

The 'Secularisation' and Ethnicisation of Migration Discourse: The Ingrian Finnish Right to Return in Finnish Politics

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ABSTRACT

Finland's Right to Return policy for Ingrian Finns presented Russian and Estonian citizens that the Finnish government deemed to have an ancestral connection to Finland the legal means to resettle in Finland. The policy existed from 1990 to 2010, and was initially driven by Finnish President Mauno Koivisto, who spoke publicly of his belief that the Ingrian Finnish minority in Russia was Finnish because it was Lutheran rather than Orthodox. However, as the political discussion on the Ingrian Finns' identity and Right to Return continued into the 1990s and 2000s, Finnish politicians increasingly abandoned the view of a common Lutheran identity between Ingrian Finns and Finland, and shifted the discussion to language, ancestry and historical memory, which were used to both endorse and disendorse Ingrian Finns' Finnishness. We argue that the disappearance of religion from the Right to Return discourse was a strategic—if not necessarily conscious—choice that emphasized the more primordial aspects of Finnish identity (and the Ingrian Finns' lack of those), which in turn enable stricter restrictions and, ultimately, the discontinuation of the policy.

In April 1990, Finland's then-President Mauno Koivisto sat down to a televised interview, part of which focused on his decision to instruct the Finnish Immigration Service to grant residence permits to Ingrian Finns as 'returnee' migrants. The Immigration Service defined returnee migrants as those who can prove 'Finnish ancestry or otherwise a close connection with Finland'.<sup>1</sup> Koivisto argued that Ingrian Finns met this qualification as the descendants of Finnish migrants to the historical province of Ingria, nowadays part of north-western Russia and Estonia. Hence, '[a] person from the former Soviet Union can be granted a residence

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<sup>1</sup> Maahanmuuttovirasto, 'Returnees'. The text has been removed from the Maahanmuuttovirasto website, but is available from the authors on request.

permit if the person's *nationality* is Finnish, i.e. he or she is not a Finnish *citizen* but is of Finnish origin in terms of ethnic background'.<sup>2</sup>

Following Koivisto's decision, Finnish lawmakers were faced with the problem of how Ingrian Finns' "Finnishness" could be identified. Ancestry, cultural identification and other identity markers like language and religion were all discussed in this context, and specific qualifications for Ingrian Finns to prove their ethnic Finnish background and/or connection to Finland were introduced into Finland's main immigration law, the Aliens Act, in 1991, 1996 and 2002–2003. These qualifications became increasingly restrictive with each addition, until the Ingrian Finnish migration queue was closed in 2010.

In this article we examine how Finnish politicians constructed religion as an element of Finnishness, and how politicians initially used membership of the Lutheran Church in Russia and Estonia as proof of Ingrian Finns' Finnishness and thus appropriateness for returnee migrant status. We also note how religion soon disappeared from the political discourse, and analyse how ethnicity supplanted religion as an identity marker. Finally, we discuss the reasons and consequences of this change for the construction of the Ingrian Finns' Finnish identity. We argue that instead of the more open nature of religion (church membership is not limited to a particular group), the essentialist definitions of identity provided a better strategic resource for MPs arguing against the Right to Return. Thus, the article demonstrates (a) how discursive constructions of identity can acquire opposite effects depending on the context of their presentation, and (b) how the content of political identity discourses is less

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<sup>2</sup> Maahanmuuttovirasto, 'Persons Coming from the Former Soviet Union'. The text has been removed from the Maahanmuuttovirasto website, but is available from the authors on request.

important than the framing of these discourses as primordial characteristics rather than reflexive capabilities.

The Ingrian Finnish case presents some unique aspects for analysis of migration discourse, given the particularities of Finland's migration history. Finland lacks the same post-war history of immigration as many other western European states, and thus unlike other examples of European returnee migrants, the political discussion on Ingrian Finns was not focused on comparisons to other migrant groups. The absence of large migrant communities in Finland gave space for Finnish politicians to link primordial identity constructions to national identity without much push-back.

In addition to Koivisto's April 1990 interview, our empirical material consists of 48 speeches/statements by Finnish MPs and ministers during parliamentary discussions regarding the drafting and amendment of the Aliens Act and other relevant legislation. Our focus is on the utterances which refer to the *integration capability* of the Ingrian Finns. The choice of excerpted texts in the analysis below reflects this focus. In addition, we examine the legislation related to the Right to Return policy. We have analysed these using a tailored version of critical discourse analysis (CDA).

After discussing our theoretical and methodological premises, we provide a brief background history of Finnish–Ingrian Finnish relations. Second, we examine how religion—Lutheranism to be precise—became one of the constituting aspects of the Ingrian Finns' Finnishness. Third, we show how other aspects of ethnic identity supplanted religion as a frame of reference when discussing the Ingrian Finns' integration capability. Fourth, we examine how these

'primordial' ethnic identity markers were later used to argue against the Ingrian Finns' integration capability. Finally, we suggest reasons for why the described 'secularisation' and ethnicisation happened in the political context of Finland between 1990 and 2010.

### National and Ethnic Identity and the Analysis of Political Discourse

The impact of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1979) has been so extensive that it seems almost superfluous to assert that national identity is a social construct. Yet it is exactly this 'common-senseness' that invites clarity about one's position. There are four issues that we want to discuss in this section, in order to position our theoretical and methodological approach.

First, although in scholarly discourse 'identity' is commonly understood as a product of processes of social construction (Hjelm 2014), the everyday use of the word has made it a fuzzy concept. Hence there is sometimes a tendency to reify identity as something essential to an entity—in this case, 'the nation'—even in critical accounts. To sensitise ourselves to this, we take seriously Jean-François Bayart's suggestion that 'there is no such thing as identity, only operational acts of identification' (2005, 92). This view is echoed in Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) account of identity, and like them we want to retain the concept while treating identity as a continuous process and, indeed, struggle.

Second, although there are valid reasons for differentiating between ethnic and national identity, we use them interchangeably in this article. Our empirical material conflates the two:

a 'person's nationality is considered Finnish' if 'they are of Finnish origin in terms of ethnic background'.<sup>3</sup> Within our framework the interesting detail is how constructions of national identity become suffused with what were considered more essential, i.e. 'ethnic' qualities. The conflation between ethnic identity and national identity has several problematic consequences, chiefly the potential for marginalising those who claim membership of a nationality but have a different ethnic identity, such as second-generation immigrants. This presents an interesting dimension to our study, in that political discussions of Ingrian Finnish exclusion and inclusion in national and ethnic identity become a statement of Finland's own national identity and its relationship to ethnic identity, with relevance for other communities in Finland. It is interesting to note the period of our study (1990-2010) is also a period of increasing migration diversity in Finland, as communities of African and Middle Eastern descent became larger and more visible in Finnish cities. The problem of "ethnicising" national identity therefore has broad consequences for defining belonging in Finland.

Third, as Wodak et al. (1999), Mole (2007), and others demonstrate, discourse analysis in its various forms is perfectly suited to examine the processes of identification mentioned above. Hjelm (2014, 6) argues that discourse theory and its operationalisations fit a dynamic view of identity construction particularly well because of the 'action orientation' of discourse. That is, discourse analysis is not only interested in *what is being said*, but more importantly *how things are done* with discourse. Wodak et al. (1999, 8) argue that in the context of national identity, discourse analysis can 'throw light on the largely contingent and imaginary character of nation and ... sharpen awareness of dogmatic, essentialist and naturalising conceptions of nation and national identity'.

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<sup>3</sup> Maahanmuuttovirasto, 'Persons Coming from the Former Soviet Union'.

Finally, building on the theoretical base of identity as construction/identification, and theorisations of discourse, our methodological approach draws from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), broadly understood. While subscribing to the basic constructionist tenets discussed above, CDA provides a toolkit that can be shaped in many ways with a variety of foci. Our apparatus concentrates on the analysis of meaning instead of a more-fine-grained linguistic analysis. This is done by focusing on meaningful packages of claims and articulations and their contextualisations within party politics and the broader social context. Through an analysis of meaning-construction we identify (implying an active process of construction) different discourses, or ways of talking, which 'designate both the relevant area of knowledge, and the particular way it is constructed' (Fairclough 1992, 128). In addition, when relevant we look at the rhetorical aspects of the parliamentary discourse, that is, how a particular type of discourse is made persuasive. Finally, on the level of grammar, we examine lexis, or word choice, which is particularly important when it creates a sense of 'us' and 'them' (Richardson 2007).

Our discourse analytical focus differs from most CDA-influenced analyses in the important sense that while CDA often focuses on the ideological suppression of alternative discourses in favour of one hegemonic discourse (Fairclough 1992), our aim is to look at the variety of discourses offered as descriptions of Finnishness. We are, however, no less concerned with 'meaning in the service of power' (Thompson 1990, 8) than analysts focusing on discursive hegemony. Discursive variety is not an indicator of unideological discourse in itself. First, as we point out below, discourses can stay the same, but they acquire new meanings in different contexts. Power manifests itself in the ways in which discourse is strategically put to use in changing contexts. Second, we retain CDA's interest in examining what is *not* said. The

absence of a discourse—especially when it is based on a tacit understanding of a taken-for-granted ‘fact’—can also be considered ‘substantially, though not entirely, ideological’ (Fairclough, 1989: 84). Within our focus on the level of meaning, looking at absences denotes the macro-level disappearance of religion as a topic altogether. As we argue in the conclusion, this can be interpreted as an ideological choice.

### Ingria, the Ingrian Finns, and Finland

Finnish politicians’ discussions on the Ingrian Finnish Return law are informed by a history stretching back at least 400 years. In 1617, Sweden—including present-day Finland—annexed territory along the easternmost coast of the Gulf of Finland, which became a focal area for immigration by Finnish-speaking peoples, who would become the dominant ethno-linguistic group in the region. These settlers, and their descendants, have become known as the Ingrian Finns. As a result of Russian conquest during the Great Northern War (1700-1721) Ingria was politically cut off from the Finnish peninsula. The Russians conquered the rest of the Finnish peninsula in 1809 and established the Autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland, but Ingria’s position as the focal point of Peter the Great’s Westernisation movement and location of his new capital ensured it never formed part of the Grand Duchy and was governed wholly by Russian authorities.

Ingrian Finns were an ethnic minority population within Russian territory, and thus subject to Russian law and not the semi-autonomous legal system of the Grand Duchy of Finland. Although Finnish-language elementary schools were abolished by the Tsar in 1908, Finnish-language religious instruction continued in the Ingrian Finnish parishes (Duke 2008). such that

Ingrian Finnish self-identification as linguistically and religiously connected to the Grand Duchy was maintained up until Finnish independence in 1917 (Ylönen 1998).

Active crossing of boundaries continued after Finnish independence - Pirkko Malinen argues the arrival of Ingrian Finns in Finland in the early 1990s was the "third wave of Ingrian-Finnish migration to Finland" (1999, 195). The first wave arrived after the Russian Revolution, when Ingrian Finns lost much of their cultural and linguistic autonomy in the new Soviet Union. The second wave refers to the 63,000 Ingrian Finns evacuated to Finland during the Siege of Leningrad in World War II, and the 55,000 who supposedly voluntarily returned at the end of the War to the Soviet Union. Recent investigations by the Finnish National Archive suggest the Soviet Union and Allies may have exerted pressure on the Finnish government to forcibly repatriate them. In the Soviet Union, the many Ingrian Finns who were deported from Ingria to distant provinces were punished for their perceived Finnishness. Those who had joined or cooperated with the Finnish army faced forced labour sentences, or more rarely, execution (Westerlund 2008, 14–16).

It is against this complex background that Ingrian Finns returned to Finnish political discourse in a completely changed situation in international politics in the 1990s. In this situation the history between the Finns and the Ingrian Finns became not just the context but a topic of contention through which the Ingrian Finns' Finnishness was produced. We now turn to these discourses.

In the Beginning: The Ingrian Finns as Lutherans



Finnish politics has a history of constructing Ingrian Finns' links to Finland through religion. Lutheranism defined Ingrian Finns' otherness from the surrounding Russian or Soviet population, and drove some early political discussions of Finland's duty to protect its 'ethnic kin'. In the early years of the Soviet Union, the Ingrian irredentist movement captured the imagination of Finnish nationalists in Finland, spurring Finnish volunteer brigades to join the chaos of the Russian Civil War under the pretext of 'rescuing Ingria from the yoke of Bolshevism' (Nevalainen 1992, 240-1). Paasi describes 1920s Finnish depictions of the Soviet Union as 'the eternal hereditary enemy of Finland, and as a Bolshevik bastion that posed a threat to Western civilisation and Christianity' (1990, 58)—a view that remained strong especially in the imagination of the Far Right until World War II (Koskelainen and Hjelm 2016). Finnish Lutheranism served, therefore, a dual function: On the one hand, it was a constitutive element of identity to be defended against the secularising forces of Bolshevism in Ingria. On the other hand, it linked Ingrian Finns and Finns of Finland as part of a broader Western identity distinct from surrounding Russians—atheist Bolshevik and Orthodox alike.

Some 70 years later, President Mauno Koivisto would also use religion to link Ingrian Finns to Finland and differentiate them from their Russian surroundings. On the 10 April 1990 episode of the Finnish talk show *Ajankohtainen kakkonen*. Koivisto was asked: 'Is public opinion, or has it been, influencing the fact that Finland has now decided to take in Ingrians to the country?'—which in itself suggests that the Finnish public has an affinity with the Ingrian Finns. Koivisto responded:

Perhaps it has had some influence. In any case, it's about the fact that these are Finns, who by Swedish decree at the time were transferred to the area, and for example in religion are very strongly Lutheran rather than Orthodox, so yes they are suitable for these Right to Return criteria, although they have lived there [in Ingria] for a long time.

A key element of Koivisto's discursive strategy is how he uses Ingrian Finnish Lutheranism as a matter-of-fact indicator of Ingrian Finns' Finnish identity. Their 'strong' Lutheranism is juxtaposed with Orthodoxy as a means of differentiation from the Russian majority in the region, rather than the perceived Bolshevism of Russians in Finnish political discourse of the 1920s. It is significant that Koivisto equates Finns and Ingrian Finns uniquely through religion – there is no mention of their common language, and only a very vague indication of their common history. At this point in Finnish politics, at least, Lutheranism appeared to hold the most prominent position in the discourse on Ingrian Finns' Finnish identity.

After Koivisto, mentions of Ingrian Finnish Lutheran identity appear in discussions of use of Lutheran Church membership in Ingria as means of proving Finnishness. The 1991 Aliens Act, as the key legal immigration document of this time, included provisions for return migrants designed for Ingrian Finnish migrants in section 18: 'A temporary residence permit may be granted if a close relative of the alien resides in Finland or if the alien has other ties to Finland'.<sup>4</sup> In a debate on the parliament floor, Social Democrat politician Raimo Vuoristo noted in 1993 that the Finnish Immigration Service was accepting certificates of membership in the Ingrian Lutheran Church as proof of 'other ties to Finland' for granting of residency permits.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "Ulkomaalaislaki", available online at URL: <<http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/1991/19910378>> , accessed 4 November 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Raimo Vuoristo, "Suomen kansalaisuuden myöntämisestä inkeriläisille paluumuuttajille", KK 483/1993. .

Finnish political discourse at this time thus accepted Ingrian Finns as Finns through a common Lutheran identity, indicative of religion's significance in creating an argument for Ingrian Finnish inclusion in Finland.

### The Disappearance of Religion and the Ethnicisation of the Ingrian Finns

In the years immediately following Koivisto's statement on Ingrian Finns, Finnish politicians did not discuss, dispute or consider the significance of Ingrian Finns' and Finns' common Lutheranism in their discussion on return migration. Instead, the political discourse came to be dominated by discussions on language, ancestry and collective memory as discursive resources for the construction of common Ingrian Finnish and Finnish history. We argue that the political discourse on Ingrian Finns in Finland thus transformed relatively quickly to a discussion on ethnic identity rather than religious identity to prove links between Ingrian Finns and Finnishness.

### Language

Language is a key component in the construction of national identity, as many commentators have argued (e.g. Hobsbawn 1996; Smith 1999). Fewster (2006) argues that nineteenth and early twentieth century Finnish nation building was primarily driven by language as a unifying concept. So it was with the Ingrian Finns, although Finnish politicians' statements exhibit a rather divided view on the matter. On the one hand, Finnish language is considered a sign of Finnishness, even if the cultural differences between The Soviet Union and Finland were

considered significant. In September 1990, a group of parliamentarians from the centre-right National Coalition Party expressed concern to the government at how prepared Ingrian Finnish returnee migrants were for life in Finland:

Ingrian Finns who move to Finland come to a country that is strange and alien to them, and they must start their lives from scratch here. While the first stages of their migration here have revealed some degree of competence in the Finnish language, and a better education than the average, their knowledge of Finnish society is very incomplete.<sup>6</sup>

By October 1990, there were approximately 1,500 Ingrian Finnish returnee migrants in Finland.<sup>7</sup> Minister for Social, Alcohol and Gender Affairs Tuulikki Hämäläinen (Social Democrat) predicted at the time that up to 10,000 would arrive in the next few years.<sup>8</sup> Language capability now featured as an independent factor that could be a sign of the Ingrian Finns' Finnishness but, on the other hand, an obstacle to integration. As Ingrian Finns began to arrive in Finland in bigger numbers, concerns regarding the limits of the Ingrians' rapid integration capability began to emerge. The then-Minister of Labour, Ilkka Kanerva, (National Coalition Party), echoed these concerns in December 1991 with an emphasis on the problem of language, noting that "only some of the Soviet Finns and Estonian Ingrians can adequately speak the Finnish language. This presents the Finnish reception system with new challenges".<sup>9</sup> The integration of Ingrian Finns in Finland was thus swiftly being viewed in terms

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<sup>6</sup> Lea Kärhä, Riita Uosukainen, Tapio Holvitie, Martti Tiuri, Anna-Kaarina Luovo, Kristi Ala-Harja, Riitta Juoppila and Kalevi Lamminen, "Määrärahan osoittamisesta Inkeri-asiamiehen viran perustamiseen", RA 2063/1990. .

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Tuulikki Hämäläinen, "Vastaus", KK 539/1990,.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

of their Finnish language abilities, and this was taken up by the centre-right in Finnish politics, for whom the economic implications of migration, and the question of labour market integration for Ingrian Finns, was of particular concern.

It is particularly noteworthy that the initial concern from the National Coalition Party noted “some degree of competence in the Finnish language”, which suggests a differentiation between those who speak Finnish as a mother tongue and those who speak it as a second or learned language. Indeed, Kanerva describes those Ingrian Finns who do speak Finnish as having “adequate” language skills, again suggesting non-native or non-first language knowledge, which differentiates Ingrian Finns from the bulk of Finland’s population. The discourse on integration capability was therefore in part a discussion on whether, in assuming Ingrian Finns had a connection to Finnishness that made them eligible as returnee migrants, it was overlooked that many Ingrian Finns lacked a specific connection to Finland through a common mother tongue. In this way, language could therefore function in this discourse as a primordial identity resource that comments on Ingrian Finns’ ethnic background and construction as Finns.

### Ancestry

Ancestral connection was another important aspect in the political discourse on links between Ingrian Finns and Finland, again taken up by the centre-right, with a more conservative approach to immigration. National Coalition Party parliamentarians argued in October 1990 that despite the many integration challenges facing Ingrian Finnish returnee migrants, they

continued to arrive in Finland drawn by “of course, an interest in their Finnish lineage”.<sup>10</sup> This discourse on Ingrian Finns is predicated on the notion of a primordialist identity link to Finland, and the idea that Ingrian Finns were connected to Finnishness as a community of common blood. Although potential weaknesses in Ingrian Finnish conformity to Finnish politicians’ understanding of Finnishness, particularly on language, were acknowledged and discussed, implementation of the policy progressed on the assumption that Ingrian Finns were linked to Finnishness through common ancestry, which would facilitate and motivate better integration in Finland even if there was initial need for language training. In the discussion on integration capability in the early years of the Ingrian Finnish return migration, there was not yet any substantial rejection of the ideology of Ingrian Finnish inclusion in Finnishness by Finnish politicians, and ancestry thus functions well as a primordial identity resource in political discourse, used to construct connections between Ingrian Finns and Finnishness.

### Collective Memory

Discussions on Ingrian Finnish identity and Ingrian Finns’ primordial link to Finnishness in the early years of the Ingrian Finnish return migration also make particularly extensive use of collective memory identity resources. For populist Finnish politicians in the early 1990s, who targeted ageing World War II veterans as potential supporters, collective memories of the Winter and Continuation Wars presented particularly resonant means for political language. A particularly notable instance is provided by Finnish Rural Party (SMP) parliamentarian Tina

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<sup>10</sup> Maunu Kohijoki, Martti Korkia-Aho and Päivi Varpasuo, “Inkeriläisiä paluumuuttajia palvelevan Inkerikeskuksen perustamisesta”, KK 539/1990.

Mäkelä, who in May 1990 submitted a question to the Minister for Health and Social Services on Ingrian Finns' war pensions, stating:

During the most recent wars, a number of Ingrian Finns fought in the Finnish Army. After the war, and the deportation of Ingrian Finns, they were almost all forced to return to the Soviet Union where they have often lived in difficult circumstances for much of the time since then. Some of them have suffered particularly from the fact that they defended Finland with a gun in hand.<sup>11</sup>

This extract relies on Finnish experiences of World War II to essentially construct an idea of Finnish identity as defined by a history of struggles with Russians and uses emotional language to make connections between Ingrian Finns and Finnishness. Not only does Mäkelä's presentation of Ingrian Finnish history suggest that the Soviets, like the Finns, see Ingrian Finns as Finnish, it also draws on Ingrian Finns' experience of suffering for their Finnishness in the post-war Soviet Union as an imperative to now provide Ingrian Finns with Finnish residency. Finnishness is thus "proved" by a shared collective memory of struggling against the USSR.

Anni Kangas (2011) identifies three voices in the Finnish discourse on Finno-Russian relations: *primordialists* who see Russia as Finland's constant enemy, *instrumentalists* who see the relationship and its use of history as constructed to serve political ends, and the *identity-based* school that focuses criticism on the distinctions made between Finns and Russians. The discussion on Ingrian Finns, as evidenced in Mäkelä's comment, shows a distinct presence of

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<sup>11</sup> Tina Mäkelä "Rintamapalvelustunnuksen myöntämisestä sotiin osallistuneille inkeriläisille", KK 330/1990.

primordialist constructions of Russia/the Soviet Union, focusing in particular on Russian actions towards Ingrian Finnish refugees during and after World War II. Indeed, a 1993 written question from Mäkelä's fellow SMP parliamentarian Marita Jurva (later Mäkinen) to then-Foreign Minister Paavo Väyrynen provides further evidence of this:

Ingrians of Finnish kin have for centuries experienced terrible human suffering, not least after the return of 55,000 Ingrian Finns to the Soviet Union under Article 10 of the 1944 Armistice Agreement. In the USSR, they were victims of the Stalinist policy of genocide.<sup>12</sup>

Use of the term "genocide" to describe the Stalinist retributions against Ingrian Finns after World War II is a particularly evocative anti-Soviet discourse. The "genocidal" relationship between Soviets and Ingrian Finns contrasts sharply to the immediately preceding "kin" relationship between Ingrian Finns and Finns.

Following on from Jurva's statement, a large group of National Coalition Party parliamentarians also submitted a written question on Ingrian history to Minister Väyrynen in 1992:

In Russia, Estonia, Kazakhstan, and in some other parts of the former Soviet Union, there now live about 67,700 Ingrian Finns. This much remains from the 200,000

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<sup>12</sup> Marita Jurva, "Inkerin virkoaminen -nimisen kansanliikkeen avustamisesta", KK 68/1993.



people who lived in Ingria previously for centuries. In Stalin's time, Ingrian Finns began to be persecuted and moved away from their former dwelling places. Cultural rights were taken away, the Finnish language was banned, the churches were closed. Ingrian Finns were exiled to Siberia even before World War II, and tens of thousands of them were executed. Since 1955, Ingrian Finns have had the opportunity to return to Ingria, but the internal passport requirement (since 1959) is still preventing many from returning to their home.<sup>13</sup>

The use of a comparative population count to show the dramatic reduction in Ingrian Finns' numbers post-World War II is a complimentary discursive method for evoking the idea of a Soviet/Russian genocide of Ingrian Finns. This extract also mentions those Ingrian Finns deported under Stalin from Ingria to remote Siberia and Kazakhstan, as further example of the suffering Russians inflicted on Ingrian Finns. The mention of the problems with Ingrian Finns returning to Ingria with their internal passports also gives the impression that Ingrian Finns are potentially still unsafe in Russia. The use of collective memory of conflict with Russia as a discursive resource was thus another way in which primordial concepts of Finnish identity (in this case, Russia/the Soviet Union as Finns' eternal enemy) became key to the Finnish political discourse's understanding of Ingrian Finnish identity. This was particularly pertinent for conservative factions in Finnish politics that have associated Russianness with the Soviet Union and communist ideology (Paasi 1990, 58). The National Coalition Party was effectively blocked from participating in coalition governments from 1966 to 1987 over concerns that the Soviet Union would be provoked by a right-leaning government (Aylott, Blomgren and

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<sup>13</sup> Jouni J. Särkijärvi, Riitta Jouppila, Riitta Saastamoinen, Anneli Taina, Tuula Linnainmaa, Päivi Varpasuo, Anssi Rauramo, Eeva Turunen, Sauli Niinistö, Irmeli Takala, Kimmo Sasi, Ben Zyskowitz, Leila Lehtinen, Väinö Saario and Oiva Savela, "Inkeriläisten auttamista koskevan kokonaissuunnitelman laatimisesta", KK 71/1992.

Bergman 2013, 90), which may account for why negative presentations of Russianness in relation to Ingrian Finns were articulated primarily by members of that party.

### Ethnicisation and its Discontents

We argue that analysis of the changing discussions on the Ingrian Finnish Return policy after the mid 1990s suggests Finnish political decision makers re-evaluated Ingrian Finns' Finnish identity, but not the nature of Finnish identity itself. We see language capabilities as playing a major part in the discussion on limitations to Ingrian Finns' Finnishness over this period, reflecting the symbolic weight the Finnish language holds as a cornerstone of Finnish identity, even in an officially bilingual (Finnish/Swedish) nation. We further argue that Finnish politicians also questioned the validity of Ingrian Finns' ancestral connection to Finland, as regulations were introduced in 1996 that sought to restrict ancestral descent to within living memory (two generations, along the lines of a 'grandmother clause') rather than less-readily proven connections potentially spanning many centuries. This indicates some degree of challenge to the construction of Finnishness as purely a community of descent, which had been used as a discursive resource to link Finns and Ingrians to a common identity in the early 1990s. Now, Ingrian Finns would increasingly be portrayed as fundamentally separate from the mainstream of Finnish identity, which continued to be defined to varying extents through other core discursive resources – Finnish language, ancestry, and collective memory, particularly from World War II. In effect, the same markers of identity Finnish politicians employed to argue for Ingrian Finns' Finnishness were now being used to argue for their un-Finnishness.

Interestingly, there is no mention of Ingrian Finns' religious connection to Finland after the mid 1990s. Götz (2003) cites Lutheranism as a key structure of Nordic identity construction, so its absence in the political discussion on Ingrian Finns' connection to Finland (and the wider Nordic region) gives some indication of a decline in the importance of religion in defining Finnishness. The fact that the 1990s saw some indication of Ingrian Finns reconnecting to Lutheranism, such as the restoration of Kupansita church in 1991, adds further resonance to the decline of religious in the political discussion, suggesting that Lutheranism by itself was not held as a sufficiently strong indicator of Finnishness as Finland itself became more secular in the 1990s and 2000s.

### Language

As Ingrian Finnish migrants began to settle in greater numbers in Finland, Finnish politicians increasingly expressed their concern that Ingrian Finns did not show the expected (and required) Finnish language skills to be included in the pervasive concept of Finnishness. One such instance is a 1998 question to the government from a quartet of National Coalition Party parliamentarians, who wrote:

Today, however, only about a fifth of Ingrian returnees coming to Finland can speak Finnish, and for many the connection to Finland is actually very weak. Their ability to gain employment in Finland is also very poor. This situation has led to Finland likely gaining an unemployed and monolingual Russian minority that is threatened with

deep social exclusion. There is already alarming news of Ingrian youths spiralling into drugs and related crimes.<sup>14</sup>

It is significant to note the clear and definite classification of Ingrian Finns as a monolingual Russian minority, and the way in which lack of Finnish language abilities is here directly and immediately translated to a “very weak” connection to Finland. As had been relatively common in the earlier Finnish political discussions on Ingrian Finns, the politicians’ language appeals to some degree of sympathy for Ingrian Finns, but in a rather new way. Ingrian Finns are now seen as a vulnerable outsider minority in Finland, rather than in Russia. Failed integration capability, born of Ingrian Finns’ apparent lack of “Finnishness” by not speaking the Finnish language, has been deleterious for Ingrian Finns, and necessitates a re-examination of the Right to Return policy.

The decline in Finnish lawmakers’ faith in Ingrian integration capability becomes more specifically linked to language with the 2002-2003 amendments to the Right to Return clause in the Aliens Act. The third point of the first section of amendments states that applicants may be granted Right to Return status on the following basis:

if the applicant himself/herself, one of his/her parents, or at least two of his/her four grandparents is or has been documented as of Finnish nationality, and the applicant has sufficient knowledge of Finnish or Swedish.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Kimmo Sasi, Ilkka Kanerva, Ben Zyskowitz and Suvi Lindén, ‘Inkeriläisten maahanmuuttoedellytykset’, KVN 43/1998.

<sup>15</sup> “Laki ulkomaalaislain muuttamisesta”, available online at URL: <<http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2003/20030218>>, accessed 15 November 2016.

This section, taking a previous 1996 amendment on generational ties to Finland, thus further adds language capability into its restrictions. The importance of integration into Finnish society through one of Finland's national languages, implied in the previous amendments, is now specifically stated and legally codified. This is a significant departure from previous discussions assuming Finnish-language competence from Ingrian Finns based on their Finnish heritage.

The amendment of 2002-2003 further notes that the issuing of a Right to Return residence permit is conditional on three points, the second of which states:

as referred to in paragraph one, subparagraph 3 of the amended law, applicants must participate in an organised returnee orientation program in their country of origin and complete a language exam organised by the Finnish authorities to show sufficient knowledge of Finnish or Swedish at the skill level of A2 in the European Union's Common European Framework language proficiency rating scale, unless circumstances prevent the returnee orientation program or language test from reasonably being completed.

Thus the minimum requirements for language capability were specifically set, and proof was now required before the returnee moves to Finland. The A2 skill level indicated by the amendment is not particularly advanced, suggesting perhaps more a nominal demonstration of willingness or commitment to learn one of Finland's national languages prior to

immigration. Neither the Parliamentary Committee set up to draft this legislation in October 2002, nor the commissioned opinion of the *Eduskunta's* Constitutional Law Committee, offer any justification or reasoning for the introduction of such language restrictions, beyond stating that the restrictions do not violate the right of those of Finnish origin to return to Finland, and that returnee residence permits should be considered different from other residence permits granted to non-returnee immigrants

### Ancestry

The first amendment to the Right to Return law, introduced in 1996, specifically addressed to return migrants from the former Soviet Union, provides a residence permit for migrants on the following conditions:

- 1) if the applicant himself/herself, or his/her parents, or at least two out of four grandparents, has been noted in his/her documents as a Finnish national, or
- 2) if the applicant has other evidence of other cohesive connections to Finland and Finnishness, but he/she does not possess documentation to qualify under paragraph 1.<sup>16</sup>

The new amendments appear to bring the criteria for Ingrian Finns closer to the standard of other returnee groups, with the particular limitation on generational connection to Finland at

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<sup>16</sup> "Laki ulkomaalaislain muuttamisesta", available online at URL: <<http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/1996/19960511>>, accessed 15 November 2016.

least serving to bring Ingrian Finnish ancestral connection to Finnish citizenship to within living memory. Thus, the construction of Finland as a national community of ancestral descent appears to show some signs of limitation: the Finnishness inherent in ancestry appears to expire or diminish after many generations living outside the Finnish nation state and Finnish national community. Yet the language of this amendment is noticeably vague. There is no definite requirement that one grandparent hold or have held Finnish citizenship. Rather, the grandparent should have proof of a “cohesive connection to Finland and Finnishness”. The exact nature of such a connection, and what form the proof of it should take, is left unspecified. The assumption present in the earlier discussions that even non-Finnish speaking Ingrians possess greater integration capability than other migrants through their ancient ancestral connection to Finland is not completely diminished, but is very much weakened.

### Collective Memory

In 1998, National Coalition Party politicians Kimmo Sasi, Ilkka Kanerva, Ben Zyskowitz and Suvi Lindén stated to the government that “initially Ingrian Finnish migration permission was right in taking into view Ingrian Finns’ perceived historical wrongs”.<sup>17</sup> Funding for Ingrian Finnish veterans was requested, for instance, by then-Christian League<sup>18</sup> parliamentarian Bjarne Kallis from 2000 to 2009, in budget initiatives to the *Eduskunta* that called for increased funding to the Ingrian Finnish and Karelian veterans associations.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, in 2002, Christian Democrat parliamentarian Leea Hiltunen expressed her support for the new stricter language

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<sup>17</sup> Sasi, Kanerva, Zyskowitz and Lindén, “Inkeriläisten maahanmuuttoedelly tyksistä”, KVN 43/1998.

<sup>18</sup> *Suomen Kristillinen Liitto*, Finnish Christian League, which became *Kristillisdemokraatit*, the Christian Democrats, in 2001.

<sup>19</sup> Bjarne Kallis, “Määrärahan osoittaminen Inkeriläisten ja karjalaisten heimoveteraanien yhdistys r.y.:lle”, TAA 418/2000 and TAA 200/2009.

restrictions for returnee immigrants, and approved of the fact that the new restrictions would not affect the return of Ingrian Finnish Winter and Continuation War veterans and deported refugees, as she wrote in a September 2002 question:

It is also fair that these conditions do not apply to those who were part of the Ingrian Finnish deportations of 1943-1944, or those who served during the Second World War in the Finnish army.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, the 2002-2003 amendments to the Right to Return law, entering into force in 2003, begin by specifically stating that returnee status may be granted on these conditions:

- 1) if the applicant belonged to the Ingrian Finnish emigrants who between 1943 and 1944 were transferred to Finland and then after the War returned to the Soviet Union
- 2) if the applicant has served in the Finnish Army between 1939 and 1945.<sup>21</sup>

The notion of shared collective memory between Finnish views of World War II and Ingrian Finnish wartime suffering appears to retain a lasting importance in the Ingrian Finnish Return discourse, and remained a key focus of Finnish legislation on the issue in the late 1990s and 2000s.

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<sup>20</sup> Leea Hiltunen, "Maahanmuuttokriteerit täyttävien inkeriläisten maahanmuuttohakemusten käsittelyn nopeuttaminen", KK 788/2002.

<sup>21</sup> "Laki ulkomaalaislain muuttamisesta".



By 2010, when the end of return migration for Ingrian Finns had been announced, the amendment to the Aliens Act actually retained residence permission for two groups specified in the 2002-2003 amendment: the Ingrian Finns transferred to the USSR in 1943-1944, and those who had served in the Finnish Army between 1939 and 1945.<sup>22</sup> The discussion on historical atonement, though now more narrowly defined, thus trumped all others in relating the Ingrian Finnish Return to constructions of Finnish identity based on the significance of the discursive resource of struggle against Russia. The dominance of this discourse, which deems the Winter and Continuation Wars to be wars of survival, appears to have weathered the challenges of academic reassessments of Second World War history and Finnish culpability (Holmila 2012; Meinander 2006; Sana 2003; Raivo 2000; Paasi 1996; Suominen 1979).

However, despite the ongoing significance afforded to collective memory in Finnish politicians' views of Ingrian Finns, it is significant to note the extent to which populist politicians in Finland, for whose ideology World War II history holds particular significance, began to view Ingrian Finns as Russian. The most significant populist figure to comment on Ingrian Finns' apparent Russianness is SMP MP Sulo Aittoniemi, whose views represent the most overt linkage of Ingrian Finns to negative perceptions of Russia. In September 1996, Aittoniemi stated:

In recent years, as many as 20,000 so-called Ingrian Finns have moved from Russia to Finland. The decision to allow and promote the return at this scale was a bad error.

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<sup>22</sup> "Laki ulkomaalaislain 48 §:n muuttamisesta", EV 220/2010.

Ingrian Finns have not found what they came looking for in Finland, and many desperately long to return to their former homes, if the conditions would at least be tolerable. Their wishes are to both Finland and Ingrian Finns' advantage.<sup>23</sup>

Reference to Ingrians as "so-called Ingrian Finns" directly challenges previous assertions that Ingrians belong within the Finnish national community. Thus the suggestion shifts from bringing Ingrians to Finland under the Right to Return policy, to assisting homesick émigrés in repatriation to Russia. Whilst the new discussions on the humanitarian imperative to assist Ingrians in Russia rather than bring them to Finland is very much present in Aittoniemi's initiative here, the presentation of Russia as the Ingrian homeland is also significant, depicted here as the Ingrians' longed-for home that was left for purely economic reasons, rather than any sense of threat or being driven out, nor of any emotional connection to Finland.

Aittoniemi's presentation of the Ingrian Finns reveals an ongoing negative discourse on Russia and Russians, but one which paints Ingrian Finns as influenced by, or connected to, negative stereotypes of late 1990s and 2000s Russian behaviour. In a 1997 written question to the Interior Minister Jan-Erik Enestam, Aittoniemi writes:

The Right to Return mission has later been judged a clear failure. Among other things, it has attracted only elderly Ingrians who are no longer rooted in Finland. They are knocking their walking sticks against the asphalt, crying and craving to go back to their

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<sup>23</sup> Sulo Aittoniemi, "Määrärahan osoittamisesta Venäjälle palaamaan halukkaiden inkerinsuomalaisten elinolosuhteiden parantamiseen", TAA 56/1996. .

old homes. On the other hand, for many of these returnees willing to move here, there is the possibility of abusing the Right to Return without justification. Some pursue criminal activity, for instance trafficking. Very few have adapted to the labour market.<sup>24</sup>

This statement continues the notion that Ingria, rather than Finland, is the traditional Ingrian Finnish homeland, as well as the overriding economic and labour market concerns with increased migration at this time. However, Aittoniemi also plays into pervasive turn-of-the-millennium perceptions of Russian criminality in Finland. *Helsingin Sanomat* similarly ran articles concerning Russian mafia infiltration into Finland, with particular reference to trafficking of prostitutes from Estonia to Helsinki's western Lauttasaari district,<sup>25</sup> and the rise of the Estonian-Russian prostitution ring in Helsinki organised by the mafia organisation "*Obtshak*" (Russian for "Common Wealth").<sup>26</sup> Aittoniemi's statement also specifically notes criminal trafficking activity as an issue for Ingrian Finns. He was even more specific in his accusations in a November 1997 question to parliament, accusing *Inkerin-Liitto*, the Ingrian community's cultural organisation collaborating with the Finnish Consulate-General in St Petersburg in processing Right to Return applicants, of being a KGB infiltration front, and both the *Inkerin-Liitto* chairman Eero Pellinen and St Petersburg Consul-General Ludmila Zaturina of being KGB double agents.<sup>27</sup> His distrust of *Inkerin-Liitto* appears born of his belief that "NGO activities for instance in Russia are in no way comparable to those of Finnish organisations", thus suggesting that *Inkerin-Liitto* is an organisation of Russians, rather than Finns. Aittoniemi

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<sup>24</sup> Sulo Aittoniemi, "Inkerinsuomalaisten maahanmuutosta", KK 877/1997.

<sup>25</sup> Ari Lahdenmäki and Riku Rantala, "Russian Mafia Ships Prostitutes to Helsinki", *Helsingin Sanomat – International Edition*, 19 June 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Jukka Harju, "Osa Suomenkin huumekaupoista päätetään Viron yhteiskassassa", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 24 April 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Sulo Aittoniemi, "Inkeriläisten paluumuuttoon liittyvien perusteiden selvittämisestä", KK 1108/1997.

again questioned the Finnishness of Ingrian Finns in a 2002 statement, claiming that “a large part of the Ingrian Finns coming to Finland do not have any roots in Finnishness”.<sup>28</sup> The negative assessment of Russians therefore extends here to Ingrian Finns, and hence, Ingrian Finns are presented now as Russians, or at least more connected to Russia than Finland.

## Conclusions

Above we have shown that the political discussion on Ingrian Finnish return migration in Finland became increasingly doubtful of Ingrian Finns' connections to Finland, with the growing argument that Ingrian Finns were not integrating into the Finnish mainstream in the straightforward way that had been anticipated. At the start of Ingrian Finnish return migration, Finnish politicians used several identity resources to show the common identity between Ingrian Finns and Finns of Finland. They were Lutherans, like the bulk of Finland's population, spoke the Finnish language, had common ancestral links to Finland, and like Finns of Finland had the historical experience of struggling against Russia/the USSR to maintain their independent identity. However, once Ingrian Finns began arriving in Finland, Finnish politicians began reversing their arguments on most of these identity markers, noting that few Ingrian Finns actually spoke Finnish, their ancestral connections were too distant to be meaningful, and the identity distinction between Ingrian Finns and Russians was actually less distinct than previously thought.

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<sup>28</sup> Sulo Aittoniemi, “Määrärahan osoittaminen inkerinsuomalaisten elinolojen kohentamiseen heidän synnyinseuduillaan”, TAA 415/2002.

Religion and its links to national identity continues to feature in European migration policy – a recent example is the 2015 decision of Spain and Portugal to grant passports to the descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This case extends the gap between emigration and return centuries further than even the 17<sup>th</sup> century migration of Ingrian Finns to Ingria. However, religion in the discussion on Ingrian Finns in Finland focused not on historical atonement, but rather on religious identity as an indicator of belonging and sameness with the broader Finnish national community. Over the period of Ingrian Finnish migration to Finland, Finnish politicians did not re-address their arguments about Ingrian Finns shared religious identity with Finland. Instead, religion effectively disappears from the Finnish political discourse on Ingrian Finns by the mid 1990s, despite it being a distinct argument for Ingrian Finns' Finnish ethnic identity in 1990. We have called this the 'secularisation' of migration discourse. We use the scare quotes in full cognizance of the fact that secularisation usually refers to long-term processes rather than agent-driven change. In the case of the Ingrian Finns' the secularisation played a strategic – if not necessarily conscious – function: religion was separated from other identity discourses by its largely 'cultural' function, whereas language, ancestry and history had more 'primordial' functions that allowed Finnish politicians to dismiss Ingrian Finnish migrants' integration capability in Finland. Essentially, had the political discourse on Ingrian Finns continued to note their shared Lutheran identity with Finland, it would have been more difficult to dismiss them as incapable of integration, whereas the primordial resources enabled exactly that. All the other resources could be flipped on their head, except Lutheranism.

The genealogy of the Ingrian Finnish Right to Return Law shows that in ethnically homogeneous contexts, discursive negotiation of national identity triggered by immigration becomes a case of defining who the immigrants *are* vis-à-vis the imagined majority

community. When the discourse on what immigrants *do* or *can do* changes, the discourse on who they *are* can gain opposite meaning from the original, as the role of language in the discussion on the Ingrian Finns' integration capability shows. Paradoxically, the more essentialised the migrants' culture, the easier the discourse is to put into use for both ends.

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