finland was purchased this time? Do the displaced people not have the right to reclaim the land they lost within the present borders of our state? If Karelian farmers are to be regarded as citizens of Finland, then they should have the right to get back what was taken from them."[38]

For Karelians, the narrative of sacrifice offered a means of understanding and making sense of their loss.[39] Historian Frank Biess has argued that one of the central challenges faced by the German population after 1945 was the task of deriving meaning from total defeat, as their National Socialist framework of understanding the world around them and their place in it had collapsed. In Finland, by contrast, no such total breakdown of meaning occurred. Instead, wartime frameworks that emphasised national unity and sacrifice could be perpetuated into the post-war period. Focused citizenship education during the interwar years had helped lay the groundwork for the social acceptability of national sacrifice by emphasising the fusion of the individual and the community. Institutions such as the school system, children's and youth organisations, and civic education provided through military service instilled Finns with the virtues of national defense, patriotism, and a strong willingness to make sacrifices when needed.[40] Together with the strong sense of solidarity and togetherness forged during the Winter War, these ideals made it possible to frame the loss of Karelia as a price that had to be paid in order to ensure the nation's very survival.[41]

Crucially, this framing did not merely give meaning to the experience of loss; it transformed it into a claim. By portraying Karelia as the "ransom price" of national independence from the Soviet Union, displaced Karelians came to accept and understand their suffering within a reciprocal moral relationship with the state. Sacrifice thus functioned as a form of moral currency, creating expectations of recognition, restitution, or compensation. In this way, individual experiences of loss were linked to broader notions of justice and obligation, forming a key foundation of the emerging moral economy.

However, the narrative of sacrifice was an inherently fragile construct. According to historian Tuomas Tepora, the ethos of sacrifice is best examined as a shifting position between voluntariness and compulsion.[42] In its positive form, the language of sacrifice enabled the displaced Karelians to interpret what had happened to them and give it meaning. Crucially, it allowed them to view themselves not as passive, traumatised victims of war, but as active agents who had helped secure the nation's future through their own actions.[43] By invoking their sacrifices, the Karelians could demonstrate that their need for help was not due to personal failure and enabled them to distinguish their situation from

that of other dependents, such as recipients of poor relief. In this way, displaced Karelians claimed that their entitlement to support was legitimate and had been earned through sacrifice on behalf of the nation.

When, however, the Karelians felt that their rights—or their expectations of rights—were being violated, sacrifice for the nation could be reinterpreted as something that had been imposed on them rather than something given voluntarily, constructing a self-perception of victimhood:

"It seems that, while the rest of Finland has managed to recover from the war with little more than a fright, people's hearts are hardening towards the plight of the Karelians. As if the demands of the displaced were boundless! And yet, they ask for nothing more than justice and fair compensation for the lands and homes that the government handed over to the Russians without even asking their permission."[44]

Like the writer of the quote, Karelian newspapers frequently emphasized that the state had surrendered their homeland against their will and was therefore primarily responsible for the consequences, including the obligation to provide compensation and support to those affected.[45] Importantly, being forced to sacrifice their homes and livelihoods did not weaken Karelians' sense of entitlement; it may have even intensified it. When loss was interpreted as imposed from above, the articulation of rights often assumed explicitly legalistic forms, as illustrated by the statement introduced at the beginning of this chapter: "Since the law has obliged us to make such far-reaching sacrifices, the state too, according to our laws, has obligations towards its citizens and their property. Obligations cannot be only one-sided."[46]

Sacrifice can thus be argued to embody a dual character. It could be embraced as a meaningful contribution to national survival, but when expectations of reciprocity were unmet, it could just as readily be reinterpreted as unjust victimisation. In both cases, by framing displacement as a sacrifice for the nation, Karelians situated their claims within a moral economy of the nation-state, in which the loss of their homeland was understood as a contribution to the collective survival of all Finns that generated reciprocal obligations.

While displaced Karelians grounded their claims to recognition and support in the irreversible loss of land and livelihood, they were not alone in translating wartime sacrifice into moral entitlement. Soldiers too, drew on shared experiences of service and danger to articulate expectations of reciprocity from the state. Examining how soldiers articulated these claims makes it possible to trace both the parallels between the two wartime communities of experience, and to

further clarify how serving the nation functioned as a legitimate moral currency in post-war Finland.

THE SOLDIERS' PROMISED LAND

Like the displaced Karelians, soldiers framed their post-war expectations through a language of sacrifice, service and reciprocity. If Karelians emphasised the loss of land and home as their contribution to national survival, soldiers grounded their moral claims in years of military service and exposure to mortal danger.

In an article published during the Continuation War in *Aseveli* (Brother in Arms), a wartime newspaper intended primarily for Finnish soldiers, several soldiers anonymously expressed their opinions on the possible post-war resettlement efforts. One sergeant articulated a sentiment that was shared by many – the expectation of compensation for the years spent at the front and of a future defined by stability and security:

"'By obtaining a piece of land on reasonable terms where he could build his own home, a soldier would feel that he has received at least some compensation for the years he has been forced to spend here in the prime of his life.'"[47]

Other interviewees quoted in the newspaper article also felt that receiving land would be recognition for the years spent on the frontlines and the sacrifices made. One lieutenant stated that resolving the land question before the end of the war would demonstrate the country's gratitude to its defenders, while another commented that the soldiers had done their part without compromise and therefore expected a fair outcome to their cause.[48]

The groundwork for the soldiers' expectations had been laid during the interwar period, when the education of Finnish men emphasised the ideal of soldier-citizenship. The image of a man defending his homeland functioned as a powerful normative model of masculinity and civic virtue. Within this framework, frontline brotherhood—where political and social differences lost all significance in the face of shared danger—was understood as the realisation of ideal male citizenship.[49] During the wars of 1939–1945, this ideal was crystalised as conscripted men were exposed to extreme conditions and mortal risk. In return, soldiers and their families came to expect compensation, or at the very least a reciprocal response, from the rest of society.

Expectations of a "fair outcome" or compensation were widespread among the Finnish soldiers. In a memorandum on the demobilisation of soldiers drawn up in autumn 1944, the Finnish League of Brothers in Arms (Suomen Aseveljien Liitto), the main advocacy group of Finnish soldiers, stated that resettlement

was an essential factor for the morale of demobilised soldiers. According to the memorandum, soldiers expected the state and wider society to recognise their special status after the war and hoped for a fairer social order that would ensure the mental and material security of soldiers and their families. The memorandum warned that failure to meet these expectations would lead to deep disappointment.[50]

It seems that for many soldiers, the resettlement came to represent not only material compensation but also symbolic recognition of the moral bond between the soldier-citizens and the state. This sense of moral economy was expressed most explicitly when soldiers demanded that the state needed to honor what they understood as concrete promises made during the war. A writer disappointed by the slow progress of resettlement wrote to the authorities in April 1945:

"There's no need to rush this resettlement issue any faster than the pace with which we were being sent to the front lines, that speed is enough. Back then, we were told that soldiers would be given land. But now, it turns out that it's not for sale, let alone being given away. We've just been miserably deceived."[51]

The contrast drawn between the rapid mobilisation of soldiers and the perceived sluggishness of resettlement highlights the writer's belief that the state was responsible for compensating soldiers for the mental and physical strain they suffered because of the war. In line with the writer here, many soldiers firmly believed that they had been promised land in exchange for their military service. While historical research has found no evidence of official guarantees, wartime rumors and informal promises from officers were widespread.[52] From the perspective of the lived experience of soldiers, it mattered little whether or not such promises had been formally made or by whom; their significance significance lay in the expectations they generated. The idea of a "promised land" crystallised a broader moral economy of the nation-state, in which military service for national survival constituted a binding obligation of the state towards its soldier-citizens. Thus, beyond simply demanding the land they believed they were promised, veterans, like the displaced Karelians, were asserting a broader moral claim on the state grounded in the promise wartime reciprocity.

CONCLUSION

As noted in the introduction, E.P. Thompson's concept of moral economy captures the implicit expectations and reciprocal obligations that structure relations between social groups and governing authorities. These expectations become most visible in times of crisis, when people demand the fulfilment of what they

see as legitimate rights. In post-war Finland, both displaced Karelians and soldiers articulated such claims towards the state. Although these were directed at state institutions, their underlying logic was national and moral rather than bureaucratic. The sources examined within this chapter thus point not only to a reciprocal relationship between citizens and the state, but to a moral economy of the nation-state, grounded in belonging, sacrifice, and contribution to the collective survival. As Helene Laurent has observed, those who had suffered for the nation could no longer be understood merely as the needy. They were recognised—and recognised themselves—as war victims and national contributors, a shift that profoundly reshaped their understanding of the state assistance they should receive.[53] Their demands were not framed as appeals to charity but as essential and immutable rights grounded in sacrifice and service:

"They [the Karelians] have suffered and are suffering even now for the sake of the entire nation, and therefore they have the right to make far-reaching demands. This is by no means a matter of charity or benevolence, although such a shameful way of thinking has appeared here and there, but rather a matter of the rights of those who have sacrificed themselves for their country."[54]

The experience of total war reshaped how state–citizen relations were imagined and negotiated. Before the war, Finnish citizenship remained ambiguous: although liberal reformers increasingly cast the state as a guarantor of welfare, full membership of this system still depended on productivity, independence, and moral worth. The claims articulated by Karelians and soldiers drew on this logic by emphasising sacrifice and fulfilled obligations. At the same time, their demands for compensation and recognition highlighted a reciprocal moral bond between citizens and the state. Mass mobilisation, coercion, and personal loss legitimised expectations that the state should respond to sacrifice with tangible support.

Scholarly work investigating the relationship of war and social policy has long emphasised the role of military service in the expansion of social policy. Bryan Turner, for example, has shown how wartime service has historically generated social security entitlements, including pensions, healthcare, and access to housing.[55]This chapter complements such accounts by shifting attention from the more abstract process of policy formation to the palpable lived experience of the individuals that such policies affected. The cases detailing the ordeals of displaced Karelians and soldiers show that wartime upheaval reshaped not only institutions but also public expectations. Although neither group articulated demands for universal social rights or a fully developed notion of social citizenship, their

claims nonetheless helped normalise the expectation that state support could be demanded when warranted.

When resettlement stalled or access was denied, such decisions were experienced not merely as arbitrary administrative outcomes but as repudiations of legitimate suffering and service—and thus as breaches of the moral economy. This is illustrated in a 1946 letter from a tenant farmer who was evicted when his holding was reassigned to a Karelian family. He justified his claim through his and his sons' own military service and injuries, asking whether he had: "... no other option than to pack up our belongings and set out along the road."[56]

Although this chapter has focused on displaced Karelians and demobilised soldiers, the wartime moral economy extended far beyond these groups, as reflected in the broad initial support for their claims in post-war Finland. Over time, this support eroded, suggesting that the moral economy was historically contingent and gradually gave way to more universalistic notions of social rights and emerging welfare-state ideals. In the immediate post-war context, however, these claims resonated because they expressed widely shared expectations of fairness, obligation, and reciprocity. Post-war resettlement thus functioned not merely as a practical response to displacement and demobilisation, but as a key arena in which the moral economy of the nation-state was negotiated, contested, and made visible.