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**Title of paper:** "We're Finns here, and Russians there": A longitudinal study on ethnic identity constructions in the context of ethnic migration

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## **Abstract**

In this article we examine how ethnic Finnish migrants construct their ethnic identities before and after migrating from Russia to Finland. We use a discursive social psychological (DSP) approach to analyse our longitudinal focus group data. In the analysis we focus on the ways that the participants use category labels, rhetorical devices, interpretative repertoires and other discursive resources in accounting for their identities. We also consider the social functions these identity constructions have over the course of migration. In the pre-migration data, participants mostly presented themselves as Finns. In the post-migration data, a larger variety of self-labels was used and the Finnish identity was explicitly problematised. The three main interpretative repertoires used when constructing identities both in Russia and in Finland were the biological repertoire, the repertoire of socialisation and the repertoire of intergroup relations.

**Key words:** ethnic identities, discursive social psychology, discourse analysis, ethnic migration, ethnic migrants, returnees, Ingrian Finns, longitudinal study, focus groups, immigrants, minorities, identity construction, self-labels, categories, interpretative repertoires, Finland, Russia

## **Autobiographical note**

**Sirkku Varjonen** is a doctoral student of Social Psychology at the Department of Social Research, University of Helsinki, Finland. Her research interests include discourse analysis, narratives and social construction of identities, particularly in the context of immigration. In her dissertation research, she examines how immigrants in Finland narrate their identities and construct the relationship between immigrants and Finns in their written life stories.

**Linda Arnold** is a graduate student of Social Psychology at the Department of Social Research, University of Helsinki, Finland. She has been a research assistant for a project researching ethnic migrants from Russia to Finland (INPRES), focusing on the discursive identity construction and negotiation. In her Master's thesis, she uses focus group data from the INPRES project and examines the ways in which ethnic migrants use rhetorical and discursive resources to construct their ethnic identities in the pre-migration context.

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intergroup relations, racism and discrimination, and the acculturation and adaptation of immigrants. She is an Associate Editor of the Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology and a reviewer of several international journals in the field. Her most recent research project (MIRIPS-FI) focuses on the prerequisites of inclusive immigration context and national identity in Finland, Baltic States and Russia.

## **“We’re Finns here, and Russians there”: A longitudinal study on ethnic identity constructions in the context of ethnic migration**

### **Introduction**

Increasing migration and globalization have given rise to a strong interest in identities by researchers in the humanities and social sciences. Changes in the cultural contexts of migrants challenge identities, which are constructed in relation to other cultural and ethnic groups. Ethnic migration represents a special type of migration. It can be defined as the ‘inflow of people who are thought to share the same ethnicity as the host country’s majority population’ (Oda, 2010: 515). Ethnic migrants are, in turn, people who ‘return’ to their countries of ethnic origin often after several generations (e.g. Oda, 2010; Tsuda, 2003: 103). Contrary to what common sense might suggest, migration to the country of ethnic origin can have even a greater impact on migrants’ ethnic identities than migration to an ethnically alien country (Tsuda, 2003: 367). Ethnic migrants typically expect to be considered as members of the ethnic majority group, yet after migration their ethnic identities may be strongly challenged as they are often excluded from the majority group against their expectations (e.g., Tsuda, 2003: 103–104).

In order to understand the phenomenon of ethnic identity, it is important to take the cultural and social context into account and study the actual social processes in

which people define and negotiate their ethnic identities (Verkuyten, 1997, 2005, 2009). In the context of ethnic migration, the complexity and multiplicity of relevant in- and out-groups of ethnic migrants make it particularly interesting to take a closer look at the processes of identity construction. In the present study, which is a part of a larger research project on ethnic migrants,<sup>1</sup> we apply a discursive social psychological approach to examine how a group of ethnic Finns (with returnee status) construct and negotiate their ethnic identities before and after migration from Russia to Finland.

### **Ethnic identity negotiations in the context of ethnic migration**

In social psychology, ethnic and national identities are seen as parts of a person's social identity and are defined as a person's self-concept as a member of an ethnic and national group respectively. A shared thought of imagined or real common origin and ancestry separates ethnic identity from other social identities (Verkuyten, 2005: 81). Still, the distinction between national and ethnic identity is a very fine one and both can be viewed as constructions people build for themselves and other people (e.g. McKinlay and McVittie, 2011: 47–48).

Ethnic identities are negotiated in relation to other cultural and ethnic groups. Even though there are usually a variety of potential reference groups for ethnic minority group members, the majority group is often an important one (see e.g. Bélanger and Verkuyten, 2010; Verkuyten, 2005: 92–93). In the case of ethnic migrants, there are

usually two important reference majority groups: the majority group of the country they grew up (i.e. the country of emigration) and the majority group of the country of their ethnic origin (i.e. the country of immigration). On the grounds of their ethnic origin, they belong to an ethnic minority group in the country of emigration, but after migrating to the country of their ethnic origin, they are typically still excluded from the majority group (see Mähönen and Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2012; Tsuda, 2003: 103). When their expectations of being accepted as members of the ethnic majority in the new society are left unfulfilled, ethnic migrants' sense of belonging towards the country where they grew up may rise, whereas the sense of belonging towards the country of ethnic origin may decrease (e.g., Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind, 1999; Mähönen and Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2012; Tartakovsky, 2009; Tsuda, 2003). These results suggest that this double minority status makes the identity negotiations of ethnic migrants particularly challenging and interesting. To develop a more in-depth understanding of these complex identity negotiations, we take a closer look at the ways the ethnic migrants discuss their identities in pre- and post-migration contexts. Discursive social psychology provides us the means to do this. As far as we know, there are no previous studies that combine a longitudinal research design and a discourse analytic approach to study the construction of ethnic minority identities.

## **Discursive social psychological approach to ethnic identity**

In this article we use a discursive social psychological (DSP) approach<sup>2</sup> to study the construction and negotiation of ethnic identities prior to, and after, ethnic migration. Potter and Edwards (2001: 103–104) describe DSP as the application of ideas from various theoretical approaches such as discourse analysis, rhetoric, and conversation analysis to central topics in social psychology. In DSP, the use of language is treated as social action and practice that serves various kinds of social functions. Furthermore, the pervasively rhetorical, interactional and situational nature of discourse is emphasised (Potter and Edwards, 2001: 103–106). Ethnic identity is conceptualised as a discursive construct and is analysed contextually in terms of discursive action (Verkuyten and De Wolf, 2002). Identities are seen as actively and locally negotiated through the use of discursive and rhetorical resources. As Verkuyten and De Wolf (2002: 374) argue, ‘ethnic self-definitions depend on contextual claims that are regarded as acceptable and justified’. Examining how these definitions and versions of reality are constructed as factual is one important focus in DSP (e.g. Edwards and Potter, 1992).

Similarly to other social psychological theories of identity (such as Social Identity Theory by Tajfel and Turner, 1986), the discursive (social) psychology also views social categorization and social comparison processes as central to the construction of identities (Verkuyten, 1997, 2005: 44). Of particular interest is how social categories are constructed, defined and used in social interaction. These categories are not taken as neutral descriptions, but rather they are seen to organize the social world in a given way



and to accomplish certain social functions with various political and ideological consequences (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Goodman and Speer, 2007; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). For instance, the ways in which various immigrant groups are classified can have important political implications for how they are treated (Goodman and Speer, 2007). An example of this is the declaration by Finnish authorities that the people in the former Soviet Union with (often distant) Finnish ancestry could be potential returnees and, thus, could migrate 'back' to Finland.

One of the first studies to stress the need for a discursive perspective on ethnic minority identity is Verkuyten's (1997) study on the construction of ethnic identities among ethnic Turks living in the Netherlands. His study showed that ethnic minority group members take an active role in defining themselves in relation to various ethnic groups (e.g. Turks and Dutch), and that although self-definitions in group terms are divisive, they are not necessarily oppositional. Later, Verkuyten and De Wolf (2002) studied how Chinese people living in the Netherlands constructed and accounted for their identities by using a variety of discursive and cultural resources. Their work has motivated the approach we have taken in the present study. Also of interest for our study, Davydova and Heikkinen (2004) looked at how ethnic Finns in Russia produce ethnicity and define Finnishness before their remigration to Finland, for example, by presenting themselves as members of a Finnish family and using biological metaphors.

Recently, Sala et al. (2010) investigated the discursive construction of identity by Italian immigrants in Australia. Their study showed some interesting differences in reference groups used by first- and 1.5-generation immigrants to make claims of authenticity. The accomplishment and display of ethnic self-definitions among young Mapuches in Chile has been examined by Merino and Tileaga (2011). They showed how ethnic minority group members use common-sense practical reasoning to negotiate, self-ascribe or resist a particular sense of identity and to produce observable and reportable identities. There are also other recent studies that have concentrated on the discursive nature of the construction of hyphenated or hybrid identities (see e.g. Ali and Sonn, 2010; Bélanger and Verkuyten, 2010; Malhi et al., 2009). However, despite this growing body of discourse analytical research on ethnic identity construction, there is still a limited knowledge of the ways ethnic minority group members define and account for their identities (Merino and Tileaga, 2011; Varjonen et al., 2009; Verkuyten and De Wolf, 2002). In this study, we examine how a group of ethnic Finnish migrants construct their ethnic identities before and after migrating from Russia to Finland.

### **The ethnic migration of ethnic Finns from Russia to Finland**

Ethnic return migration from the former Soviet Union (FSU) to Finland began in 1990, when Russian nationals of Finnish descent, as well as their family members were given the right to apply for returnee status to migrate to Finland. Most of these ethnic migrants

are Ingrian Finns who are descendants of Finns who emigrated between the 17th and the beginning of the 20th century to rural Ingria, located between St. Petersburg and the Gulf of Finland. In Russia these people of Finnish descent commonly call themselves Finnish (Takalo and Juote, 1995: 79), but Finnish officials widely refer to them as Ingrian Finns. During and after World War II, many Ingrian Finns were relocated around the FSU, which led to ethnic dispersion, nationally mixed marriages, monolingualism in the Russian language, as well as isolation from contemporary Finnish society. The political changes in FSU at the end of the 1980s and finally its collapse in the early 1990s allowed ethnic Finns to rediscover their Finnish identity, and also led to migration to Finland (e.g. Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000: 20).

In order to get the status of returnee from the Finnish government, Ingrian Finnish applicants must provide evidence for their Finnish ethnic background and pass an official Finnish language test. Due to the long waiting list and problems with finding housing in Finland, potential migrants have waited years in Russia before migration. Since 1990, approximately 30,000 Ingrian Finns have moved to Finland. Most of the Ingrian Finns nowadays speak Russian as their first language. Together with other immigrants from FSU, they constitute the largest immigrant group in Finland today – approximately 55,000 Russian speaking immigrants, i.e. 33 per cent of the total immigrant population (Official Statistics of Finland, 2012). In 2011, Finnish authorities closed down the remigration system of Ingrian Finns and now apply the same

immigration criteria for them as those used for labour migrants. The approximately 10,000 registered Ingrian Finns (including their family members) who are still in the remigration queue in Russia have until 2016 to apply for a residence permit (Finnish Immigration Service, 2012).

Being Russian speakers and moving from FSU/Russia, ethnic Finnish migrants from Russia are not considered as a part of the Finnish majority in Finland (e.g., Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2003; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2006). Consequently, they are also targets of negative attitudes and belong among the least welcome migrants together with the Somalis and the Arabs (Jaakkola, 2005). For many ethnic migrants the ascribed Russian identity stands in sharp contrast to their own views of themselves as being at least partly Finnish, either because they consider themselves to be so or because they have been defined as such by others (i.e. by the Russian and Finnish authorities) prior to their move to Finland (Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000: 21).

## **Methods and procedure**

To study ethnic identity constructions of ethnic migrants over the course of their migration from Russia to Finland, we set up a longitudinal research design with focus group interviews before and after migration. Focus groups provide useful means for gathering rich interactional data (Goodman and Burke, 2010) and they have been successfully used previously in several discourse analytical studies (e.g. Grancea, 2010;

Sala et al., 2010). Our pre-migration focus group interviews were conducted in 2008, with one interview in Petrozavodsk and three interviews in St. Petersburg. Participants were recruited through Finnish language courses organized for potential returnees as a part of their immigration training. The semi-structured focus groups took place in schools in which the participants attended the language courses. There were 26 participants in total (with females in the majority), with six to seven participants in each focus group. In 2010, three follow-up interviews were conducted in Finland, with all 11 participants (three to five participants in each group) having participated in first-round interviews in 2008. At this point the participants had lived in Finland between one and two years. These follow-up interviews were carried out at the University of Helsinki, Unit of Social Psychology. The interviews were conducted in Russian by the third author, who is a native Russian speaker.

We analysed the ethnic identity constructions built in the focus group discussions by looking at which ethnic category labels the participants used, how they described and evaluated these categories, and how they positioned themselves in relation to them. We also paid attention to the rhetorical and discursive resources used in claiming ethnic identities and analysed how participants accounted for identity constructions to make them appear as factual. We identified the *interpretative repertoires*, i.e. 'relatively coherent ways of talking about objects and events in the world,' as Edley (2001: 198) defines them, that the participants drew on in their identity talk. Throughout the

analysis, we included the contribution of the interviewer as one of the participants in the identity negotiations. In the end we compared our results from pre- and post-migration data analysis and considered the potential functions of the different identity constructions in the context of ethnic migration.

## **Analysis**

Overall, there was flexibility and variation in identity talk both in the pre-and post-migration focus group data. One example of this is the wide selection of social categories used. The main categories used by the participants (and also offered by the interviewer) were Finns, Russians and Ingrian Finns. In addition to these, they also employed categories, such as Ingrian Russian, partly Russian, people from Russia, immigrants and human beings, when negotiating their identities. Further, a particular social category, for example Ingrian or Ingrian Finn, was used in a multitude of ways, sometimes aligned with Finns to distinguish themselves from Russians and sometimes aligned with Russians to distinguish themselves from Finns. There were also several interpretative repertoires used for constructing ethnic identities: the biological repertoire, the repertoire of socialisation and the repertoire of intergroup relations.

Despite the multitude of ways in which the identities were defined, we found some of the identity constructions in our data to be more common than others. Next, we will look at our data and results in more detail. The extracts for this article were chosen

to best represent our findings in terms of a) the predominant ways participants constructed their identities in pre- and post-migration focus groups, and b) the main differences between the constructions produced in these two contexts. This analysis chapter is divided in three parts. First, we will examine how the participants construct identities in pre-migration focus group interviews, and then we will look at how they do so in the post-migration stage. Finally, we will compare and sum up the findings from the two sets of interviews.

### **Pre-migration context: Being Finnish in Russia**

In the pre-migration focus group sessions in Russia, participants predominantly portrayed themselves as Finnish. The social category of Ingrian Finns was quite rarely spontaneously used as a category label for one's own group, which is in line with what Takalo and Juote have noted (1995, see also earlier in this article). Occasionally the participants referred to themselves as being 'from Russia,' but never as 'Russian,' except for when they referred to their future life in Finland, as seen in extract 1.3.

#### *Defining Finnish characteristics*

In our pre-migration data, Finnish identity was defined in very positive terms and Finnishness was constructed as fundamentally different to Russianness. In the extract

below this is done by referring to the Finnish character as a key distinguishing feature between Finnish and Russian people. The quotation is part of a long response to the moderator's question about what it means for participants to be Ingrian Finnish or Finnish.

Extract 1.1 (Interview Petrozavodsk 1-1)

- 1 Viktoria: (...) They don't know how to lie. Well, they don't know  
2 how to lie, not how to talk nonsense, not how to scheme.
- 3 Oleg: \*\*
- 4 Viktoria: They're more straightforward. They are like more honest.  
5 That's the trait, that doesn't please everyone, you know.  
6 They don't know how to scheme, like at all. They're not  
7 capable of deceit. That's why I think, that Finns, are very  
8 clearly different from say, Russians. I for instance, am  
9 proud, that I'm a Finn. I'm proud, that I, Finns aren't  
10 capable of deceit (2)

At the beginning of the quote, Viktoria builds up a *three-part list* (Jefferson, 1990) to describe the Finnish character: 'they don't know how to lie, not how to talk nonsense,



not how to scheme.’ A three-part list is an example of rhetorical devices that help construct something as factual by invoking a sense of completeness or representativeness (Edwards and Potter, 1992: 163). All three parts in this list bring in different manifestations of honesty, which together work to make honesty as the ultimate marker of Finnishness and, at the same time, construct Finns as thoroughly honest. Viktoria continues to describe the Finnish character by listing positive traits and a lack of deceitfulness. By defining Finns as ‘very clearly different’ from Russians, opposite attributes of Russians are implied. The *extreme case formulation* (Pomerantz, 1986) ‘very clearly’ works to portray the Finnish in-group as truly different from Russians and the nature of the difference is thus framed as essentially moral.

The way the personal trait of honesty is used in the above quote invokes an idea of ethnicity as inherited. This can be seen as an indicator of a *biological interpretative repertoire*. Viktoria also brings in an aspect of intergroup relations, stating that the honesty of Finns ‘does not appeal to everyone,’ which can be read as an indirect reference to Russians. She adds that she is proud of Finns not being capable of deceit. Viktoria’s orientation as a member of the Finnish in-group, on the one hand, and the orientation of Russians, on the other hand, towards honesty are thus contrasted. This strengthens the division between Finns and Russians and highlights the moral superiority of Finns over Russians.

*Negotiating the meaning of slowness as a Finnish characteristic*

The previous extract (1.1) was followed by another speaker's version of the specific, distinctive nature of Finns. By comparing a Finnish school class to two other classes in a Petrozavodskian school, the participant highlighted peacefulness as a characteristic that distinguishes Finns from other people concluding 'So, the Finnish class is a balanced, peaceful class (2).' The next extract is a continuation of this discussion. In extract 1.2, participants negotiate different interpretations of peacefulness, which is here put forward as another essential feature of Finnishness.

Extract 1.2 (Interview Petrozavodsk 1-1)

- 1 Natalia: Well, it, is a national characteristic, it, that they're calm,  
2 quiet sort of, right? So it's, well definitely true. And the  
3 whole world, if you're describing Finns (3) what's that  
4 they say – slow-witted, is that it? ((laughs)) Or what is it?
- 5 Viktoria: They're not slow-witted, they just (.) think things through  
6 before they say something, consider, don't you think, or  
7 what?
- 8 Natalia: Well it's still, it still is.
- 9 Olga: It's just an opinion.

- 10 Viktoria: Yes.
- 11 Olga: A common opinion.
- 12 Natalia: Yes, yes, yes. But really, I like, purely from myself, I like  
13 slowly, but surely. I can't, I don't have that quickness, that  
14 Russians have. Like. Quick as a flash [in the blink of an  
15 eye, in the blink of an eye!]
- 16 Viktoria: [Yes \*]
- 17 Natalia: I don't have it. I slowly, but then I finish it, the way I see  
18 fit, calmly and correctly. But [if I'm being]
- 19 ?: [\*\*\*]
- 20 Natalia: pushed, then everything (2)
- 21 Viktoria: Then the trait, conscientiousness. It is part of the character  
22 that everything is done, with all the finishing touches,  
23 properly, thoroughly, everything.

Natalia is offering the potentially threatening description of Finns as 'slow-witted' not as her own, but as the way in which 'the whole world' describes Finns. The long pause marks the sensitivity of the topic (Van Dijk, 1984). Laughter positions Natalia as someone who probably does not agree with 'the whole world' in describing Finns, but this reference to a wide consensus regarding the matter makes it difficult to ignore.

Viktoria (lines 5–7) refutes the description of Finns as ‘slow-witted’ and offers a new interpretation of slowness as an indication of consideration. The debate continues as Natalia orients towards the existence of the public opinion on Finns as the relevant thing in her somewhat ambiguous utterance ‘Well it still is, it still is.’ Olga dismisses the value and factuality of public opinion by claiming that it is ‘just an opinion,’ although ‘a common opinion.’ Now Natalia supports the notion of slow Finns by using her first-hand experience of her own personality and related behaviour as evidence. At this point, the worldwide consensus about the slowness of Finns is used together with reference to personal characteristics to guarantee a position within the category of Finns. The description of Finnishness here is based on the lack of quickness: ‘I don’t have that quickness, that Russians have.’ It resembles the way Finns were described in the first extract: ‘They are not able to deceive.’ As in the extract 1.1, also here the meanings are mostly drawn from the biological repertoire. The question is not about learned or chosen ways of behaving, but rather about shared traits, inherited abilities or a lack of them. The participants in our research often used this type of reference to shared traits and mentality, when constructing Finnish identity. Cillia et al. (1999) found a similar tendency in their study on construction of national Austrian identity and named the strategy as ‘presupposing intra-national sameness or similarity’ (p.161).

Finally, by linking slow with sure and calm with correct, Natalia produces a positive version of Finnish peacefulness/calmness as an essence of Finnishness. In that

version, the notion of slowness is not dismissed; instead, it is celebrated as both a marker and a guarantee of calmness and correctness. As a result of portraying slow Finns in opposition to quick Russians, the image of Finns as morally superior is reconstructed and further strengthened, this time with a special emphasis on working morals. The positive interpretation of Finnish slowness is further highlighted by Viktoria who concludes the negotiation of Finnish slowness by referring to the trait of conscientiousness: ‘It is part of the character that everything is done, with all the finishing touches, properly, thoroughly, everything.’

#### *The future as Russians in Finland*

The issue of intergroup nature of ethnic identity negotiations was already touched upon in the previous extract, in which a reference was made to how ‘the whole world’ describes Finns. In that case, the negotiations concerned the content of the identity; the nature of Finns as described by in-group members and ‘the rest of the world.’ The next extract, in which the participants are orienting towards their future life in Finland, also highlights the socially negotiated and contextual nature of ethnic identities. Here, the focus is on the assumed change in ethnic labels ascribed by others.

Extract 1.3. (Interview Saint Petersburg 3-1)

1 Moderator: And what do you think this, in my view, Aleksandra said,  
2 that “there we’re Russians”  
3 ?: We are Russians.  
4 Moderator: [Interesting point.]  
5 ?: [Yes]  
6 Sergei: [We’re Finns here, and Russians there]  
7 Svetlana: [But it’s probably that all immigrants are like this]  
8 Tamara: [Well for example my aunt], she’s dead now, was seventy-  
9 nine years old, in ((name of a Finnish town)). She said:  
10 “Try and understand. In Russia I’ve always been a  
11 Chukhna<sup>3</sup> \* or whatever, but here I’m always a Russki.<sup>4</sup>”  
12 Sergei: Mmm  
13 Svetlana: Well just like Jewish people,  
14 Nina: [Because I’ve heard,]  
15 Svetlana: [the same, all immigrants are like this]  
16 Nina: whenever I’ve been to Finland. I mean I don’t go there  
17 very often, little, but that’s what I’ve heard and right away  
18 I understood.  
19 Tamara: My aunt herself told me.

- 20 Svetlana: [There are 50,000 immigrants and they are all Russkis  
21 there]
- 22 Sergei: [\*\*\*\*\*]
- 23 Tamara: [\* so what]
- 24 Svetlana: and we're part of their group. If we're from Russia, then it  
25 can't be helped. You don't get rid of lyrics in songs. If  
26 we're from Russia, then that's the way it is.  
27 [we're called Russians, well so what]
- 28 Tamara: [\*\* it doesn't mean being from Russia], it's sort of an  
29 offensive
- 30 Svetlana: Well I know, I know, I know.
- 31 Tamara: \*\*
- 32 Svetlana: I know, but what should be done? In one ear out the other.  
33 Shouldn't act hysterically.
- 34 Tamara: No one does ((irritably))

The participants' answers to the moderator's initial question are constructed as evaluations, which address the coherence or validity of the claim that Ingrian Finns are seen as Russians in Finland. The participants widely agree with this claim, with similar statements being also made elsewhere in the pre-migration data. Several simultaneous

corroborating statements are offered in this extract: ‘We are Russians’, ‘Yes’, and ‘We’re Finns here, and Russians there.’ The moderator’s comment ‘Interesting point’ can be heard as an encouragement for further explanations. The participants do not just offer expressions of agreement about the truthfulness of the claim. They also give reasons for why they think so. This part involves a lot of discursive work, especially through the use of rhetorical devices that are designed to make accounts to appear factual. It could be that in addition to the moderator’s prompt, also the notion of rapid identity change, which is contrary to the commonsense idea that identities are fairly stable and continuous, requires extra accounting.

*Active voicing or reported speech* helps to increase the credibility of the account (Wooffitt, 1992). In this extract Tamara, supporting the claim that Ingrian Finns are Finns in Russia and Russians in Finland, reports the words of her aunt, who can be taken to be a reliable witness because she already had personal experience of living in Finland: ‘Well for example my aunt...’ (lines 8–11). Nina joins in the factualisation work by offering her own witness account of the notion that Finnish ethnic migrants are Russian in Finland: ‘whenever I’ve been to Finland. I mean I don’t go there very often, little, but that’s what I’ve heard and right away I understood.’ By emphasising the quickness of understanding, the phenomenon is constructed as an obvious one, leaving no room for doubt. Being ascribed the Russian identity by Finns is presented as a matter of fact. It is something that concerns all ethnic Finnish migrants (as well as other



migrants, as Svetlana suggests on line 15) moving to Finland from Russia, and is thus beyond the control of the participants. It is their common destiny. Here a migrant's identity is constructed as being dependent on the majority group in each context. We have named this type of talk as *the interpretative repertoire of intergroup relations*.

The notion of being Finnish in Russia and Russian in Finland was referred to in several focus group sessions. In contrast to what Tsuda (2003: 103–104, see also earlier in this article) writes regarding many ethnic migrants and their expectations, the participants in our study were already orienting towards this scenario before their migration. The paradox of not being recognized or accepted as a member of one's own ethnic group when 'returning' to the country of ethnic origin, has been commented by Popov (2010), regarding the case of Russian Greeks: 'the very "Greekness" of the migrants, which plays such an important part in their desire to (im)migrate to Greece, is called into question' (p. 80). Only the explanation and interpretation of this agreed-on future prospect of 'being Russians in 'Finland' causes some expressions of disagreement among our participants. The question is thus not how to avoid being labelled as Russian, but how to react to that. In a sense, this becomes framed as a moral issue: how should and how should one not behave.

Since 'Chukhna' used for Finns and 'Russki' used for Russians are derogatory terms, in Tamara's account of reported speech (lines 8–11) the ascribed identity of ethnic Finnish migrants is defined as a clearly negative one both in Russia and Finland.

Svetlana first contributes to this definition by paralleling the situation of ethnic Finnish migrants with that of Jews (on line 13), invoking the position of victimised minority, that is being looked down by other groups. On lines 20–21, Svetlana then states that the ascription of a Russian identity is a common practice generally affecting immigrants in Finland: ‘There are 50,000 immigrants and they are all Russkis there.’ Based on the size of this group as well as the category ‘Russki’, we take this as a reference to Russian-speaking immigrants in Finland. Defining the act of being called ‘Russki’ as a very common practice can be seen as a means of normalising, which again can be used to avoid the position of a victim (see e.g., Maydell and Wilson, 2009; Rapoport et al., 2002). Using a Russian saying “You don’t get rid of lyrics in song” Svetlana suggests that being called Russian is a natural consequence of coming from Russia.

Tamara resists the normalization of an ascribed Russian identity or being called ‘Russkis’ by defining these practices as offensive (lines 28–29), thus implicitly positioning the Finnish majority as guilty of discrimination. The implied discrimination has the potential to position the migrants from Russia as victims, but it also simultaneously positions the speaker as an active person who is claiming his/her right for equal treatment and does not surrender to discrimination. By contrasting the suggested ‘In one ear out the other’ strategy with acting hysterically (lines 32–33), Svetlana is undermining the importance of reacting to being labelled as Russians and

indirectly positioning Tamara as overly sensitive, or hysterical, even. Tamara rejects this position by stating abruptly: 'No one does.'

Overall, the participants in all the pre-migration focus groups constructed strong Finnish identities for themselves, mainly drawing on the biological repertoire. A Russian identity was constructed as ascribed to them by Finns in Finland, not as a voluntarily chosen group label. Yet, there were a few instances when they would also refer to the influence of Russian culture on them. Typically this took place when discussing their future migration and the potential differences between ethnic Finns in Russia and Finns in Finland. The following account from focus group Saint Petersburg 2-1 is an example of this: 'I don't know how it will be like in Finland then (...) We have in any case adopted the Russian culture. Whatever the genes are, the culture is Russian. We have been brought up here.' In this quote, we can see a reference to the *interpretative repertoire of socialisation*, by which we mean the type of explanations of identity that employ ideas of upbringing and cultural learning. Elsewhere, this repertoire was also used in constructing Finnish identity, but here the unidentified speaker emphasises that the socialisation of participants has taken place in Russian culture, thus indirectly placing them (also) in the category of Russians. The idea of identity being dependent on biological heritage (genes) is also referred to, but only by contrasting the explanation of cultural influence with it, in a classic nature versus nurture (or socialisation versus biology repertoire) type of design. The use of this contrast structure

implies that different explanations have been considered, which again contributes to making the argument concerning the important role of Russian upbringing more convincing.

### **Post-migration context: re-negotiating identities in Finland**

Both extracts chosen here as examples of identity negotiations in the post-migration context are taken from a single focus group (Petrozavodsk 2-2). Extracts 2.1 and 2.2 appear in the data directly one after the other, but are here cut in two parts to make the analysis more readable.

#### *Russian, Ingrian, human being, never Finnish in Finland*

The quotation below begins with the moderator's reference to Boris' earlier self-definition as a Russian. Boris used that self-definition when he talked about studying on a Finnish course.

Extract 2.1. (Interview Petrozavodsk 2-2)

- 1 Moderator: And, Boris, you (\*) you're the only Russian in the course,
- 2 and the others represent other nationalities. What's been

3                    your opinion since your move, do you consider yourselves  
4                    here in Finland as Russians, Finns or Ingrian Finns?

5 Boris:            Well, as an Ingrian. Everyone is equal here. We didn't  
6                    have a classification, that you're Russian, you're  
7                    something, you're something else. Everyone is like equal.

8 Viktoria:        As for me, I feel like a human being here. I'm serious. In  
9                    Russia you could for example in the course of one day feel  
10                   like anyone. And here I feel like a human being. The  
11                   reaction is always sort of normal from all directions,  
12                   equal. And that's why I feel very good here.

13 Marina:         I'm thinking now about what I should say. Because when I  
14                   lived in Russia, I always knew that I was a Finn. When I  
15                   was still a little girl, my father always said to me that  
16                   Finns were oppressed in Russia, that Finns are on foreign  
17                   soil there. He told me: "Be proud of your roots." And I  
18                   was. All my life I've been proud of being Finnish,  
19                   although the others have been Russians. When I come here  
20                   it turns out I'm Russian, but I know I have Finnish blood  
21                   in my veins.

22 Viktoria:        Not Russian, but from Russia, yet not Russian.

23 Marina: From Russia, but it says in the paperwork and it's written  
24 down everywhere

25 Viktoria: No, no it's "from where", that's to say Russia, not  
26 Russian. What's written down is the country you come  
27 from, not your nationality.

28 Marina: and the most interesting thing is that one of the course  
29 participants is a young Filipino woman. She, or one of the  
30 male course participants told me: "It's good that you're  
31 Finnish, I mean that you have white skin, it will be easy  
32 for you." They themselves have dark skin you know. And  
33 then this Filipino woman continued: "She's not considered  
34 Finnish here. People tell her she's not Finnish, even if she  
35 had Finnish blood in her veins, but that she is Russian."  
36 That's the truth. I've never thought of that before, but  
37 when I heard that, I understood that she's right. I'll never  
38 be Finnish here, I'll always be Russian here. Although I  
39 know where my roots are, that I'm Ingrian. And that's the  
40 truth.

As described earlier, in the pre-migration data, the only instances when participants explicitly used the category label of Russian to describe themselves was when they were talking about their future life in Finland, using the repertoire of intergroup relations like in extract 1.3. Compared to pre-migration data, in the post-migration data it was more common to use 'Russian' as a self-label. This was done for instance when talking about language classes in Finland, as in the example to which the moderator refers in the above extract. Because language and ethnicity are commonly equated, Finnish language classes are, perhaps, by nature a context in which claiming Finnish identity would be particularly challenging.

The moderator's question 'What's been your opinion since your move, do you consider yourselves here in Finland as Russians, Finns or Ingrian Finns?' emphasises the local and temporal difference of the current context in Finland from the previous context in Russia. It also suggests that the participants may now consider themselves to be different than before they migrated. Boris and Viktoria built their replies as responses to this suggestion, constructing an explicit comparison between the two contexts.

Boris responds by saying, 'Well, as an Ingrian,' choosing a different self-label as the label of Russian, which he used when talking about himself at the Finnish class.<sup>5</sup> He continues: 'Everyone is equal here. We didn't have a classification, that you're Russian, you're something, you're something else. Everyone is like equal.' It seems that Boris is

referring to equality between different ethnic and/or cultural groups as a general principle in Finland, while also giving an example of this principle (not classifying) from the language class. Together with the moderator's framing 'since your move,' Boris' use of localizing 'here' contrasts the situation in Finland with that in Russia.

As Baker (1997) has argued, interview questions guide participants to speak as members of specific categories. This did not always limit the ways interviewees in our study referred to themselves. In addition to the category labels of Finnish, Russian and Ingrian (Finn), all frequently used both by the interviewer and the participants, the participants also chose to use more alternative self-descriptions. For instance, expression 'I am / we are from Russia' (instead of 'I am / we are Russian(s)') was used as one way of defining oneself in all three post-migration interviews. Another alternative description is seen on line 10 where Viktoria defines herself as a 'human being'. This is a very interesting positioning as the moderator has just explicitly offered three categories to choose from. Viktoria thus refuses to define herself in terms offered, but instead positions herself within the meta-level category of human beings, emphasising the humane and 'normal' treatment she has received and contrasting it with having felt 'like anyone' in Russia. Just like Boris, she mentions equality. Finland as a current place of residence is constructed in a very positive way as a place where people are treated as equals, allowing one to feel good.



In contrast to Boris and Viktoria, Marina paints a very different picture of Finland when it comes to feeling good about one's identity. She starts her account by saying 'I'm thinking now about what I should say,' signalling that the content of her account could be controversial. Marina uses the biological repertoire (organic metaphors of soil and roots) when constructing being Finnish as very different in Russia and Finland (lines 13–21). Repeated use of 'always', reference to roots, childhood and the words of her father in this description of being Finnish in Russia allows Marina to construct her Finnish identity as strong, factual, continuous and uncomplicated. From this perspective, migration to Finland should be not just an easy, but also a very positive step for the proud Finn moving from foreign soil to the Finnish soil where one's roots are. The reality in Finland is, however, described as far from any fulfilment of coming home. The continuity of Finnish identity is abruptly cut after moving: 'When I come here it turns out I'm Russian'. Marina constructs her Russian identity as an underlining truth suddenly revealed by Finns, who ignore her lifelong devotion to Finnishness. This ascribed identity is contrasted and questioned with a reference to her own knowledge regarding her origin: 'I know I have Finnish blood in my veins.'

Viktoria responds by suggesting that the ascribed Russian identity is not supposed to be taken as an accurate description of nationality or ethnicity, but rather as a reference to the country where they have moved from: 'Not Russian, but from Russia, yet not Russian.'<sup>6</sup> This could be read as an effort to minimise the difference between

Marina's presentation of herself as a Finn and the Russian identity ascribed to her, as a means of making these identities compatible. Marina, largely ignoring Viktoria's interpretation, continues her own account and frames the next part of her talk as 'the most interesting thing.' What suddenly being Russian in Finland means is spelled out by voicing two other people's description of her. These people are immigrants themselves, and therefore they can be assumed to have some insider information regarding how immigrants are seen in Finland. The fact that they do not belong to the relevant comparison groups (i.e., Finns, Ingrian Finns or Russians) further strengthens their reliability as witnesses. White skin and being Finnish are equated in the reported speech of Marina's dark skinned class mate: 'It's good that you're Finnish, I mean that you have white skin.' Having the right skin colour, Marina is seen to be in a privileged position and assumed to pass as a Finn. Marina then reports the speech of the Filipino woman, who says: 'She's not considered Finnish here. People tell her she's not Finnish, even if she had Finnish blood in her veins, but that she is Russian.'

Validity of the identity construction as non-Finnish is increased by Marina's emphasis on sudden nature of her understanding of the issue: 'I've never thought of that before, but when I heard that, I understood that she's right.' It is not as if she was inclined to see her identity as a Finn to be refused and thereby perhaps looking for evidence to support this assumption, it is the situation that is so obvious that one understands it as soon as someone mentions it. And so she concludes: 'I'll never be

Finnish here, I'll always be Russian here. Although I know where my roots are, that I'm Ingrian. And that's the truth.' In this account, labels Finnish and Ingrian are used practically interchangeably. The use of extreme case formulations as well as the almost biblical sounding repeated evaluation 'that is the truth' (lines 36–40) invokes a strong sense of finality and protects the description against alternative interpretations. Knowing her roots and having the Finnish blood is not enough to change the 'fact' that she is Russian in Finland. Just as she 'always knew' she was a Finn in Russia, in Finland she will forever be Russian.

#### *The meaning of not being Finnish in Finland*

The next extract is a direct continuation of the previous one. In this extract, Marina continues arguing for not being able to be Finnish in Finland, while Viktoria challenges the importance of Finnishness.

#### Extract 2.2 (Interview Petrozavodsk 2-2)

- 1 Marina: And one more thing: I live at my sister's, who has been
- 2 living here for seventeen years and has accomplished a lot
- 3 in that time. She is smart, hardworking, works as a
- 4 secretary in ((name of the company)), studied, worked.

5 But when she was unemployed, people said to her: "You  
6 are eating here at our expense". And now that I, for one,  
7 have a permanent job, I am being told: "You take a Finn's  
8 place, you came here and took another person's  
9 workplace. A Finn could have done this same work, but  
10 you took it in front of him". But how do you react to this  
11 kind of a problem? Well, there sure are problems such as  
12 those do exist

13 Viktoria: Perhaps, yes, perhaps, there are.

14 Marina: But I respect and love myself, but at the same time I know  
15 that I can never become a Finn here. Maybe my son can, if  
16 he moves here young, he may become a Finn. I can never  
17 be a Finn here.

18 Viktoria: Do you need that?

19 Marina: No (\*)

20 Viktoria: You came here and that's that. What does it matter  
21 whether you're Finnish or not. What does it matter. Live  
22 and be happy. Does it matter whether you're Finnish or  
23 not. It doesn't matter at all.

- 24 Marina: Well, there are times and problems where it does matter –  
25 it's just that we're now at a level where we don't know  
26 those sorts of problems yet.
- 27 Viktoria: It's important that you go your own way and don't get  
28 stuck on whether you're Finnish or not. I think that it's not  
29 that important.
- 30 Marina: No, except if it's about pay: if a Finn does the same job or  
31 does less than I do, and gets paid more, then that's exactly  
32 when this comes up

On lines 1–12, Marina provides evidence for her claim (articulated on lines 14–17) that she is Russian and cannot be Finnish in Finland. She does this again by resorting to reported speech, things that have been said to her sister and to herself. Before giving an account of what her sister was told, Marina describes her as having been living in Finland for 17 years. She lists several positive attributes characterising her sister as someone who 'has accomplished a lot' and is smart and hardworking. In other words, the sister is portrayed as a proper citizen, someone who would deserve good treatment and appreciation instead of being accused of eating at the expense of Finnish society. Marina next reports how she herself was blamed for taking Finns' jobs: 'You take a Finn's place, you came here and took another person's workplace. A Finn could have

done this same work, but you took it in front of him.’ The structuring of reported speech is similar in here as in the case of her sister. Together with the present tense in the phrase ‘I am being told’ (line 7), it invokes a sense of status quo, that is, that ethnic Finnish migrants from Russia continuously receive criticism from the Finnish majority. The position of Marina and her sister is constructed as being between a rock and a hard place and the treatment they receive is portrayed as unfair. Marina deploys the repertoire of intergroup relations when she makes it clear that not being Finnish in Finland is a forced position, based on being excluded from the category of Finns in Finland. What is more, she and her sister are not only defined as non-Finnish, but in opposition to them, always acting against the interests of Finns, no matter what they do.

Although Marina defines the situation as problematic by asking, ‘But how do you react to this kind of a problem?’, she does not directly name Finns as responsible for the problem. She either talks about the ‘people’ or uses even a more passive form of ‘I am being told,’ when reporting the criticism received by her and her sister. (This style was already used by Marina in extract 2.1, where she spoke about her status as Russian in Finland: ‘but it says in the paperwork and it’s written down everywhere.’) So, the explicit focus in this account is put on how one should deal with the problem (similar to extract 1.3) instead of simply blaming Finns for discrimination. In lines 14–17, Marina contrasts her own positive feelings of love and respect towards herself with knowing that she cannot become a Finn. This seems to imply that there is a contradiction

between these two issues and, perhaps, also that being able or allowed to be a Finn in Finland would be a sign of Finns respecting her. Marina adds: 'maybe my son can, if he moves here young, he may become a Finn.' In this construction, the option of becoming Finnish is only reserved to those who move to Finland early in their life. This type of accounting can be seen as derived from the interpretative repertoire of socialisation, which emphasizes not the fixed biological features, but the role of cultural influence and learning in the development of ethnic identity. Yet, in this context, also identities constructed within this repertoire seem somewhat rigid; developing a new identity, at least the kind of one that would also be accepted by the members of the national majority group, would require a migrant to be able to adjust and change him/herself to such an extent that is impossible for older people.

At this point Viktoria challenges and questions the importance of being recognized as a Finn and finally simply declares that 'it doesn't matter at all.'<sup>7</sup> Marina insists that, in a certain context, being defined as non-Finnish can have concrete consequences and suggests that such consequences may become apparent in the future. Highlighting the importance of 'going one's own way' as opposed to 'getting stuck on whether you're Finnish or not,' Marina is positioned by Viktoria as someone who is preoccupied with trivial issues, obsessively dwelling on the issue of identity, which prevents her from 'living and being happy' and 'going one's own way.' On the other hand, with her own utterances such as 'we're now at a level where we don't know those

sorts of problems yet,' Marina constructs herself a position of an expert in immigration issues with a unique ability to see the future challenges that await them and a readiness to face negative issues that Viktoria laughs off.

When negotiating the meaning of Finnishness as a recognised or ascribed identity, Marina and Viktoria place an emphasis on different aspects of the future. Marina underlines the problem of discrimination of those not considered Finns, as well as a material consequence: being paid less than others. The importance of Finnishness is here evaluated as a group-level issue and framed as a practical and political concern. Viktoria's account is more individualistic. She emphasises the importance of enjoying life and following one's own path, and argues that pre-occupation with Finnishness prevents one from reaching these goals. The relevance of Finns and their way of labelling ethnic Finnish migrants is also defined differently by Marina than by Viktoria. For Marina, Finns play an important role, since her equality in the working life depends on whether she is considered a Finn or not. Viktoria, however, defines the group label as totally irrelevant to what she here produces as important in life. In this construction, Viktoria appears as an independent actor making her own happiness, whereas Marina's position is more dependent on others.

**Identity construction before and after ethnic migration: repertoires and their functions**



In this section, we will sum up and compare the identity constructions in the pre-migration context in Russia and in the post-migration context in Finland, with a special emphasis on the interpretative repertoires used and their social functions. The findings will be discussed in relation to other similar research, in particular, Verkuyten and De Wolf's (2002) study.

'Finnish' and 'Russian' were the most common social categories the participants used when negotiating their identities. Claiming a Finnish identity was the predominant way of presenting oneself in the pre-migration data. In the post-migration data, a larger variety of self-labels was used and the Finnish identity was more explicitly problematised. In the latter context, also the category 'Ingrian Finns' seemed, to some extent, to replace the Finnish self-label. We distinguished three interpretative repertoires used to construct and account for ethnic identities in the focus group discussions: the biological repertoire, the repertoire of socialisation and the repertoire of intergroup relations.

In the pre-migration context in Russia, the *biological repertoire* was the most common one in constructing a Finnish identity. References to blood, roots and genes were typical markers of this repertoire. By using this repertoire, ethnic identity was constructed as biologically inherited and thus as something that the surrounding society would not change. Further, Finnishness was contrasted with Russianness by using mental characteristics, referred to as traits, as distinguishing qualities between Finnish

and Russian people. The traits described as Finnish were predominantly positively evaluated and of a moral nature (e.g., honesty and calmness). Similar to our findings, Takalo and Juote (1995) also found Finns in Russia to distinguish themselves from Russians by attaching positive qualifications to Finns and negative ones to Russians. In the Russian context, in our research, this repertoire provided a powerful resource for constructing Finnish identity as a continuum of positive qualities that were passed on from one generation to another. Defining Finnishness in terms of a few key characteristics allowed participants to claim Finnish identity on the basis of those features. As the social category of Finns was usually defined in very positive terms, a Finnish identity can also serve as a source of ethnic pride. By reducing ethnic identity to genes, the biological repertoire has the potential to unite all Finns regardless of where they live. Therefore, it can also function to justify migration to the country of ethnic origin and construct positive expectations regarding adaptation to Finland. Davydova and Heikkinen (2004) who also have studied how Finns in Russia produce ethnicity prior their migration from Russia to Finland found this type of biologically oriented identity talk to be common in the context of remigration. In our data, this repertoire, despite being widely used in pre-migration data, was less frequently drawn on in the post-migration context where it seemed to be of limited use in the discursive maintenance of Finnish identity. Verkuyten and De Wolf (2002) also found biological discourse to be a common resource when accounting for ethnic identities in a study

among Chinese in the Netherlands. But contrary to our data, when the participants in their research drew on the biological discourse, they referred to outward appearance and not to inherited qualities or abilities.

The *repertoire of socialisation* consisted of references to cultural influence and learned behaviour, with a special emphasis on childhood and youth. In the pre-migration context, it was especially used to account for the meaning and feeling of Finnishness by referring to the Finnish language, cultural practices and values that had been taught by parents or grandparents. References to early socialisation also served to construct Finnishness as something that has been meaningful throughout one's whole life and not just adopted for instrumental purposes in the context of ethnic migration to Finland. On the other hand, both in Russia and in Finland, the repertoire of socialisation was also used to implicitly construct at least a partly Russian identity by emphasising the cultural influence of broader Russian society. An example of this was seen in an already quoted extract from focus group Saint Petersburg 2-1, in which the biological and socialisation repertoires are put against each other, with more weight on the latter: 'I don't know how it will be like in Finland then (...) We have in any case adopted the Russian culture. Whatever the genes are, the culture is Russian. We have been brought up here.' In the post-migration focus groups, the repertoire was also drawn on when talking about the possibility of (only) young migrants to become Finnish in Finland, e.g. in extract 2.2: 'Maybe my son can, if he moves here young, he may become a Finn.'

This way of talk involving references to socialisation as a mould that shapes people and their feelings, was also found in research by Verkuyten and De Wolf's (2002) research, who described it as a 'discourse on early socialisation' (2002: 385). In their data, this talk was also used when the participants claimed both Dutch and Chinese identities.

While both of the above repertoires focus on differences in the (inherited or learned) qualities attached to Finns and Russians, the third repertoire identified in our data concentrates on the relations between groups. This *repertoire of intergroup relations* refers to the discussants' talk about how their in-group was defined and (not) valued by the out-group. The accounts produced using this repertoire emphasised the role of the majority in defining in which group the participants belonged to. In the study of Verkuyten and De Wolf (2002), participants were also found to define the dominant society's ethnic assignment responsible for their ethnic (Chinese) identity. However, Verkuyten and De Wolf (2002) do not consider this way of talking as a separate repertoire or discourse, but rather link it with the biological discourse, since their participants explained discrimination being based on their looks. In our data, the repertoire of intergroup relations was used both in pre- and in post-migration data, but in different ways, depending on the reference group. In the pre-migration context, the repertoire was used as a resource to construct a collective Finnish identity, which was based on being different from, as well as disliked by, Russians. As such, Finns were constructed as persistent people who would be proud of their group even when it is not

valued by others. The widely agreed statements such as 'In Russia we are Finnish and in Finland we are Russians' also served to present the participants as worldly and realistic immigrants, who do not have too rosy ideas about their future in a new country but are ready to face whatever awaits them. At the same time, both in pre- and post-migration contexts, the repertoire of intergroup relations was used to position the ethnic Finnish migrants as a powerless minority when it comes to possibilities for defining their own ethnic identities. In the Russian context, this meant having their group negatively valued by the Russian majority, whereas in Finland, their Finnishness would be denied and replaced by the ascribed Russian identity. These type of constructions give an impression of a double minority position as an unavoidable fate of returning migrants.

## **Conclusions**

There was a striking difference in the ways Finnishness and Finnish identities were constructed in the pre-migration data collected in Russia and the post-migration data collected in Finland. In the Russian context, the ethnic category of Finns was readily available to participants and the Finnish self-label was the label most often used, despite the negative meaning attached to it by Russians. The Finnish identity was constructed as an important and strong identity with clear boundaries and often in opposition to the Russian identity. The participants also emphasised their personal history of being Finnish in Russia. However, in the post-migration data, the Finnish identity was rarely

referred to, other than when claiming that ethnic Finnish migrants can not be Finnish in Finland. It is as if the Finnish identity constructed in Russia was not anymore valid in Finland. In the post-migration data, the participants defined themselves in a variety of ways, e.g. as returning migrants, Russians, “partly Russian” or Ingrian Finns. Occasionally the participants also used labels and expressions such as immigrants, human beings or “being from Russia”, when describing their identities, instead of using ethnic categories. These alternative labels could perhaps be seen as a way of avoiding the controversy between self- and other-described identities.

When the impossibility of being Finnish in Finland was discussed, one participant declared that concerns about Finnish identity are unimportant and should be abandoned, while also suggesting that breaking ethnic ties would be the only option to follow one’s own path: ‘It’s important that you go your own way and don’t get stuck on whether you’re Finnish or not.’ Verkuyten and De Wolf (2002) have noted that ethnic identities constructed in terms of biological references, discrimination and early socialisation resulted in fairly deterministic accounts of ethnic identity, with not much room for personal agency. There were, however, some instances in their data when participants claimed a more active role for themselves. This was particularly apparent when they talked about combining different cultural influences and presented this mix as advantageous. In our data, combining cultures or referring to hyphenated identities was not common at all. Instead, as seen in the above referred quotation, one of the most

dynamic and independent positions constructed by the ethnic migrants in our post-migration data was done by dismissing the issue of Finnishness. Also choosing to define oneself using non-ethnic group labels and reinterpreting ascribed identity categories could be interpreted as striving for non-deterministic self-positioning and thus to some extent undermining the minority status too.

Considering that Finnish origin is a precondition for the participants to get the returnee status from the Finnish government, it is somewhat paradoxical that Finland is the very place where it was stated that being Finnish was impossible. Constructions of ethnic identities are always situated by nature, relevant to a particular time and place (see e.g. Banks, 1996). That is why we argue (similarly to Van De Mierop, 2011: 587) that, although the focus of our analysis is on the textual level, we should also consider the implications of the broader social context on the data and the identities constructed within it. The process of ethnic migration, officially centred around and based on criteria of ethnic Finnish ancestry, invites strong constructions of Finnishness through which migration to Finland can be justified, especially prior to migration. In Finland the context of identity constructions and negotiations is quite different. In the focus groups, the notion of ethnic Finnish migrants being Russian and not Finnish in Finland is often treated as a common fact and a stable state of affairs. The finality in the statement, 'I'll never be Finnish here, I'll always be Russian here' by one of the participants suggests that the category of Finns is simply inaccessible, regardless of any efforts made to fit in.

Recent longitudinal quantitative research findings on the same population of ethnic Finnish migrants from Russia to Finland point to a similar direction and suggest that an ascribed Russian identity and experiences of discrimination and rejection by the national majority group may prevent the ethnic Finnish migrants from Russia from developing a positive national identity in Finland (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2009; Mähönen & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2012). It is worth noting that our post-migration data was collected fairly soon after the participants moved to Finland. Therefore, it would be interesting to see if new patterns of self-definitions will emerge in the future.

Do ethnic identities matter? Are ethnic labels just words in the end of the day? In our post-migration data, the membership in the category of Finns was described to be of an instrumental value; it is the prerequisite for equal treatment in labour market. Participants' descriptions of the Russian identity ascribed by the Finnish majority seem to suggest that defining oneself as a Finn is not enough. To receive the same social benefits as the Finns, one's identity as a Finn has to be recognized by the Finnish majority in Finland. If it is difficult for ethnic Finnish migrants to publicly claim a membership in the category of Finns, it must be even more difficult for other groups of immigrants in Finland. Identities are negotiated over and over again in flexible ways. The negotiations are situational and identities produced are always relational. Some people and groups have more power in these negotiations than others. In Finland, ethnic Finnish migrants from Russia are positioned, and position themselves, both as insiders



and outsiders. This can have its advantages too. As Verkuyten (2005: 152) argues (regarding hybrid identities), 'It is from this space of liminality or in-betweenness that it is possible to interrupt, to interrogate, to challenge, to unsettle, and to intervene tactically in dominant discourse.' The rich background of ethnic migrants provides links, experiences and knowledge in two different cultural/ethnic groups, while also exposing the migrants to exclusion. As seen in our data, references to this background can be employed as a discursive means of constructing both insider and outsider positions in relation to both Finnish and Russian (as well as other) groups. This multiplicity makes it harder to lean on any clear cut and tight definitions of Finnishness. Therefore, ethnic migrants have the potential to contribute to constructing a more inclusive and flexible Finnishness that would make it easier for all residents of Finland (be it various migrant groups or people born and bred in the country) to belong and be part of the Finnish nation.

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## **Transcription conventions**

- (.) Short pause of less than one second
- (2) Pause measured to the nearest second
- Underlined Emphasis
- [overlap] Overlapping speech
- (...) Part not included in the extract

? Unidentified speaker  
\* unclear word  
((comments)) comments from the transcriber

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<sup>1</sup> The four-year INPRES research project was carried out in the Department of Social Research, Unit of Social Psychology at the University of Helsinki between 2008 and 2011. The research project focused on the migration and integration processes of ethnic migrants from Russia to Finland. The longitudinal study design included the pre- and post-migration stages. Besides the discursive approach used in this article, other studies of the project used cognitive and developmental psychological approaches to integration and identity formation and change.

<sup>2</sup> DSP and DP share to a large extent similar epistemological and methodological background. For a review of DP, including social psychological aspects, see e.g. Hepburn & Wiggins, 2005 and the whole special issue of *Discourse & Society* 2005, 16. As social psychologists, we prefer to use the term DSP to refer to our theoretical and methodological approach.

<sup>3</sup> Chukhna, a derogatory name used for Finns in Russia. Corresponds to the Finnish word *ryssä* (Russki) for Russians.

<sup>4</sup> Russki, a derogatory name used for Russians in Finland (In Finnish: "Ryssä"). Corresponds to the Finnish word Chukhna, used for Finns.

<sup>5</sup> 'Ingrian' is a term which is often used synonymously with 'Ingrian Finn'. As already noted earlier, the participants used this concept in many different ways. In this particular example it is hard to say whether Boris is correcting his earlier description of himself as Russian and emphasising this time the Finnish identity by referring to the concept of 'Ingrian' or specifying the description of himself as Russian by using 'Ingrian' as a sub category of 'Russian'.

<sup>6</sup> Same kind of negotiation takes place in extract 1.3.

<sup>7</sup> Following the logic of discourse analysis we do not want to treat these accounts as indicators of any individual psychological states or dispositions. Yet, we cannot resist pointing out the intriguing fact that this account is produced by the same individual who, in the pre-migration interview, strongly spoke for the importance of Finnish identity. Rather than making any interpretations regarding her changed identity as understood in a cognitive sense, we take this as an example of the contextually constructed and negotiated nature of identities.