



Article

Migration and Youth: The Lived Experiences of Russian Youth in Finland

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Abstract: The number of Russian immigrants to Finland has already been steadily increasing since 1990, when the President of Finland launched an initiative aimed at facilitating the repatriation of Ingrian Finns living in the territories incorporated into the USSR. Today Russian-speaking immigrants account for approximately 1.3% of Finland's population. The segmented assimilation theory encourages one to explore the lived experiences of second-generation immigrants. This article analyses the data from qualitative interviews conducted within the framework of the field work carried out in the central part of Finland, from 1 October to 31 December 2021. Young people who spoke Russian in their family and were a part of groups where Russian is a tool of communication and used for the intergenerational transmission of cultural traditions were selected for interviews. The empirical data resulting from a study conducted in Finland provide insight into the factors that have contributed to the migration of their families, from the perspective of these young people. Applying the concept of identity as a "moveable feast", this article focuses on the process of self-identification as depending, first, on the dynamics between inherited and obtained identity and, second, on the identity level (ethnicity, nationality, global identity) at which these dynamics are present.

Keywords: migration; young people; Russian immigrants; identity; self-identification; social exclusion



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1. Introduction

Compared with other Western European countries, the number of immigrants in the Finnish population is not significant, while Finland stands out in terms of its high share of Russian immigrants. Over the past few decades, academic research has focused specifically on this immigrant community, which has been subject to regular research in the fields of social sciences (Davydova and Pöllänen 2010; Varjonen et al. 2017; Stikhin and Rynkänen 2017; Davydova-Minguet and Pöllänen 2017; Tiaynen-Qadir 2020; Habti 2021; Ryazantsev and Gadzhimuradova 2021), history (Baschmakoff and Leinonen 2001) and psychology (Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind 2001; Brylka et al. 2015). Following the Russian aggression in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the issue of the Russian immigrant community in Finland has taken on particular significance. While the risk is considered low, since "pro-Russian political movements in Finland are, in fact, not even movements but mere individuals" (Martikainen et al. 2016), it is clear that making efforts and investing the resources geared towards the integration of Russian minorities into Finnish society is vital at this point in time.

It is expected that successful integration will be at the top of politicians' agendas for a long time, as integration is a long-term process requiring the involvement of immigrants and their participation in lifelong learning. In the wealthiest countries, immigrant children are the fastest growing segment of the population (Drouhot and Nee 2019); therefore, the "diverging destinies" (Zhou and Gonzales 2019) of immigrant youth have come into the limelight in recent research. Such studies are important when planning social development, since they allow for developing data-based integration policies suitable for different generations.

Despite active research being aimed at the Russian immigrant community in Finland, it has rarely focused on second-generation immigrants. The issue of how Russian young people, who moved to Finland in early childhood or were born soon after their parents' immigration, feel and what they have experienced has not been analysed. Given the relevance of this issue, an ethnographic study of young Russian immigrants has been conducted.

The empirical basis of this article is the data collected during field work carried out in the central part of Finland from 1 October to 31 December 2021. This article analyses qualitative interviews (n 16) with young Russian immigrants. While analytical and overly theoretical studies often "do not adequately capture the multifaceted and dynamic nature of migration processes, including from migrants' perspectives" (McAuliffe and Koser 2017, p. 7), these data have made it possible for young people to speak up.

2. Historical and Political Context

To illustrate the presence of Russian immigrants in Finland, the key turning points in history determining the increases in the Russian-speaking population in Finland should be highlighted first. After its victory in the Russian–Swedish or the Finnish War (1808–1809), Russia established the Grand Duchy of Finland, ruled by the Emperor of Russia. In the late 19th century, the Russian Empire launched a targeted policy aimed at restricting the autonomy of the Grand Duchy of Finland. At the outset, Russian public servants took a full control of the most important local authorities. The removal of legislative power from the Parliament (1910) and the disbandment of the Finnish Army (1901) meant the end of Finland's autonomy (Jussila 2004). When the Emperor of Russia abdicated and declined all his titles after the Bolshevik coup in Russia, Russian domination lost its legal basis, and the Republic of Finland was proclaimed (1917).

During their flight from the Bolshevik regime, Russian emigrants sought asylum in various countries, including Finland, which was used as a country of temporary stay by many emigrants, while others stayed in Finland permanently. The Winter War (1939–1940) and Continuation War (1941–1944), in which Finland was fighting against the USSR, did not contribute to the increase in the number of Russians in Finland. On the contrary, Finland lost part of its territory (the Karelia Strait, the northern and western coasts of Lake Ladoga, territory to the East from Merkyarvi to Kuolayarvi and part of Rybachy Peninsula) when signing the Peace Treaty, and a large number of people found themselves in the USSR, where those Karelians, Veps and Finns were subject to Russification. In its endeavours to avoid any conflicts with the USSR, Finland returned Soviet defectors to the USSR until the collapse of the communist regime.

On the initiative of Finnish President Mauno Koivisto, a migration programme was implemented (1990–2016) enabling Soviet citizens with Ingrian (Ingria—the current Leningrad region and St. Petersburg) or Finnish ancestry to resettle to Finland. Before the collapse of the communist regime, USSR inhabitants of Finnish origin had no chance of moving to Finland, as Soviet citizens had no right to free movement. With the communist regime collapsing, Finnish politicians hurried to lend a helping hand to their compatriots in the USSR. Following the ethnicity-based model of the nation, Finnish politicians initially built their Ingrian Finnish Return discourse on an argument of religious identity: the Ingrian Finnish minority in Russia was Finnish because it was Lutheran rather than Orthodox (Prindiville and Hjelm 2018). Later, other arguments rooted in historical memory, language and culture, including the national romantic image of Ingria, were preferred. Approximately 30 thousand people used this so-called right to return.

This historical and political context suggests that Russian-speakers represent a long-established and significant immigrant community in Finland. The size of the Russian-speaking population has been following an upward path since the 1990s, and yearly immigration from Russia to Finland was about 3000 people until 2022. According to the Statistics of Finland, after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, 6003 people moved from Russia to this neighbouring country in 2022, and there are 93,535 Russian-speaking people

(1.7% of the total population) in Finland (Statistics Finland 2023). The majority of them live in the eastern and south-eastern parts of Finland.

The social profile of Russian immigrants has changed over the years: in the 19th century, they were mainly Tsarist administration employees, soldiers and merchants; in the first half of the 20th century, they were Russian monarchists fleeing from Russia and later moving to other Western countries (France, Belgium and Germany); and in the second half of the 20th century, they were repatriates and labourers from the former USSR. Today, Russian-speaking immigrants in Finland are not a socially homogenous group either. One part is of Finnish origin, Ingrians, also called Russian Finns, another part consists of immigrants of Russian ethnic origin and a third part comprises immigrants of various ethnic origins from the former USSR. Common historical memory (in the form of the ideologized history of the Soviet period) and culture (first and foremost, the Russian language and Soviet culture) are the main elements uniting all Russian-speaking immigrants and enabling them to represent themselves as a linguistic and cultural minority in Finland. Russian-speaking immigrants belong to the most highly educated immigrant groups in Finland; nevertheless, their employment rate suggests that they do not enjoy any labour market advantages over other immigrant groups. Statistics show that the employment rates of Russian-speakers in Finland (52.7% and 47.1% for men and women, respectively) are no higher than those of other foreign language speakers (53.6% and 45.1% for men and women, respectively) (Varjonen et al. 2017).

3. Methodology

3.1. Theoretical Framework

Over the last few decades, under the impact of immigration, many European countries have changed from being homogenous societies to multicultural, multireligious and multi-ethnic societies. “Super diversity” (Vertovec 2007) has become an attractive subject of research, gaining particular attention in migration studies. European researchers are currently focussing on the social inclusion problems of the immigrants of individual countries by analysing the political, historical and educational context of various countries (Westin 2003; Crul and Vermeulen 2003b; Simon 2003; Nilsson and Bunar 2016; Crul et al. 2019). These studies examine the integration of immigrant communities of various ethnicities in the society of a specific host country by analysing cross-cultural interaction issues, access to education, the labour market and healthcare. The examination of integration processes in search for successful immigrant integration solutions reveals an urgent need to focus on second-generation immigrants: “The integration of children born to immigrant parents in countries of migration is critical, for this second generation, as they have come to be known, constitutes a growing share of metropolitan youth today. Research on the second generation is particularly pertinent because it can respond to many universal questions concerning integration” (Crul et al. 2012, p. 11).

The second generation includes youth born after their parents arrived in the host country, with both parents born outside the host country (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Alitolppa-Niitamo 2004). In this case, research does not cover youth if, for example, only one of their parents was born outside the host country or youth who arrived in their host country in their childhood or teenager years. Oropesa and Landale have suggested that “researchers should make distinctions between the ‘decimal’ generations to avoid obscuring diversity within the child population” (Oropesa and Landale 1997). Thus, sociologists have started to group immigrant descendants into decimal generations (Rumbaut 2006). This article does not use the notion of “decimal” generations, and the concept of second-generation immigrants includes youth with at least one Russian-born parent.

Studies on second-generation immigrants constitute a relatively new field of research which became popular in Europe in the last few decades of the 20th century and which has currently become the central focus in the study of immigrant integration. The topicality of this research theme resides in the situation that has emerged in several EU countries where immigrants live in “a parallel world”, i.e., isolated from the society of their host

country. The fact that second-generation immigrants are not integrated into their host country's society is often interpreted as a failure of integration and multiculturalism. If, a couple of years ago, such statements were the basis of the pre-election capital of individual politicians, in 2023, only Sweden, the country holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, has decided to change the paradigm of its migration policy.

Integration and multiculturalism are interpreted as a story of failure by the representatives of academic research as well (Koopmans 2013; Schinkel 2018). At the same time, an opposing theoretical perspective has been outlined by researchers. The segmented assimilation theory, originally proposed in the USA by Portes and Zhou (1993), argues that second-generation immigrants may take divergent assimilation paths. These researchers point out that it is not the very idea of integration that is to be blamed, but rather the fact that the linear integration model is inappropriate for second-generation immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut 2005). By dismissing "relatively uniform and straightforward" integration, Portes and Rumbaut highlight that "the present second generation may be better defined as undergoing a process of segmented assimilation where outcomes vary across immigrant nationalities" (Portes and Rumbaut 2005, p. 986). They believe that a fast integration in their host country's society is just one of the possible options.

One part of the immigrant population integrates smoothly into the mainstream, because for them ethnicity has become an individual choice. For another portion of immigrants, ethnicity remains a tool for strengthening their social and economic position, as they use the networks and resources of their ethnic community. For the third portion of immigrants, ethnicity becomes a "mark of subordination", leading to inequality and dissatisfaction (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, p. 45). The segmented assimilation theory helps us understand why the integration process of some immigrants is successful, while others encounter insurmountable obstacles (Bean et al. 2003, p. 100). This theory reveals the differences in the integration process between the first-generation immigrants that have arrived recently and their descendants, or the second generation (Zhou 1999). Research aiming to describe the integration models for second-generation immigrants is based on the segmented assimilation theory in Europe as well (Crul and Vermeulen 2003a; Crul and Vermeulen 2006), including in Finland (Jääskeläinen 2003; Sarvimäki 2011; Kempainen et al. 2020; Nshom et al. 2022). Particular attention is paid to two integration types: downward assimilation and upward mobility through ethnic cohesion. In a way, this reflects the growing difference between immigrant youth successfully integrating in their host country's society and labour market and the portion that finds it difficult.

The segmented assimilation theory encourages one to explore the lived experiences of second-generation immigrants. This paper addresses three questions: How do second-generation Russian-speaking immigrants understand and assess the decision made by their parents to immigrate? How does the experience they gained affect their attitude towards their host country and its society? What are their feelings of belonging and identity? Depending on their experience, immigrant youth can have upward mobility or downward mobility.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

The sample consisted of young people who are members of groups where Russian serves as a tool of communication and is used for the intergenerational transmission of cultural traditions: in a religious community, in a Russian learning group and in two groups dedicated to the preservation of cultural traditions. In a sampling exercise, these groups served as the point of departure for recruiting potential interviewees. Observation and interviews were the key research instruments used in this field work. The process of meeting the potential interviewees was gradual, starting with group leaders and the most active members. The researcher, through participation in group activities and applying the snowball method, had an opportunity to meet less active group members. Sixteen individual qualitative interviews were carried out during this field work: three group leaders were interviewed (aged 46–51) and thirteen young people, most of whom were

19–23 years old, while the ages of two respondents were 34 and 35. Twelve women and four men were interviewed, since the majority of group members are women, who are also more responsive than men.

Group leaders, who were familiarized with the objectives of the study and allowed the researcher to participate in group activities, offered her a helping hand in recruiting the interviewees. Although group leaders supported the researcher and e-mailed informed consent forms containing the researcher's contact information to all their group members, it was only the young people whom the researcher had addressed personally during events who responded. The recruitment process was impaired by the busy schedules of the potential interviewees (work, studies and social, cultural and sports activities). Despite the fact that young people were interested in participating in the study, they had limited opportunities to make room for interviews. During the field work, Finland had not introduced gathering restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and group activities were not restricted as long as epidemiological safety regulations were complied with. However, account had to be taken of the fact that the epidemiological situation could change abruptly. The busy schedules of young people and the epidemiological situation in Finland affected the way interviews were conducted. One of them was a face-to-face interview, but others were planned well in advance and were conducted using the technological opportunities offered by the Zoom platform. All interviewees, except one, turned on their video camera and spoke with the researcher face-to-face during the interview. Although it provided an opportunity for the researcher to observe the interviewee's emotions, the possibility of identifying body language was limited. The response rate was high, since only one of the potential interviewees changed his mind about participating in the interview and showed no willingness to contact the researcher.

As is usual in ethnography, the study took place in the researched environment without affecting it: the researcher merely documented the activities taking place in the chosen location and the experiences of the participants. It was important for the researcher to distance herself from her personal beliefs and biases, so that they would not have any impact on the contents of the questions or the quality of the interview. The researcher collected data through unstructured and partly structured interviews, with interviewees providing answers to the questions posed by the researcher. This ethnographic approach means that the interviews were less formal and less managed by the interviewer; they were a friendly conversation rather than a formal questioning. This approach enabled interviewees to talk more freely about what is important to them and guaranteed data reliability.

As ethnography is an inductive science, namely, it works from empirical evidence and towards theory, its application confirms the reliability of this research. The obtained data are reliable because of the researcher's successful integration into the group (the researcher was personally invited by the young people to join events and the response rate for the interviews was very high).

Unstructured interviews with group leaders were conducted, i.e., the interviewees were not restricted by a pre-designed survey outline, but they were encouraged to tell their story. It gave group leaders an opportunity to make their views known and elaborate on their explanations about pressing themes and problems. These interviews include data on the history of the group's establishment, its strands of action and the value system to be passed on to the younger generation. Semi-structured interviews were employed when working with young people, i.e., they were conducted according to a pre-developed series of questions, often while changing their order and asking in-depth questions (Brinkmann 2014). The interviewees responded extensively, particularly expanding on the personal experience gained in their childhood when they exchanged the Russian cultural environment for the Finnish one (taking up residence in Finland together with their families, starting school with insufficient proficiency in Finnish, etc.).

Interviews were conducted *by the researcher herself* in the language spoken in the young people's families, i.e., Russian, and they lasted one hour on average. They were recorded in audio format and then transcribed in Russian, marking emotions and longer pauses in the

text, as well as complying with the transcription norms adopted in research (Dresing et al. 2015). In order to avoid mistakes, the researcher had to listen to the interviews once more after their transcription while anonymizing interview data.

A qualitative content analysis that has not been strictly regulated (Hsieh and Shannon 2005) and gives more flexibility to the researcher (Schreier 2012, 2014) has been used as a research tool. The object of analysis—young people’s experience—was clearly defined before commencing the content analysis, and the words, sentences or several sentences constituting a single thought unit (Schreier 2014) was defined before starting the content analysis. The interviews were coded manually: first the key categories or codes were identified and then they were divided into subcategories or subcodes. Thus, the analysis was performed by following the text (Krippendorff 2019). The codes were created on the basis of interview data, while, during their review, they were assessed in terms of their compliance with our conceptual framework, the objective of the study and research topics. Thus, deductive and inductive methods were employed in the data analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005).

4. Results

4.1. Drivers behind Migration

The drivers behind migration have been analysed by researchers for decades. This analysis has led to the identification of key economic, political, social, cultural, religious, demographic and ecological factors (Massey et al. 1993; Ghatak et al. 1996; Hagan and Ebaugh 2003; Marchiori et al. 2012). Juxtaposition dominates the debate on the causes of migration: whether it is voluntary or forced, economic or political, etc. When conceptualizing migration processes, researchers pay particular attention to “aspiration, desire and drivers” (Carling and Collins 2018). Although researchers understand that the simultaneous effects of various factors contribute to migration, they tend to conceptualize migration as an informed choice and assume the dominance of one driver in each individual case (Ruedin 2021). During interviews, each young person talked about one driver of the migration of his/her family; however, these individual cases allow for drawing up an overall picture of the reasons underlying the immigration of Russians into Finland.

The duration or time of immigration was not defined as a criterion when selecting the sample, but it turned out that the migration program initiated by Finnish President Mauno Koivisto (1990) had changed lives of most of the study participants. Both the group leaders and young people selected for the study arrived in Finland in the 1990s, together with their families, or were born in Finland into the families of immigrants from that period. The interviewed young people who experienced migration in their childhood arrived in Finland at the ages of three/four (Bil), ten (Inna, Veronika), twelve (Karla), and sixteen (Katrina) (see Appendix A: References to Interviewees).

Their parents made the decision to emigrate from Russia. Only one interviewee said it was her own choice to move to Finland: “When I finished the ninth grade, tutors from the border town N arrived and looked for those having good English, maths, who were promising, and I just received an invitation to continue my education at a Finnish gymnasium after the ninth grade. And actually, I was very interested in this and so I moved [to Finland] and enrolled at the gymnasium, and studied for three years at the gymnasium N” (Katrina). Other interviewees had no choice but to migrate, therefore, they view migration differently now. In one case, a young man takes a positive view of his family’s decision: “It so happened that we moved. There was an opportunity and we moved. Now everyone is happy to live here. Everyone is happy” (Aleksandr). In the second case, a female interviewee expressed her disappointment about not being involved in the decision-making process: “Nobody never asked me whether I wanted to move here [to Finland]. I didn’t have a chance to say what I thought about it, what my feelings were. I was just told—look, Karla, now pack your stuff and let’s go, and that’s it. And I have a feeling that I didn’t even have time to think it all over, I didn’t even understand what was going on when it all happened, and because of this I feel that I want to return” (Karla).

Another interview contains a clearly negative attitude towards the family's decision to leave Russia:

"Answer [Further—A.]: When I sometimes get hysterical, I shout at my dad that I'll give up my Finnish passport (. . .). Question [Further—Q.]: Why does such a thought cross your mind? Answer: Well, because I have the feeling that I'm being kept here, that I'm like in prison here, that I don't like Finland more than I like it. (. . .) my parents took me to Finland just at the stage of education, because they thought that in Finland there was European education and therefore they decided to move here sort of from the very beginning, and I didn't want to go to university here, I would have preferred a university somewhere in Russia, but my parents were against it, so I have a feeling that they are keeping me here, and I said that I wanted to study remotely and be in Russia, but my father and mother were against it" (Inna).

The political motivation to leave the USSR (considered a "nice story" by the interviewee) ranks first among the drivers determining their parents' choice: "My parents initially left the Soviet Union, they travelled the world and ended up in Finland around early 2000s, they already had two children, and then my older brother and I were born" (Alisa). Leaving the USSR required a great deal of courage, as those who wanted to leave this country were considered dissidents, against whom the Soviet regime took particularly harsh measures. The above family managed to leave the USSR through repatriation to Israel. It cannot be excluded that the reason behind the emigration of those who moved to Finland within the aforementioned migration programme was political, but this assumption was not clearly confirmed by the interview data.

Striving for a better life was a significant driver of migration. One would expect to see that migrants leave economically underdeveloped rural territories, but, actually, the poorest sections of the population have neither the money nor skills to access migration channels (Skeldon 2002). Therefore, most of Finland's Russian immigrants have arrived from urban environments, mainly from St. Petersburg and Petrozavodsk, and have settled in the largest cities, with preference given to Helsinki. The interviews with the young people confirmed that the case of their families striving for a better life dominated among the drivers behind their migration. The interviewees mentioned that Finland offers "better wages" (Karla), a "better life" (Lola) and that their parents moved for work (Inna, Lola). It turned out that the group leaders had moved to Finland for employment reasons (Olga, Oleg).

Remarkably, the migration of young people's family members has taken place gradually: "First my granny moved [to Finland]" (Veronika); "My granny is Ingrian, and it turns out she was Finnish before the war. In fact, due to her Finnish roots, my mother could move from Russia to Finland in the 1990s" (Bil). On the other hand, gradual family immigration was also driven by precaution: "My dad moved to Finland all alone first, I think, eight or nine years ago, something like that. He worked here and visited us regularly, and then me and my mum also decided to move here about seven years ago" (Karla).

The desire of young Russian women to marry Finnish men is a reason of a demographic nature driving immigration: "I just understood that it would be difficult for me to find a person for serious relationships in Russia, because my status was very high, and I understood that it would be hard for me to find a person like my ex-husband" (Jana). The interviewee had observed that some female Russian students who study in Finland "find Finnish men, but they are somehow slow to marry" despite the fact that "the girls are smart, they aren't poor, their parents pay for their studies" (Jana).

According to researchers, the most common reasons for emigrating to Finland were reuniting with family (41%), working (32%) and studying (25%) (Varjonen et al. 2017). The empirical data resulting from this study show that political, economic and demographic factors have driven Russian immigration to Finland: young people's families have emigrated from Russia to obtain political freedom, better economic conditions, learning opportunities or to tackle demographic problems. The interviewed young people know the migration stories of their families, and the key driver behind the migration is clear to

them, but their attitudes towards the choice made by their families range from positive to profoundly negative.

4.2. Experienced Self-Identification Problems

Recent scholarship argues that identities are “never fully and finally “established”; instead they are seen always in process, always in a relative state of formation” (Rattansi and Phoenix 2005, p. 105). Contemporary sociology defines identity as “a “moveable feast”; formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems that surround us” (Hall 1992, p. 277). From this perspective, identity is what I tell myself and others, who I am and who others are. This narrative relies on the perception of belonging to a social group: a class, ethnic community, nation, religious movement, etc. The empirical data derived from this study conducted in Finland provide an understanding of how young Russian immigrants explain their identity and how their own self-identification changes at three levels: the ethnic, national and global.

At the ethnicity level, the identity of young Russian immigrants is put on equal footing with their ancestry or education attained in the country of origin: “I consider myself Russian, just a purely Russian girl, (...) my parents are Russian, and I attended a school in Russia for three years” (Inna). Identity is understood as a static phenomenon determined by a person’s cultural background: “I probably identify myself more with Russian culture rather than Finnish culture” (Katrina). Although answers to the interview questions contained some doubts regarding the sustainability of identity, young people tried to overcome them by looking for arguments:

“Q: How do you define who you are? A: I guess I’m Russian. Q: What does this mean in everyday life? A: I even don’t know. . . . For example, when I’m in Russia, I feel at home, even though I was born in Finland, that is, I have Russian culture in me (...). I feel that I’m more Russian than Finnish” (Maria).

In supporting their Russian ethnicity, young people also mentioned other arguments: “I speak Russian with my parents. Most of my friends are Russians, (...) I feel more comfortable with Russian people, and culture is closer to me, the Russian one” (Veronika); “the Russian soul sits in me” (Maria); “I have a Russian mentality” (Inna); “Russian openness is in me” (Aleksandr); “family values are closer to me, the ones taught in Russia rather than those that are here” (Katrina).

Young Russian immigrants were confused and felt that their identity was not stable, i.e., their answers to the question about ethnicity were “I even don’t know” (Karla, Bil). Young people realize that their identity is transforming: “For a while I feel more Russian, and for a while more Finnish” (Anna). Adhering to the view that identity should be stable, an informed choice is made: “When I moved [to Finland], I was a little girl, (...) the Russian girl that lived in me probably started dying slowly, because I mingled with Finnish girls, I got Finnish friends here. But from about the eighth grade, I began to somehow remember that I was still Russian, (...) because it’s not so easy to find a common language with the Finns” (Inna).

In contrast, other respondents did not try to associate their identity with one culture, and their answers to the question about ethnicity were “Russian-Finnish” (Lola); “both Russian and Finnish” (Aleksandr); “half Finn, half Russian” (Bil); “50% of each” (Anna). Self-identification poses a problem for young people—“I feel right at home with strangers and a stranger among my own people” (Aleksandr). This creates a negative experience in emotional terms: “You cannot always be a Russian with Finns and a Finn with Russians” (Bil). According to the interview data, youths’ self-identification depends on the social group they want to belong to: “When I’m in a Finnish company, I always consider myself a Finn, and when I’m in a Russian company, I’m 100% Russian” (Aleksandr).

Significantly, when young people talked about their ethnicity, they tried to quantify it in percentages. Their reference to a quantitative indicator leads to an assumption that young people have analysed in detail or even “weighed” their identity: “I don’t really

know very well, I don't know who I am, and I can't say that I'm purely Finnish or purely Russian, but if I need to express the way I feel in percentages, Finnish culture is closest to me, then probably Jewish, because we have all these festivities, and it is important for me to have a connection with God despite the fact that I'm not a religious person at all, and the last one probably is Russian, because I was not raised in Russian culture" (Alisa). To shed light on her ethnicity, the interviewee has constructed a hierarchy of self-identities, providing reasons for why one identity prevails over the other one.

Young Russian immigrants are aware of the fact that identity is a complex issue. Considering that other people might not understand their "mixed" identity, young people often identify themselves with a country:

"Q: How do you identify yourself when you meet other people, how do you say who you are? A: I sometimes say that I'm half Russian, although I know that this is a difficult thing, because I've never lived in Russia, I've lived in Finland almost all my life. I still feel that Russian culture in me affects my identity, that I sometimes say that I'm half Russian. For example, I don't say I'm Finnish. I say I'm from Finland" (Lermontov).

Reference is made to the country that best suits, outside the country of residence, when identity has to be specified without going into detail about its complex structure:

"Q: What is your answer to the question "who you are" asked in Spain? A: I'm from Finland, and if there are more detailed questions, I, of course, always say that yes, my mum is Russian, my father is Finnish, I speak two languages, but I live in Finland" (Lola).

Without a doubt, family affects youths' self-identification. Although this study did not include interviews with representatives of different generations, the group leader explained that there is a difference between the self-identification of parents and young people: "Of course, we, parents, we feel we are Russians. Russians who live in Finland. Our children are in a completely different situation. (. . .) when they are small, when they depend on the family, when they are still strongly attached to their mum, this is, of course, one issue. When they go to school, some of these problems begin—the problem of understanding whether I want to be Russian or not, whether I want others to understand that I'm different or I don't want others to understand that I'm different. We [in the group] are trying our best to make this transition smoother" (Olga). Russian immigrants in Finland try to address this youth identity problem by engaging young people in the activities of this group dealing with the preservation of cultural traditions. The group leader explained that "everyone has to build his/her identity. If we want to keep this identity and at the same time to merge it harmoniously with this Finnish identity, that is, we are trying to raise, to put it roughly, Finnish citizens who speak Finnish, who have Russian roots" (Olga). Thus, the older generation of immigrants would like young people to identify themselves as Finnish Russians. The interviewed young people confirmed their willingness to preserve their Russian identity: "I don't know if it [Russian identity] can completely disappear, it's still part of how I think, how I see the world. I want to preserve it" (Lermontov).

As to national belonging, young people pointed out the difference between *nationality* and *ethnicity*: "Ethnicity has more to do with some kind of cultural perception and with how a person identifies himself/herself in this society, but nationality (. . .) has to do with the country a person belongs to" (Katrina). Real-life practice has shaped young people's understanding of nationality as a political identity, since all interviewees are Finnish citizens. This means that they have come into contact with the Finnish authorities to which their political belonging has been institutionalized.

The young people with only Finnish nationality regretted they did not have Russian nationality: "When my mum moved to Finland, she only had Finnish nationality, because when she moved there was no possibility to have dual citizenship. But next year following her immigration, it would have been possible. It's a pity that it turned out that way" (Lermontov). This was found regrettable, as it would be easier to cross the Russian border

with a Russian passport. The opportunity to apply for Russian nationality is not used, since “paperwork has to be done, a little difficult” (Anna).

In their answers about national belonging, the young people with dual citizenship were proud of it, first and foremost: “I’m proud that I have two passports, and I consider this a great opportunity” (Bil). Second, these young people stated that they felt closer to the Russian nation due to their short period of being Finnish nationals: “Since I only recently obtained Finnish nationality, most of my life I had only Russian nationality, I identify myself more with the Russian nation” (Veronika). Third, Russian nationality reinforces young people’s conviction that their identity is stable and uniform: “In general, I basically consider myself Russian as a whole. It’s not like my identity is Russian, and nationality is Finnish. I just completely consider myself Russian” (Inna). Fourth, young people have an equally strong sense of belonging to both nations: “I can consider myself a patriot of both Finland and Russia. Both countries. I really love these countries” (Aleksandr). Emotional belonging to both nations is illustrated by an interviewee’s explanation in terms of a hockey match. When Russia plays against Finland, he adopts a neutral position: “If one team wins, I always say that the strongest team won. In any case, I always say our team won” (Aleksandr). Remarkably, with regard to the performance of an individual hockey player, a Russian one is preferred: “I even have a sport shirt of my favorite hockey player. Aleksandr Ovechkin is my favorite one. The most famous hockey player in Russia. Well, and my second favorite hockey player is Teemu Selanne” (Aleksandr).

At the global level, the Russian youth living in Finland identify themselves as Europeans, and their answer to this question is very convincing: “Q: Do you consider yourself European? A: Yes, 100%” (Lola). Only one interviewee confessed that she does not feel like a European: “Well, not really to be honest. I don’t know, I just usually associate Europeans with good English, but I don’t know English very well” (Inna). Other female interviewees also mentioned language proficiency as a criterion determining their belonging to Europe. The logic of their thought is as follows: I know many languages, so I am a European (Karla, Anna).

Shared values (Lermontov), the unity of Europeans (Veronika) and individualism were mentioned as characteristics of Europeans: “We love to be alone and need a lot of space” (Anna). It is apparent from these interviews that Europe is considered as identical to the European Union (EU), i.e., the interviewed young people believe that *Europe* is a political rather than geographical concept. Therefore, the conclusion regarding their belonging to Europe was drawn following this logic: I am a Finnish citizen, Finland is an EU member state, so I am a European (Bil, Aleksandr, Lola, Lermontov). In answering the question as to what it means to be a European, young people mentioned that Europeans “have many rights, many opportunities” (Maria) and “can travel without restrictions, can participate in study exchange programs” (Veronika); “Europeans, they are very free compared to other world. They always have an opportunity to choose what they want compared to, say, Asians, Africans, South Americans, some North Americans” (Aleksandr).

The question of whether the entire Finnish population is European was answered both in the positive and negative. The explanation that “immigrants from other countries outside the European Union, from the Middle East” are not Europeans, as they do not have Finnish citizenship, was followed by the comment “But even if a person has the right to be in a European country, this does not make it possible to become a European” (Veronika). Another interviewee differentiated immigrants according to the duration of their stay in Finland: “Some people who, for example, migrated a very long time ago and are already raising children here, and live for a very long time, have been Europeanized, and they can be called Europeans (...). But the recent waves of migration—I wouldn’t say that they can be called Europeans, I doubt it, unfortunately” (Katrina). “Cultural integration and language learning” (Katrina) were mentioned as means of becoming a European.

It should be stressed that young people were not asked direct questions concerning their political attitudes, but these attitudes emerged from the questions about their European identity. Their replies contained open criticism of the Russian political system:

“Q: Do you consider Russians to be Europeans? A: No, I don’t. It’s probably because of politics. It’s not because of people. If politics in Russia were conducted differently, I could think so, but due to the fact that the man in power in Russia is who he is, and he conducts politics the way he does, not in a democratic way, therefore, I cannot consider such a country Europe” (Bil).

According to young Russian immigrants, a lack of openness and a tacit acceptance of propaganda are the key criteria that do not make it possible to consider Russia’s population Europeans:

“Q: Are Russians Europeans? A: A difficult question. Most probably they aren’t. But it depends on a person. That is, if a Russian person travels a lot around Europe, sees the world, maybe he perceives the world somehow more openly and still lives in Russia, then maybe yes, but a person who has lived all his life in Russia and has been exposed to all this Russian propaganda, I think no, such a person is not a European” (Lola).

It seems that this statement by a young Russian woman living in Finland can only be understood after the 24 February, when Russia invaded Ukraine. Today nobody perceives this statement as an exaggeration driven by youthful hyperbole. The dichotomy between the Russian and the European seen by young people also refers to culture:

“Q: Is Russian culture part of European culture? A: I think it isn’t. Though I don’t know. It seems to me that it is somehow different. Q: What makes it different? A: I feel it’s different, but it’s difficult to say concretely what the difference is. I don’t know. But it seems to me that it is nevertheless... somewhat different” (Anna).

Young people find it difficult to conceptualize that Russian culture belongs to European culture. This is driven by both the concept of *culture*, which is hard to grasp, and by treating Europe like a political union of countries. The empirical data derived from these qualitative interviews suggest that young Russian immigrants are experiencing a very complicated process of self-identification depending, first, on the dynamics between their inherited and obtained identity and, second, on the identity level (ethnicity, nationality, global identity) at which these dynamics are present.

4.3. Experienced Social Exclusion

With immigration from non-EU countries increasing, in Finland “multiculturalism encounters a quite uniform and homogeneous society, constructed according the Nordic welfare model and its ideal of equality” (Kalalahti et al. 2017, p. 1243). During interviews, Russian young people did not talk about the unfavourable positions of their families with regard to income and wealth. They personally have not experienced discrimination in the labour market, although they have noticed that people from their parents’ generation face problems with finding employment in their field of specialization. An interviewee found the situation incomprehensible: “Why do teachers, people of her level, maybe even higher, have to do cleaning jobs? Yes, why?” (Jana). An inability to overcome the obstacles to successfully entering the labour market poses the social risk: “There are people who couldn’t find themselves or who are somehow dissatisfied with this life, maybe they couldn’t find an interesting profession, find some kind of an opportunity” (Vladimir). “The dissatisfied” is the keyword in this case, a constant risk factor in every society.

After arriving in Europe, Russian youth have gained both positive and negative experiences with social contacts: “I was very struck by the kindness and the fact that people were quite open. I’d say that I was probably the lucky one. (...) I know that not everyone in Finland has the same experience as me. There are people who experienced a kind of cold attitude, sometimes even aggression because they were newcomers” (Katrina). The immigration experience of youths depends on their age, and the risk group consists of teenagers who “had difficulties to learn the language, difficulties to join any group. (...) [Their] parents are busy with their own affairs, they tried to get settled, and young people were left alone. If an adult somehow copes with this situation, then young people do not

always understand what is going on” (Vladimir). Young people’s tribulations show that almost all interviewees have had negative experiences at different ages. However, there is a positive element in all stories of these young people’s experiences, i.e., their experience gained during social contact evolves in a positive direction, since young people talked about their negative experience like it was gained in the distant past. An interviewee said that the attitude towards immigrants is changing in Finnish society: “Thank God, it’s getting better, and I’m meeting more and more people who like to meet people like me, that is, people who have other cultures” (Alisa).

Historical memory plays a special role in the attitude towards Russian immigrants. The USSR invasion of Finland (1939) is the most tragic part of Finland’s history in the 20th century. Although Finland managed to protect its independence, a large number of Finns were killed and territories were lost during the Winter War, and this is a historical trauma for the Finns. Russia, as heir to the USSR, is still trying to justify this invasion; therefore, Russian young people experience unpleasant moments during history lessons at school. “When they start talking about Russia, teachers look very meaningfully at children with Russian roots” (Olga). An interviewee has observed that there is “resentment towards the Russian people about what happened—their grandfathers died or somebody else in the war, this is probably the case in many families” (Bill). Also, Russian young people in Finland face negative attitudes from their peers due to current Russian politics: “A boy who himself is not even a Finn called me names. I think he was an Arab. (...) called me Russian, Russian, Putin, Putin. (...) that was not a good thing” (Maria). It should be remembered that the young people were interviewed before the 24 February. It is likely that the situation may have deteriorated following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Young people said they felt marginalized, first, due to the language: “I didn’t go to kindergarten (...), I watched different cartoons and films about friendship, about the fact that people love each other, and then I entered a Finnish-language school (I didn’t have a very good level of Finnish), (...) suddenly I noticed that others looked at me strangely. (...) I was told I was different (...) It was very painful (...)” (Alisa). Second, young people felt they were rejected due to cultural differences, described by an interviewee as follows: “I think a little differently and see the world differently than my friends at school” (Lermontov). In contrast, another interviewee mentioned an everyday situation—friends who were visiting the interviewee “asked what kind of food it was, it was not Finnish, and they didn’t want to eat it, I took offence, and then my mother had to master Finnish cuisine” (Anna).

School is the main place where young Russian immigrants are exposed to humiliation, since they cannot be identified on the street as they are not racially different. The interviewees talked frankly about bullying at school. They have coped with injuries by themselves without seeking help from teachers: “In gymnasium, I was a very emotional girl (...). All tears had to be carried home if something was boiling inside me. I had to run home, and at home you can already show all the emotions” (Katrina). Although Finland has been successful in implementing programs to eradicate bullying at schools, the interviews suggested that this problem has yet to be satisfactorily resolved:

“A: My friend was greatly bullied because she was Russian. Q: On what grounds?

A: I don’t know. Finns just bullied her because she was Russian, that’s it. But she was bullied even more than me. She doesn’t have the best memories” (Maria).

These empirical data reflect the youths’ understanding of the fact that prejudices towards otherness are conceptually the same both in the case of Finns and Russians. The most common Russian stereotypes concerning Finns mentioned by interviewees include “the fact that they don’t talk much, that they drink a lot of alcohol, that Finns are very lazy, soft, one might say” (Aleksandr), “Finns always arrive well before the fixed time, (...) rude” (Karla). Meanwhile, according to the interviewees, Finns think that Russians “deprive Finns of jobs” (Karla), “drink vodka, eat pickles, that bears walk along streets [in Russia]” (Aleksandr). Young people are aware that such stereotypes “humiliate other people” (Veronika), therefore, they express their disapproval of stereotypes.

One would expect that Russian youth who have experienced marginalization would be more open to immigrants from other countries. However, when talking about migration, they emphasized the need to control it: “Migration is not bad, but somehow it needs to be regulated so that it would not be as free as possible and anyone could come here. (...) feeling safe is important” (Aleksandr). When explaining their attitude towards immigrants of other ethnicities, young people often contradicted themselves; for example, an interviewee said in a condemning manner that “[Finnish] society does not love immigrants very much. Everyone wants to keep their Finnish blood, so that it does not mix, so that each country would have its own people” (Veronika). Admitting that “Africans suffer from racism more than Russians” (Veronika), she confessed that she would not like Africans to be her neighbours. The explicitly negative attitude of young Russians towards the Roma has not changed after their arrival in Finland. This attitude has supposedly been inherited from their families. The interviews contained negative statements about the Roma: “(...) they take and give some food to their children in the store, and they go through the checkout without paying for it. They just go through the checkout, and they don’t say anything, they just walk through it. For me it is very wild, how can one not pay for the taken things, just to take them for free. I don’t have a very good attitude towards such people” (Inna).

The empirical data resulting from this study show that the marginalization of Russian youth has not led to segregation. According to the interviews, the key obstacles to reducing marginalization and to the successful integration of Russian youth into Finland are an insufficient proficiency in Finnish and difficulties overcoming cultural distance. Looking forward to a more inclusive Finnish society in the future, young Russian immigrants offered their solution: organize events and implement projects that provide an opportunity for “young people [from different ethnic groups] to meet each other” (Anna).

5. Discussion

The segmented assimilation theory explains that immigrants choose different paths for adjusting to life in their host country as well as adapt differently to various segments of the society. That means that integration proceeds in a different way for different immigrant groups, as it depends on the larger social environment and individual-level group adaptations and behaviours (Portes and Zhou 1993). Segmented theory helps us to understand the process of how the second generation of Russian-speaking immigrants integrates into Finnish society and the factors affecting this integration. As Portes and Zhou (1993) have concluded, there are three possible patterns of integration: first, integration into the economically well-off stratum of the host society; second, downward integration into the low-income stratum; and third, “rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community’s values and tight solidarity” (Portes and Zhou 1993, p. 82). Distinguishing between these different models of “segmented assimilation”, scholars ask an important theoretical question: why do some immigrant communities manage to avoid downward integration while others do not?

The drivers behind global migration—a threat to life due to political repression or war, human trafficking or natural disasters—have not affected the experience of the second-generation Russian-speaking immigrants interviewed during the last months of 2021. They do not know what it means to immigrate alone, as they have arrived in Finland under the shadow of protective parents. Since young people depend on their parents, they had to migrate without their consent, thus unleashing a series of traumatic events of variable severity. Studies of children migration conclude that parents are not usually aware of their children’s vulnerability in the case of migration (Hjern and Jeppsson 2005, p. 119). This also refers to second-generation Russian-speaking immigrants in Finland. Empirical data from this ethnographic study reveal that the migration of Russian youth was driven by their parents’ desire to leave the USSR/Russia, seizing the opportunity to move to the country of their ethnic origin. This emigration was facilitated by strong social imaginaries of a better life abroad. These second-generation Russian-speaking immigrants know that the driver behind their parents’ migration is the improvement of their social and economic status.

Young people do not fully comprehend this driver, as they had no understanding of their social status and economic difficulties before emigration. However, young people still feel they are emotionally linked with Russia (memories about friends, relatives, the cultural environment), and these links become a cause of generational conflict to some extent.

In the case of second-generation Russian-speaking immigrants in Finland, we cannot give in to the concepts of victimhood and psychological trauma that are dominant in research on child migration. That would enable the treating of immigrant youth as passive and traumatized victims who do not exercise their own will and who have no future plans, and this is not consistent with the observations made during this study carried out among Russian immigrants. Migration studies either ignore children or consider them passive appendages of their parents (Whitehead et al. 2005). In Finland, second-generation Russian-speaking immigrants may be conceptualized as active immigration agents who are looking for their place in their new conditions in a targeted manner. This is in line with modern anthropologists' view of children as articulate social actors (Hirschfeld 2002; James 2007, p. 261). If we agree that the acquisition or non-acquisition of nationality is perhaps the most dramatic consequence for children's lifelong prospects, we can conclude that Finnish nationality provides opportunities for second-generation Russian-speaking immigrants to realize their potential and become responsible citizens.

Finland is considered a safe country for immigrants, where they can find a job, support their families and build a future. Therefore, it is assumed that immigrants do not want to return to their country of origin and that they engage in the integration process without difficulties. Such a viewpoint means that the formation of immigrants' cultural identity is regarded as a binary choice: immigrants identify themselves either with the culture of their host country or that of their origin. Moreover, a directly proportional relationship is highlighted: the stronger the connection with the culture of their country of residence, the weaker their connection with their culture of origin. This approach is criticised as over-simplified, since studies on intercultural relations suggest that the process of identity formation involves more sophisticated models (Berry et al. 1992; Berry and Sam 1997; Phinney and Alipuria 1990; Phinney et al. 2001).

By applying segmented theory, migration studies are attempting to identify the segments of society that second-generation immigrants will integrate into. Due to their phenotypic similarity to the mainstream Finnish population, Russian immigrants are not identified as a different race and are not subjected to extensive discrimination. As soon as second-generation Russian immigrants become fluent in unaccented Finnish, they are indistinguishable from the rest of the population. The question remains as to what extent second-generation Russian immigrants want to integrate into the mainstream population and whether they tend to preserve their ethnic identity. The identities of second-generation Russian-speaking immigrants have not been fully and finally established; they are going through a formation process. Recent studies reveal a trend of "the production of 'ethnic' statistics or the statisticalisation of identity and the reductionist emphasis on differences in 'ethnic background' fails to take into account the growing proportion of young people with migrant parents who do not define themselves (at least not initially) by their migrant background" (Behtoui 2021, p. 341). However, this study conducted in Finland shows that the interviewed young people are trying to incorporate the Russian identity into their identity. Their Russian identity was formed in their early childhood in Russia and/or, after their emigration to Finland, in their Russian-speaking families and Russian-speaking groups that keep Russian cultural traditions alive in Finland. Even in cases where parents have immigrated into Finland due to their Ingrian ancestry, young people do not include the term Ingrian in their self-definition; they try to find a place for their Russian identity by defining themselves as Russian-Finnish. With regard to ethnic identity, the youths' narratives contained clear references to belonging, stemming from actual social and cultural practices (participation in Russian cultural groups and groups with religious traditions). Young people do not consider ethnic identity to be "inborn" and static. Youth with a Russian background actively seek various forms of identity and belonging. Moreover,

they often identify themselves situationally, presenting themselves according to different social contexts. In line with modern theoretical frames, identity is not “fixed, immutable or primordial” (Jenkins 2008, p. 19), but it is ever-changing, i.e., it is a dynamic process of self-identification (Hall 2006).

In trying to conceptualise the integration of immigrants into their host society, migration studies have persistently tended to highlight the role of assimilation, i.e., the more successful the move away from the ethnic culture of the immigrants, the more successful their integration into their host society. In this sense, preserving a connection to their culture of origin is seen as an obstacle to integration and a risk of marginalisation. Although the next generation of immigrants were expected to completely abandon their cultural memory, they retained their ethnic attributes, thereby reinforcing the multicultural structure of society. Second-generation Russian-speaking immigrants in Finland try to strike a balance between their desire to preserve the identity of their family roots and that of their host country, the latter being their institutionalized identity in the case of the interviewees, i.e., they have become Finnish nationals.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A. References to Interviewees

- Aleksandr, male, 20 years old, student, was born in Finland, 13 November 2021.
- Alisa, female, 19 years old, student, was born in Finland, 1 December 2021.
- Anna, female, 20 years old, student, was born in Finland, 17 November 2021.
- Bil, male, 34 years old, ITC specialist, 30 years in Finland, 12 December 2021.
- Inna, female, 20 years old, student, 10 years in Finland, 19 November 2021.
- Jana, female, 35 years old, unemployed, 6 years in Finland, 31 October 2021.
- Karla, female, 19 years old, student, 7 years in Finland, 19 November 2021.
- Katrina, female, 23 years old, teacher, 7 years in Finland, 28 November 2021.
- Lermontov, female, 23 years old, student, was born in Finland, 19 November 2021.
- Lola, female, 21 years old, student, was born in Finland, 14 December 2021.
- Maria, female, 19 years old, student, was born in Finland, 10 December 2021.
- Oleg, male, 46 years old, group leader, 8 years in Finland, 10 December 2021.
- Olga, female, 52 years old, group leader, 13 years in Finland, 26 October 2021.
- Veronika, female, 19 years old, school student, 10 years in Finland, 14 October 2021.
- Vladimir, male, 54 years old, group leader, 28 years in Finland, 2 November 2021.

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