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MEDIATISED IMAGES OF JAPAN IN EUROPE:
THROUGH THE MEDIA KALEIDOSCOPE

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EDITED BY

MARCO PELLITTERI & CHRISTOPHER J. HAYES

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The perception of the Japanese in the Estonian soldiers' letters from the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905)

Ene SELART | Tartu University, Estonia

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ABSTRACT

The Russo-Japanese war (1905-1904) had a great impact on Estonian society as it instigated the discontent in the society that in the end led to the turbulent events of the Russian revolution in 1905 and the pursuit of political independence that was achieved in 1918. It also changed the content of the Estonian printed media as these two years escalated a Japanese boom that was never seen before or after: almost in every single newspaper issue there were articles written about Japan (war news, foreign news, opinion stories, fiction, travelogues, etc). As a new genre, newspapers started to publish the letters of the soldiers who were sent to the battlefield in the Far East. On the whole approximately 10,000 Estonian men were mobilized that was a considerable proportion of the nation of 1 million and the Estonians back at home were eager to know every piece of information how their men are doing in the distant warfare. Consequently, the war created a genre in newspapers that was providing war news without the mediation of foreign languages or journalists.

In the context of the research of the Estonian printed media history, the soldiers' letters have not been researched as a type of journalistic genre in the newspapers. The aim of the current paper is to study how the Estonian soldiers constructed in their letters the Japanese as an enemy and which topics and comparisons they used while writing about the war. The thematic analysis was used as a research method to study the letters published in three main Estonian newspapers from spring 1904 up to spring 1905. Main topics in the letters have been divided into directly war-related issues or descriptions of the surrounding environment. In both categories the positive or negative perceptions of Japanese have been analysed.

KEYWORDS

Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905); Newspapers; Soldiers' Letters;
Perception of Japan as a War Enemy; Estonian Media History; Thematic Analysis.

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Introduction

The Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905) was the first major military conflict between Eastern and Western countries where the latter was defeated. The Russian empire was won by the overwhelming Japanese military success and tactics. At the time of the war, Estonia belonged to the czarist Russia and Estonian men were conscripted to the imperial army. At the beginning of the war there were already about thousand Estonians serving in the army and navy forces in the Far East. In addition, about 7,400 men of reserve forces were mobilized to the 37th Infantry Division of the Russian First Army and by the end of

1904 there were 3,200 young soldiers conscripted (Andresen *et al.*, 2010: 353). Although Estonians made up only marginal 0.8% of the total forces, for the nation of 1 million the conscription of men in such scale was a considerable part of the population. In total the Estonian casualties of the war were about 600 men killed, 1,100 wounded and 300 taken to prison (Andresen *et al.*, 2010: 353).¹

At the time of the Russo-Japanese war the present-day territory of the Republic of Estonia was still divided between the Estonian province and Livonian province of the czarist Russia. The first newspapers published on this land were written in German (*Ordinari Freytags (Donnerstags) Zeitung* (1675–1679)) and it took over one hundred years until the first Estonian language journal made a short-lived appearance (*Lühhike Öppetus* (1766-1767)). From the beginning of the 19th century, the newspapers were published in German, Russian and Estonian languages at the same time but they were meant for different audiences: German language newspapers for the Baltic-German upper class, and Estonian language newspapers for the peasants of Estonian nationality. The first newspaper for the Estonians in the beginning of the 19th century – *Tarto maa rahva Näddali-Leht* (1806) – was remarkable in its time as this was the first newspaper in the world that was meant for the serfs and written in their own language, i.e. in Estonian. The first continually appearing weekly newspaper in Estonian started half a century later (*Perno Postimees* (1857-1885)).

The turn of the century and the beginning of the 20th century was a pivotal time for the Estonian printed media: in the course of the Russian revolution of 1905 many newspapers ceased to exist, yet the new ones emerged: in 1905 there were 48 different Estonian newspapers but by the end of the 1906 there were already 100 on the market.

When the war between Russia and Japan broke out, it caused an all-national surge of interest in Japan as everybody wanted to know more about the distant land where their men were sent to battle. As was characteristic of the beginning of the 20th century, the main mediators of information were larger Estonian newspapers (*Olevik, Postimees* and *Teataja*) and they covered extensively all kind of aspects about Japan. In almost every single newspaper issue the war news, foreign policy reviews and other articles about Japan (fiction, opinion stories, travelogues, etc.) were published. The soldiers' letters from the battlefield turned out to be one of the most popular newspaper topics among the readers, so editors

¹ The more specific overview of Estonians serving in the Russian forces is given by prof Tõnu Tannberg (2015, 62-69) in his article about the Estonians in the Russo-Japanese war.

started to make announcements for acquiring the letters from the relatives to publish them in order to share their content with wider audience (Teataja, 1904, no 55). Before the war there were customarily only travel letters published in the newspapers, so the letters from the war were a new journalistic genre and way of communication with the reader. The letters provided direct information without mediation of journalists or translations from foreign languages. This study focuses on the analysis of the content of soldiers' letters from the Russo-Japanese war, more specifically how the Japanese was depicted as a war enemy.

The course of the war was very important for the development of the Estonian society. The discontent and resentment towards the governing czarist regime and old-fashioned legal system brought along the Russian revolution of 1905 that became a landmark in Estonia which started the quest for country's autonomy and political independence from czarist empire that could not function anymore (due to the war and uprisings) (Andresen *et al.*, 2010). The defeats on the battleground initiated in towns strong dissatisfaction and general strikes in the factories, while in the countryside tens of manors were burnt down by the rebelling peasants. Perhaps Japan also set a positive example for Estonia in its striving for modernity and search for an independence as the newspapers covered the positive reforms that had changed the Japanese society in order to be equal among the other states. Consequently, Japan (although a war enemy) was respected in Estonian media as a courageous country that bravely battled against the much more powerful enemy: the weakness, corruption and bureaucracy of the Russian empire that was exposed during the war made the Estonians rather to side with Japan (Rosenberg, 2006: 31). Studying the soldiers' letters also reveals how the Estonian soldiers felt about being the subjects of the imperial Russia.

Several scholars have researched the representation of the war enemy in media (Dower, 1986; Rieber, 1991) but it has been mostly analysed in the context of World War II. In addition, little attention has been paid to the "social memory" of the war (Wells and Wilson, 1999: 61) that could be researched by the studying of soldiers' letters.

The aim of the current paper is to research how the enemy was constructed in Estonian media during the Russo-Japanese war by the example of soldiers' letters that were published in the main Estonian newspapers.

Research questions:

- 1) Which topics and comparisons are used while writing about Japanese as an enemy?
- 2) How the Estonian soldiers constructed Japanese as an "enemy"?

Literature review

The Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905) from the Estonian perspective has not been much researched by the historians in Estonia. There are some general works about the war that were compiled directly after the fighting ceased (e.g. Prants, 1904-1911) which are based on the information published earlier in the newspapers. An interesting study is authored by a folklorist A. Lintrop (2006) who analyses the events depicted in the Russo-Japanese war song and uses the soldiers' letters as a source of evidence in order to prove whether the actions described in the popular war song are really true. Also an overview has been written about the sea-battles that took place in the beginning of 20th century up to First World War (Õun, 1995), but in the history writing more attention has been paid to the other events of the Russian revolution of 1905 that happened in Estonia than to the war itself and apart from an one article by prof A.-T. Tannberg (2015) there is hardly any research work done about the war. The most outstanding overview of the historiography of the beginning of 20th century Estonia does not mention any academic work about the Russo-Japanese war (Andresen *et al.*, 2010: 342-347). The reason why the Russo-Japanese war has been left into obscurity lies in the importance of the wars that narrowly succeeded it: First World War (1914-1918) and Estonian Independence War (1918-1920), which, with their scale and influence, shadowed the distant imperial war in the Far East.

Even today the most considerable source of the Russo-Japanese war is the contemporary media, i.e. Estonian newspapers. Though several sources have suggested that Estonian media was very pro-Japanese and that Japanese military leaders were better known among readers than Russian generals (Rosenberg, 2006: 31), the profound research or proof about these assumptions are is still missing.

Out of various media content about Japan (war news, foreign news, editorials, travel stories etc.) probably the soldiers' letters offer the best first-hand overview about how the Estonians saw the Japanese as a war enemy.

Soldiers' letters have been used as a source of historical research for a long time. Some researchers have paid attention to the subject of otherness or racial issues in the wartime correspondence (e.g. Omissi, 1999; Koller, 2011). In Estonia, the general analysis of the soldiers' letters as a source of history writing by the example of letters written from the First World War have been studied by A. Rahi and P. Jõgisuu (1998). The authors stress that analysing the letters provides the objectivity and variety of the written memory of a nation (Rahi and Jõgisuu, 1998: 29). Letters of the soldiers from the First World War have

also been studied by L. Esse (2016) who has focused on the topic of war experience of the soldiers as well as the meaning of this experience in long timespan, i.e. how the war experience was perceived and re-implemented afterwards in their lives. The soldiers' letters from the Independence War have been used as a source by A. Lõhmus (2014) who in his study uses them as a material to depict the ordinary soldiers' way of thinking and perception of the war experience.

Soldiers' letters may also give an idea how the idea of nationalism developed in the course of the war as the Estonians started to construct themselves more and more *other*. The development of Estonian nationality during the Russian Revolution of 1905 has been studied by several historians (Raun, 2003; Petersoo, 2007; Karjahärm, 2012; etc.).

Researching the soldiers' letters from the Russo-Japanese war is also a part of the history of Estonian journalism, e.g. how the censorship was enacted before and after the October Manifesto that granted civil rights and press freedom for a short period (Peegel *et al.*, 1994; Lauk, 2000). The history of the war censorship during the Russo-Japanese war and the effect of it to Estonian media has not been researched. The original sources are in the archives of Russia, some articles cover the general situation of the rules of war correspondence censorship in Russian empire (Airapetov, 2004).

Airapetov offers the exact checklist of the special rules that were applied to the war correspondence in the Russian empire and what were the topics that should have been omitted from the letters sent from the war (2004: 343). Firstly, everything that was connected with actual warfare (battle tactics, weapons, movement of the troops, etc.) was to be excluded and in addition, interpretations of the conditions at the battleground that might have had negative impression on the public sentiment (like soldiers experiencing difficulties or their suffering, criticism of military leadership). Although the same censorship rules applied to the media all over czarist Russia, the circumstances in major Russian newspapers and peripheral Estonian newspapers cannot be compared (i.e. no Estonian newspaper was granted with a permit to send a war correspondent to the Far East). In spite of the fact that the mentality of the Russian newspapers at the time of the war have been studied by several scholars (Bartlett, 2008; Mikhailova, 2011, etc.), it is difficult to draw the accurate comparison between the media in Russia and the provinces of Estonia and Livonia. It can be presumed that the state censorship did not keep a stern eye on the content of Estonian newspapers and if it did, it focused on official announcements and war

news, while much less attention was paid on the Estonian soldiers' letters sent from the battlefield that had to have been already censored.

Socio-cultural context

By the time of the Russo-Japanese war the level of literacy among Estonians was considerably high - according to the census of 1897 about 97% could read and 78% could write (Zetterberg, 2010: 312) - and the Estonians who served in Russian army and navy could pursue for higher military education and also became officers. In 1870-1914 there were at least 300 officers of Estonian nationality in the Russian army (Kröönström, 2000). High level of literacy provided also the possibility that most of the soldiers had correspondence with their families in the homeland and many started to regularly send letters to the newspaper editors like Anton Suurkask (1873-1965) and Gustav Frisch (1870-?) to *Postimees* or P. Vares to *Olevik*, etc.

The majority of the Estonians were Protestant (Lutherans) and according to the census of 1897 their percentage from the whole population was 84.2% while the percentage of Russian Orthodox was 14.3% (Andresen *et al.*, 2010: 324). In the Russian army majority of the soldiers were Russian Orthodox and Lutherans remained on a low position.

Estonians had been conscripted to Russian army also in the previous wars of the czarist empire (e.g. Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, Crimean War 1853-1856, Napoleonic Wars 1803-1815 etc.) but the Russo-Japanese war was the first one that was extensively covered in Estonian printed media (war news and letters written by the Estonians from war). The Russo-Japanese war became the first war that started the practice of publishing the letters from the battlefield in Estonian newspapers. The biggest amount of the letters was written by soldiers, but also officers, nurses and doctors wrote letters to the newspapers. Some letters were also translated from Russian (e.g. *Olevik*, 1904, no 42) or from German (e.g. *Olevik*, 1904, no 28) that were written by the Baltic-Germans. Their perspective to the war and information sphere differed from the Estonians because they had access to wider spectrum of sources in Russian or German languages. For example, a Baltic German surgeon prof Zoege von Manteuffel (1857-1926) uses derogative terms for Japanese that were never used by Estonian soldiers: "And how precisely they can shoot, those little, yellow devils" (*Olevik*, 1904, no 28). While the letters written by Russians or Baltic-Germans were translated by the Estonian editors from the other newspapers, the readers of the Estonian newspapers were asked to give their private letters for publishing. Further on the soldiers

started to send their letters directly to the editors of the newspapers by themselves (in 1904 there are still few letters, the bulk of the letters is published in 1905: out of the sample 12 letters are published in 1904 and 41 in 1905).

Estonian soldiers differed from the majority of Russian soldiers by their language (Estonian), religion (Lutheran) and cultural background. The same applied to Latvians, Finns and some other national minorities who were conscripted to the Russian troops. It might be due to these aspects that they felt secluded from the other Russian imperial troops that were mainly Russian Orthodox and spoke Russian which caused them additionally to be in the separate cultural and information sphere. In some letters Estonian soldiers complain that they were deprived of Lutheran sermons (*Olevik*, 1905, no 25): they were told that due to the troops' movement there was not enough time for holding their church service. Lutheran church services were not a mere clerical procedure, it offered possibility to gain different kinds of presents (clothes, books, newspapers and even tobacco) (*Olevik*, 1905, no 25), even though some of the gifts were rather small like an envelope or a needle or some writing paper (*Olevik*, 1905, no 39), all those items were sent as donations by the congregations back in Estonia. Church service was also a place for communication and exchanging news. Even ten years later, during the First World War, Estonian soldiers complain in their letters about alien religious customs (fasting during the Easter) that they had to bear and the military drills that were purposefully held at the time of Lutheran church feasts (Kalkun, 2008: 573-574).

Data and method

The mediators of information about the Russo-Japanese war were the main Estonian newspapers *Olevik*, *Postimees* and *Teataja*. The newspapers *Olevik* (started to appear in 1881) and *Postimees* (started in 1886 and since 1891 was the first Estonian daily) were published in the second biggest town of Estonia – Tartu. The daily *Teataja* started to appear in 1901 in Tallinn. The biggest rivals were *Postimees* and *Teataja*, which competed in the freshness of the news and had their own circles of supporters, while *Postimees* was orientated on the national issues (Peegel *et al.*, 1994: 214), the newspaper *Teataja* was promoting the economy topics (Aru, 2002: 36). The newspaper *Olevik* appeared in Tartu and at the time of the war had a female editor, M. Koppel. The newspaper fought for the rights of women and supported teetotalism (Peegel *et al.* 1994, 180). All of the three newspapers were widely distributed and their circulation even grow during the war: *Postimees* increased

from 7,000 copies per day (1902) up to 10,000 (1904), *Teataja* increased from 5,500 copies (1902) to 8,700 (1904) (Lauk, 2000: 13). The war and revolution years of 1904-1905 had a great impact on the development of printed media industry as in 1897 there was one periodical per 43,935 Estonians (in comparison with Germany where the ratio was 8,000), but already by 1907 there was one periodical per 7,845 Estonians (Lauk, 1996: 14).

The current paper focuses on the analysis of the content of soldiers' letters from the Russo-Japanese war (n=53). In the sample of the current research there are 37 soldiers' letters published in *Postimees*, 10 in *Olevik* and 6 in *Teataja*. The other Estonian newspapers published also soldiers' letters (e.g. *Eesti Postimees*, *Eesti Postimehe õhtused kõned*, *Linda*, *Sakala*, *Uudised*, *Uus Aeg*, *Valgus* etc.) but these newspapers are not included in the sample analysed in this paper. In Estonia there were also Russian and German language newspapers but they remain out of the sample as foreign language newspapers. Estonia did not have its own war correspondents as the major European nations or bigger Russian newspapers had, so the direct interpersonal information about war came only via letters sent from the battle ground.

The letters from the war-field were written by soldiers, officers, nurses and doctors but only the letters of the soldiers are included to the analysis. As a matter of fact, the letters written by officers are more laconic and contain less information, although it could be expected as they were written by the educated men, thus they would be more informative and detailed. Perhaps the reason is that the officers were more cautious and applied more self-censorship to their writings than the ordinary soldiers.

Almost half of the authors of the letters are anonymous, the author is only referred as "W" or "P" (*Olevik*, 1904, no 22), the other half of the authors appear by first and family name as "Johan Orikas" (*Olevik*, 1904, no 50) or as "Soldier Kusta Rander" (*Postimees*, 1905, no 86). The anonymity is sometimes given to the authors because of the request of the relatives in order not to reveal openly who has written the letter. However, there are some soldiers, for example Gustav Frisch, who wrote several letters (*Postimees*, 1904-1905) and it seems that with great enthusiasm to cover the events and sentiments at the battlefield. On the other hand, there are soldiers who are worried that if they write too much, they are wasting the space of the newspaper (*Olevik*, 1905, no 23). Even if the author of the letter is unknown, it is still identifiable from the content of the letter whether it has been written by a soldier or an officer.

The letters reached the newspaper editorials either directly sent by the soldiers or by the soldiers' relatives or pastors who gave the letters for publishing. Sometimes the way of the receipt of the letter is defined in the beginning of the printed letter and sometimes it is left unknown. Usually the time difference between the writing of the letter and the publishing of letter is four or five months but always approximately at least a month.

Theoretically the letters were subjugated to double censorship: military and media, but in reality they might have escaped the notice of the censors because of their quantity and secondary importance from the viewpoint of war-related materials published in newspapers (top priority was given to war news). At least this can be an explanation why the content of the letters does not always correspond to the conventional censored topics and descriptions of war enemy (i.e. the enemy is described positively, different problems of food, health, command, tactics are covered, even up to the discontent that Japanese soldiers have better arms and clothes).

There are no archival sources to estimate the censorship in the soldiers' letters or how it affected the content of the letters but there are rules of military censorship (Airapetov, 2004) by which the enactment of censorship can be evaluated. Several sources have suggested that the state censorship on Estonian media was rather lenient (Tannberg, 2015: 64). The newspapers were not allowed to write about the positions of the troops or movements of the forces, nor were they allowed to criticize the leadership or show the war in negative perspective which could affect the fighting spirit or public support. In some soldiers' letters the omitted parts of the text were marked with lines but this can be also due to the limited space or personal issues of the authors that were also discarded (at that time it was not customary to reveal publicly family matters). The soldiers mention in their letters that their correspondence is opened and read by officials (*Postimees*, 1905, no 39) and they also sometimes mention using self-censorship ('I saw a lot that I would not reveal here' (*Olevik*, 1905, no 23)). Under these circumstances it is only possible to assess the enactment of censorship rules by the content of the letters.

The thematic analysis has been used for studying the content of the letters that cover the chronology (spring 1904 up to spring 1905) of the aftermath of the decisive battles where Estonian soldiers were involved (e.g. Port Arthur, Yalu, Mukden, Tsushima). The first major battle where Estonians participated was the battle of Yalu from 1-5 May that resulted in a large scale defeat of the Russian troops. In all, about 7,000 reservists and 3,000 freshly recruited men were sent to frontline where they participated the bloody

battles of Sahe and Mukden, around 350 of them were involved in protection of Port Arthur and many Estonians who served in navy participated in the battle of Tsushima (Tannberg, 2015: 65-66).

Thematic analysis is suitable for analysing the Estonian soldiers' letters as it offers the possibility to get an overview of the different subjects that were covered in the content of the letters and later on discover the notions and hidden meanings of topics described. Main issues in the letters have been divided into directly war related topics or descriptions of the surrounding environment. In both categories the positive or negative perceptions of Japanese have been analysed.

Results – Which topics and comparisons are used while writing about Japanese as an enemy?

The perception of the enemy can be estimated by the vocabulary used for naming the enemy. The terms that are used by the Estonian soldiers while referring to enemy in their letters are *Japanese* and *enemy*, there are no other (or derogatory) terms. Typically, the words *Japanese* and *enemy* are used as synonyms in the same letter (*Olevik*, 1905, no 23). Only in one case a diminutive term “jaapanlasekesed” (*Postimees*, 1905, no 43) was used which can be translated as “little Japanese fellows”.

Sometimes metaphors are used while referring to the Japanese soldiers. In one letter dead Japanese soldiers are referred as wooden logs rolling down the hill (*Postimees*, 1905, no 117) and in two letters the action of Japanese is described as that of ants but the comparison with these insects is in positive context: ‘spectacular is the bravery of the Japanese: like ants they are repeating their action for several times’ (*Postimees*, 1905, no 117); ‘he looked at the enemy’s camp. It looked like an ants’ nest that had been kicked with the foot. Just like a cloud the enemy was moving towards the hill where our soldiers were hiding’ (*Postimees*, 1905, no 40). In Estonian tradition the ants are valued as laborious and diligent insects which can co-operate in the name of the end goal.

In the cause of the battles and movements of the troops the descriptions of the fighting and other war situations are usually neutral and the Japanese are never accused of the horrors of the war. Instead the weapons are considered to be evil, e.g. in one case the 11-inch artillery is referred as a “monster” (*Postimees*, 1905, no 101) but not the men who are using it. In the other letter it is concluded that the arms are killing our people not the enemy (*Postimees*, 1905, no 117). The descriptions of war can be devastating, but on the personal

level the Japanese are not criticised as the participants or actors of the battles (*Postimees*, 1905, no 101). One of the Estonian soldiers was horrified how their wounded and dead were left behind as the troops were retreating during the night. It was hopeless to give them any aid as one could become a victim himself, so the wounded soldiers were abandoned in their pain and suffering (*Postimees*, 1905, no 84). The fact that the Japanese troops also had its part in retreating of the Russian troops or killing, is not at all mentioned. Sometimes the bad weather and food conditions are described but the role of the enemy is somewhat distant: 'Life in the army, is life in the army, even if for some people it shows itself in different colours. What should we do then, when the enemy manages to block the roads. Every day can bring along the confrontation with the enemy, as they are only 60-80 versts away' (*Olevik*, 1904, no 40).

In some context the Japanese are described as treacherous or cunning, e.g. during the night time the Japanese troops are shouting 'Hooray!' as if they are planning an attack or singing songs in Russian (*Postimees*, 1905, no 36). As they have a good command in Russian language and as they are tactically clever they have done a lot of mischief (*Postimees*, 1905, no 38). One Estonian soldier describes how three Japanese officers were caught spying in the port of the Port-Arthur because although they spoke excellent Russian, they said the wrong name of the ship as their origin (*Teataja*, 1904, no 57).

The Japanese are portrayed positively also because they have better clothes with good quality: 'woollen and handknitted jumpers, warm underwear and extremely warm mittens' (*Postimees*, 1905, no 41). When the Russian troops retreated from the battle field, they left behind their equipment and even uniforms, so that the replacement had to be searched from the local Chinese villages: 'we didn't look at all like the army of the civilized state anymore' (*Olevik*, 1905, no 23) is stated in one letter. From this letter it becomes obvious how the Estonian soldier was not satisfied with hasty retreatment and negligent behaviour with the supplies.

The Japanese army was also said to have better guns, or even better bullets, as their weapons were smaller and the wounds caused by shooting were not so severe and healed quicker (*Postimees*, 1905, no 30). At the same time the ability of Japanese to fight in close combat was not so good as well as their shooting from the distance (*Postimees*, 1905, no 42). However, in some other letters it was claimed vice versa that Japanese are excellent in shooting (*Olevik*, 1905, no 21). 'The Japanese are skilful warriors but not as invincible as people back at home think. If they would fight on open ground, instead of hiding

themselves in the mountains, we could win them easily!' (*Postimees*, 1905, no 42). Although there were different opinions about the capability of the Japanese in fighting, generally they were thought to be strong and courageous.

Results – How the Estonian soldiers constructed Japanese as an “enemy”?

In most cases the Japanese as an enemy was treated in the soldiers' letters with neutrality and respect. For instance, the example of neutrality is represented in the depicted scene when captured Japanese soldiers are brought to the camp (*Postimees*, 1905, no 39), their condition and blindfolded eyes are described thoroughly but there is no scolding or disdainful attitude towards them that could be expected under these kinds of circumstances. Thus, the consideration and civility towards the Japanese can be observed in many occasions.

Mikhailova points out that while the Russian upper-class view Japan from the perspective of *yellow peril*, for the ordinary people the adversary in the war was not seen as a threatening menace (2011: 44-45). This concept suits with the above-mentioned case of Baltic-German professor Zoege von Manteuffel that the nobility was much more critical about the war issues. As R. Bartlett states the anger of the educated classes were not directed towards Japanese but their own government as she quotes the memoirs of the writer and critic Vikentii Veresaev that the anti-Japanese sentiment among the troops sent to the war was whipped up and vanished in the course of battles (2008: 26).

In some situations, the relations between enemies were rather amicable, e.g description of ceasefire while bringing drinking water and greeting each other politely (*Postimees*, 1905, no 72) as it was customary to give notice with the white flag that soldiers are going to fetch drinking water so that nobody was trying to shoot at them while they were fulfilling this duty. In the same letter (*Postimees*, 1905, no 72) it is described how Japanese soldiers even brought rum to Russian troops for holidays and told that it should be already enough of blood-spilling and everybody should go home. The Japanese left a notice written in Russian where it could be easily found saying: 'Why are you Russians fighting! You will be frozen! You have no warm clothes. Put your reply at the same place' (*Postimees*, 1905, no 43). Sometimes the “amicable” relations between the enemies could have been explained with pure reasoning: they are not going to shoot at a single Japanese soldier in open space when it is sighted because the bang of the gun would bring out all the rest of the enemy troops (*Postimees*, 1905, no 43).

The war tactics and reasoning was sometimes difficult to understand for the ordinary soldiers, it was comprehensible that retreating was done in haste but it was painful to watch that all the food supplies were just burnt in order the enemy would not gain them 'all the food had to be engulfed in flames, the soldiers couldn't get from it even a piece of sugar' (*Postimees*, 1905, no 94).

One Estonian soldier who was in the hospital found friends among the wounded Japanese: 'We [he and two other wounded Estonian soldiers – E.S.] often visit the neighbouring hospital building and even more often the Japanese come to visit us. Joyful lads!' (*Postimees*, 1905, no 30). What makes the content of this letter intriguing is the fact that although there were about 200 soldiers of different nationalities in the hospital buildings as the author of the letter himself mentions, the only befriending that is described takes place between Estonians and Japanese. The soldier explains: 'One day they [the Japanese – E.S.] realized that I am not a Russian. They understood it because I don't have the cross pendant. Now a really difficult explanation began what is actually my nationality and religion. Finally, I succeeded in making it clear for them.' (*Postimees*, 1905, no 30).

However, Japanese were also considered to be cunning nation because they could learn and speak Russian well in order to pretend to be not the enemy (*Postimees*, 1905, no 29). One soldier gives in his letter (*Olevik*, 1904, no 50) a vivid description of a treacherous Japanese prisoner whom he caught in the darkness of the night. The Japanese captive was a young man and he asked his life to be saved as he was an orphan but suddenly the Estonian soldier recognized that the Japanese soldier was about to kill him, so the Estonian had no choice but to use his bayonet in order to save his own life. The Japanese action in attacking Port-Arthur was also considered to be treacherous (*Teataja*, 1904, no 57) but the general description how the Japanese sunk the Russian ships and bombed the port is without any negative connotation – it is a pure description of military movements without any judgements or pursue to blame somebody (*Teataja*, 1904, no 57), the same style reoccurs in the letter covering the Japanese attack on Vladivostok (*Teataja*, 1904, no 78).

The Estonian soldiers also antagonize with the Russian officers as one soldier complains in his letter that the officers did not realize how strong the enemy actually was (*Postimees*, 1905, no 116) or that the officers were behaving cowardly in the battle. This kind of adversity could be also the usual confrontation between soldiers and officers as for example one Estonian soldier complains that officers have their own shops from where

they can buy everything while ordinary soldiers are not allowed to purchase from there even a box of matches (*Postimees*, 1905, no 98).

Estonian soldiers distanced themselves from Russian soldiers by using terms as *self* and *Russian soldiers* (not *we* or *our soldiers*) (*Postimees*, 1905, no 116) making thus a verbal separation. Some Estonian soldiers felt homesick because in their company there was not many Estonians left (*Postimees*, 1905, no 103). One soldier described how the Japanese bombed the house where they were stationed and how one fellow Estonian soldier was injured as the 'fragments of the bullets tore his cap into pieces but didn't hurt the head that much – only a bit of skin with hair was blown away' (*Teataja*, 1904, no 78). The letter did not mention whether soldiers of other nationalities were hurt, also not a single bad word is written about them who actually launched the attack.

The other type of letters that the Estonian soldiers sent back to home were the letters written in the prison camps. From these letters it is evident that the conditions were satisfactory and comfortable: 'Life is good here, only it's dull and that is why we ask all the readers of the newspaper and also the editor of the newspaper and all the brothers and sisters to send us newspapers for reading and all kind of books' (*Postimees*, 1905, no 139).

The question of nationality was complicated on the battlefield. One Estonian soldier explains how the Buryats were sometimes taken as Japanese and therefore considered to be the spies of the enemy although they belonged to the Russian forces (*Postimees*, 1905, no 118). Sometimes the Japanese themselves are pretending to be soldiers of the Russian army and take undercover action as it was described in one letter (*Postimees*, 1905, no 29): the soldier happened to stay behind from his company and in the darkness he didn't recognize that the two men who were riding horses and turning to him in clumsy Russian, were actually the Japanese who tried to trick him and take him into prison, luckily enough, the Estonian soldier managed to escape. On the other occasion confronting the enemy was described as a humorous event while the soldiers were sent to gather fire wood during the night time and enemy started to shoot suddenly in the darkness, consequently everybody were escaping in panic and only some of them managed to bring along some twigs for the camp fire (*Postimees*, 1905, no 72).

It is difficult to estimate whether the attitude towards the Japanese as an enemy changed in the course of time and constant defeats at the battlefield. Gradually the soldiers' letters show more exhaustion and readiness to surrender but the Japanese are treated with the same respect as in the beginning of the war. In the same way it is difficult to

estimate whether the fighting spirit and mood stayed the same during the war: 'When there are four or five Estonians together, we are making jokes as the Japanese bullets fly over our heads' (*Teataja*, 1905, no 12). Sometimes the letters are deeply emotional: 'My eyes are not crying but my heart cries blood tears' (*Olevik*, 1904, no 50) and some soldiers describe the harsh conditions of the battleground: 'If you are on the front line at the open field where there are 30 degrees of cold! And you have to lie down or if you rise your head, you will have a bullet in it. Then how should one write that the spirit of the soldiers is high!' (*Postimees*, 1905, no 86).

Vuorinen states that 'every enemy is an other, but all others are not enemies' (2012: 2). This might have happened also with Estonian soldiers' interpretation of the Japanese as the enemy. The Japanese were considered to be enemies but in spite of the war they were treated as an honourable and respectful *other*. R. Kowner gives in his article several examples of mutual compassion and respect during the Russo-Japanese war and he explains it by the presence of foreign observers, lack of the civilians at the battleground and that the conflict didn't escalate to the total war as it happened during the Pacific war decades later (2000: 134-51).

Conclusion

The Estonian media gave a controversial picture of the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905): on the one hand the war enemy was treated as an enemy in the public war news as all the actions of Japan were observed thoroughly and analysed in detail, on the other hand it was mainly neutrally and sometimes even positively observed in the soldiers' letters from the battle field. One reason for such kind of attitude might have been the distinction of the Estonian soldiers from the Russian empire (often the state was revealed as *our* but the nation as *mine*). Estonian soldiers differed from the majority of the Russian troops by being Lutheran and speaking Estonian, and they might have felt secluded from the rest of the troops. The other reason was perhaps the custom of the time to treat the war enemy with honour and respect as R. Kowner (2000: 134) points it out that the benevolent relations between the Japanese and Russian soldiers seem utterly bizarre, especially in the light of the notorious Pacific war but at the time the Russo-Japanese war the camaraderie manifestations were a commonplace (Kowner, 2000: 136). Only in few cases Japanese were accused of cunning or treacherous activities. The derogatory words for the Japanese were not used, neither were the military misfortune or defeat imposed on Japanese.

For the current paper, 53 soldiers' letters published in main Estonian newspapers *Olevik*, *Postimees* and *Teataja* were thematically analysed from the perspective of construction of enemy, related topics and comparisons used for describing the Japanese soldiers. In sum, the analysis tried to give an overall picture of the different topics in the soldiers' letters that conveyed the perception of Japanese as an enemy during the Russo-Japanese war.

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