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The pursuit of belonging

Identity discourses among Viena Karelian war refugees and their descendants in Finland

1. Introduction

The 20th century World Wars were times of immense displacement, as millions of people were forced to flee their homes all over Europe and seek refuge in other countries. Among the refugees were thousands of Viena Karelians who, between the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the end of World War II between Finland and the Soviet Union in 1944, fled the battles over the state border from the North of the Republic of Karelia in the Soviet Union to Finland.[1] Viena Karelians form the northernmost subgroup of Karelians and traditionally inhabit the northernmost areas of the Republic of Karelia, along with three villages within the Finnish state in Kuhmo and Suomussalmi. Today there are three primary groups of Viena Karelians in Finland: the descendants of the border-village residents, the descendants of merchant families who established themselves in Finland prior to 1917, when Finland was part of the Russian Empire, and refugees, including some elderly individuals who arrived as WWII refugees during their teens or childhood, along with their descendants, as well as the descendants of refugees who arrived during the Russian Revolution and Civil War between 1917 and 1922.

1. In the light of available figures (see Jalagin 2021a: 153 and the sources mentioned there), roughly 20,000 Karelians sought refuge in Finland between 1917 and 1944. Out of those, around 11,200 fled due to the 1922 anti-Bolshevik uprising, with about 5,000

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This paper draws from my ongoing research project, which aims to comprehensively understand what constitutes being Viena Karelian in Finland today. Investigating Viena Karelians in Finland is particularly pertinent to fill research gaps in Karelian studies. While the traditional Viena Karelian cultural heritage, such as rune-singing and lamenting, has been documented and investigated since the 19th century (see, e.g., Paulaharju 1924; Stepanova 2012; 2020; Tarkka 2013) and a great deal of data have been collected and some basic research done on Viena Karelian traditional dialects spoken in the Republic of Karelia (including the descriptive grammars analyzed in Novak et al. 2022), there are significant gaps when it comes to any kind of research-based information on Viena Karelians and Viena Karelian as spoken in Finland. Considerable research has been conducted on various aspects of the history of Karelian-speaking Karelians originating from Border Karelia, the easternmost part of Finland from 1812 to 1944 when Finland was part of the Russian Empire (see, e.g., Sarhimaa 2017: 86–103 and the sources cited there). However, there is a severe lack of comprehensive, systematic investigations into the historical trajectory of Viena Karelians in Finland. Due to the absence of prior research, even the results of the first large-scale case study dedicated to Karelian-speaking Karelians in Finland,[2] conducted within the EU-funded ELDIA project between 2010 and 2013, provided more information about those Karelian speakers originating from Border Karelia who were Finnish citizens and were evacuated, and resettled to other parts of Finland by state authorities during and after WWII (Sarhimaa 2017: 268).

The current paper focuses on the newest layer of Viena Karelians in Finland, war refugees and their descendants, for three primary reasons. The first is to pay tribute to the birthday celebrant Riho Grünthal's Estonian diaspora and refugee identity, which his father nurtured in all his children. Second, the war of aggression initiated by Russia against Ukraine, which began with the seizure of the Crimean Peninsula in February 2014, has continued to escalate. Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine since February 2022 has already forced millions of Ukrainians to flee their homes and seek refuge elsewhere in Europe, including Finland. At the time of the writing of this paper in autumn 2023, there are no signs indicating that the situation will improve

staying and 7,000 returning home by 1924. In the 1930s, few refugees arrived. To my best knowledge, no numbers exist for all WWII Karelian refugees, but about 2,200 are known to have come in 1944 along with the Finnish Army retreating from the regions it had occupied during the Continuation War (Jalagin 2021a: 153). By 1949, around 1,000 Karelian refugees had migrated from Finland to Sweden (Jalagin 2021a: 154).

2. The results of the case study have been reported in Grans 2011; Sarhimaa 2011; 2013; 2016; 2017; and Laakso et al. 2016: 104–111.

soon. The presence of refugees, originating from within Europe, brings the issue of displaced people and its effects close to the European population and makes it acutely relevant all over Europe once again. Third, refugees always find themselves in unfamiliar, often hostile environments, they struggle to cope with displacement and loss, to find their place in the new society, and to make sense of who they are in their new contexts. Refugees' experiences often have long-lasting intergenerational effects, influencing the identities, memories, and even health and well-being of subsequent generations in exile as well (Creet & Kitzmann 2011; Damousi 2015: 222–242; Aarons & Berger 2017; Shore & Kauko 2017). Providing knowledge about the personal and intergenerational impacts of refugee experiences is essential, not only for the present but also for the future of Finland and Europe.

One of the key foci of the ongoing research project on Viena Karelians in Finland is to understand contemporary perceptions of Viena Karelian identity within the community today – what people identify with when they consider themselves Viena Karelians, and what constitutes "being Viena Karelian" to them. In the current paper the scope is intentionally narrow, focusing exclusively on Viena Karelians with a refugee background, and introducing the first and preliminary results from the elementary content analysis, which marks the initial phase preceding the systematic, language-use-oriented qualitative analyses underway to be reported in subsequent publications.

2. Methods of data collection, processing, and content analysis

By now I have studied the Karelian language and its status in Russia and Finland in five different decades. Data collection, processing, and analysis methods have significantly evolved over my research decades, with contemporary qualitative linguistic analyses of interview data demanding greater systematicity (see, e.g., the articles in Ruusuvuori et al. 2010) compared to earlier interview-based studies. During the past two decades or so, I have devoted significant thought to research methods, a reflection also prompted by my role in teaching these methods to sociolinguistics students. One persistent challenge that I see in interview-based studies is that not only analyses but also data collection operates largely with predefined categories chosen by the researcher to explore what they believe is relevant, for instance, to Viena Karelian identity. However, these categories may not align with the interviewee's perspective, and when brought to discussion via the interviewer's questions, they lead interviewees to talk about topics the researcher intended rather than addressing topics relevant, e.g., to their individual identification as Viena Karelian.

Teaching research methods, I have increasingly also come to emphasize that in linguistic interview studies with a hermeneutic goal, the analysis should not be limited to merely describing and generalizing based on what interviewees say verbatim. As linguists we should pay attention to how they talk about things and how the ways language is used in terms of the regularities in lexical and grammatical choices across the data enhance the interpretation of what the data ultimately reveal about the investigated phenomenon.

Considering the above, I have collected, processed, and planned the data analyses for the Viena Karelian project very thoroughly and systematically. To begin, it was crucial that the sample represented all three Viena Karelian groups, allowing me to examine how individuals within the same subgroup construct their identities, and which means connect or differentiate the three groups. After reflecting different options, I chose to collect data from families to be able to investigate how closely connected individuals experience their Viena Karelian identities and their constitutive elements as well as whether and how they circulate the elements of identity construction. In the end, analyzing the results across families and subgroups is expected to reveal the shared means of identity construction among contemporary Viena Karelians in Finland also at the group level.

In 2019–2020, I interviewed ten families, each with three members belonging to different biological generations within the family[3]. The sample contains one family with roots in Finnish-side border villages, two merchant families who settled in Finland before its national independence from the Russian Empire in 1917, two families with a mixed merchant and WW refugee background, and five families with a direct WW refugee background. Three of the refugee families came in 1917–1922, and two during WWII.

I selected and reached the families and the interviewees in various ways. A couple of families were chosen because I knew someone from the family. A couple of families I found via my long-standing connections within the Viena Karelian community in Finland as a researcher investigating Karelian-speaking Karelians. With the rest of the families, I established contact through genealogical networks and events because of their distant kinship with my mother, stemming from her Viena Karelian ancestors, whose roots there that we currently know of date back to the late 18th century. Some interviewees knew that I have investigated Karelians in Finland before, and some did not.

3. I warmly thank the Karelian Educational Society (Fin. Karjalan Sivistysseura), Finland's oldest Karelian organization, founded in 1906 by Viena Karelian merchants and their Finnish supporters, for the financial support to interview-related expenses for my research project.

I conducted a total of 31 interviews instead of the planned 30, because in one family, both parents were Viena Karelians, and I decided to interview both. For various reasons, a direct chain of descending generations was not always available. In two cases, the oldest generation's representative was the middle-generation interviewee's several decades older cousin. In two cases, the oldest generation's representative was a sibling of the middle-generation interviewee's parent. In one case, the youngest generation's representative was their nephew, and in another case, their niece. As eclectic as this selection may seem to an outsider, it mirrors the interviewees' own understanding of their Viena Karelian family, a concept that will be revisited in Section 3.2 below. As some merchant families and families from the Finnish-side border villages received new members when the WW refugees arrived, sometimes family backgrounds are mixed, which explains why the sample from 10 families with three interviewed members each contains a total of 18 interviewees having a direct refugee background.

Seeking to understand how the interviewees perceived me, I recently asked four of them to describe their experience. They do not have any contact with each other, yet all four offered similar feedback: they perceived me as someone with an empathetic connection and genetic ties to Viena Karelians, while maintaining a professional, researcher's approach during the interview. This aligns with my own conception of my researcher's position not as an insider per se, but as someone with extensive and long-standing connections within the group and a keen interest fueled by blood ties to some of its members.

The interviews took place in six geographical regions: in Pohjois-Karjala in the East, Uusimaa in the South, Pohjanmaa in the West, Meri-Lappi in the Northwest, Varsinais-Suomi in the Southwest, and in Pirkanmaa in the central South of Finland. Many interviewees had previously lived in other parts of Finland, up to the Far North of Lapland. The data thus represent lives and experiences of Viena Karelians throughout the country. Through the personal experiences of the oldest interviewees about their parents and grandparents, the data offer perspectives on the lives of family members up to those born in the 1870s.

The interviews were individual interviews, apart from those with a mother and her son who were so interested in the research project that they were largely present at each other's interview sessions. I chose individual interviews, because I wanted in-person face-to-face interactions with the interviewees, and due to the geographic distance between family members, group interviews were not feasible given our time and budget constraints. Furthermore, while group interviews could have offered interesting insights into identity discourses in family interactions, individual interviews allowed

each participant to express their views independently, free from potential immediate control or interference by other family members.

The total duration of the interviews was slightly over 48 hours, and the length of the interviews varied from about 40 minutes to nearly three hours, depending on the talkativeness of the interviewees. On average, each interview lasted 1 to 1.5 hours.

The interviewees received a handout that explained the project and their rights as interviewees and requested their consent to record the interview and use the data for the project and for authorized research after its completion. All of them provided written consent. The interviews and their transcripts will be stored on Zenodo (https://zenodo.org/), a universal repository for all research outcomes, including large datasets. In 2022, I established the Multilingual Karelians: Research Data repository on Zenodo. This repository already contains the audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews I conducted in the Seesjärvi region of the Republic of Karelia and in the Tver area in the Russian Federation in the 1980s and 1990s.

At the time of the interviews, the youngest interviewees were 15 years old and the oldest well over 90. Among the interviewees, there were 17 women and 14 men. To protect the interviewees' privacy as members of a numerically small minority group where most people know each other to some extent, publishing any personal information on the interviewees or their family relationships is not possible. In reporting, I will provide only their birth years and the pseudonyms they chose, from which one can infer their age and typically their gender as either male or female. Based on my current knowledge, however, neither of these variables appears relevant to my focus or objectives. Gender does not appear to influence the topics that the interviewees brought up, as both women and men discussed the same themes roughly equally. The demographic variable of age presents challenges due to the families' diverse settlement times in Finland. Comparing individuals of the same age group or biological generation becomes complex, because, even if they are of the same age, interviewees may belong to different generations in terms of the time their families have lived in Finland. Defining generations in the Viena Karelian dataset is not straightforward, and finding a solution requires additional results from data analysis.

The data collection utilized the systematic sociolinguistic methods detailed in this and subsequent paragraphs. I used two background questionnaires that the interviewees filled out at the beginning of the interview session on paper by hand. To ensure anonymity, at this stage everyone selected a pseudonym for use in identifying questionnaires and for later reference during the interviews. The first questionnaire collected personal information that could become useful in interpreting the data, including the interviewees' age,

educational background, places of residence, work history, parents, and their own descendants. I also asked them to list Viena Karelian surnames in their family to assess their knowledge of family history and potentially identify broader kinship networks within the sample families. The second questionnaire asked interviewees about their ethnic identity, offering three options: Finn, Viena Karelian, or both. In retrospect, it would have been good to also provide the option "none of these" and an open-ended question option "other" with a possibility for additional comments. This questionnaire also inquired about their self-estimated active and receptive language skills in Viena Karelian.

The questionnaires and the interviews were in Finnish, but at times, the oldest interviewee switched to Viena Karelian, and some other interviewees sometimes used isolated Viena Karelian words or short phrases. The language choice was Finnish from the outset because I know Viena Karelian only at a very basic level and because it is common knowledge that the Viena Karelians living in Finland have largely lost their active proficiency in the ethnic language (Jeskanen 2005: 249, 259; Sarhimaa 2017: 268). Based on background questionnaires, only three of the interviewees assessed themselves as "proficient" or "fairly proficient" in Viena Karelian, while most reported not speaking it at all. In my estimation, most likely only the oldest interviewee would have been able to engage in comprehensive and nuanced discussions in Viena Karelian on all the interview topics.

To achieve views as objective as possible, it was crucial to try to avoid feeding the interviewees with a priori categories and researcher's wordings. Following the narrative interview method developed by the German sociologist Fritz Schütze in the mid-1970s,[4] I began each interview by asking the interviewee to provide an autobiography, inviting them to share whatever they wished about the course of their life starting with the day they were born to the day of our interview. The aim was not to document life stories per se, but I was interested in whether the interviewees spontaneously connect being

4. Eliciting narratives by asking interviewees to discuss highly emotional and life-changing events, such as being in life-threatening situations, has been a widely used data collection method in sociolinguistics since the early studies of its founder, William Labov, in the 1960s (see Labov 1966; Labov & Waletzky 1967). Schütze's strictly structured and refined narrative interview method that I have now employed was developed to collect life stories to uncover how individuals interpret and make sense of their own life stories. The method comprises three subsequent interview phases: an opening that encourages respondents to narrate their life story in a monologue without any interruptions from the interviewer, a follow-up section for the interviewer's questions related to what the interviewee has talked about, and an evaluation part for achieving generalizations and posing "why so" questions. The method is briefly explained in Schütze 1983: 285.

Viena Karelian to their life narratives, and if they do, what they connect and how. The interviewees knew that I was starting a project on Viena Karelians in Finland and that was why I wanted to interview them. Nevertheless, to my surprise, many interviewees did not speak about Viena-Karelianness or related experiences in this narrative life story segment at all. The reasons for this remain unexplained at this stage of the study, but I hope to find explanations through further analyses.

The interview continued as a semi-structured thematic interview, with which I aimed to deepen the discussion about the interviewee's relationship to being Viena Karelian and to Viena Karelian as a language. There were questions designed to map the emotional side of the language awareness regarding Viena Karelian, so that I could get an idea of how, if at all, Viena Karelian has been present in the interviewees' lives. We first discussed the language landscapes of the interviewee's childhood, school days, adulthood, and today. To avoid leading the interviewee too much, I did not ask directly, e.g., if they spoke Viena Karelian in their everyday life, but we discussed language(s) and dialect(s) spoken in the interviewee's childhood family, at school, at the workplace, in their own family, and area(s) of residence.

The next section elicited language attitudes using the language biography method developed in the German-language teaching research of the 1990s (see Busch 2006; 2018). The interviewee received twelve different color pens and a human figure drawn on paper; I told them that this is now you, and then I asked them to choose a pen and to color in the point on the human figure where the language lives in them, which the interviewee had mentioned first in our conversation. All the languages mentioned by the interviewee were reviewed in this way. The interviewees usually spontaneously explained why they chose a certain color and place when coloring; if not, I asked, e.g., why is Viena Karelian green to you? Why does Finnish live in the chest?

I also wanted to use the interviews to gather data for studying the diversity and changes in identities throughout a person's life. Therefore, towards the end, we discussed the presence and influence of being a Viena Karelian in the interviewee's life across various life stages. I asked what it means to them that a person or thing is Viena Karelian, if their definition of being Viena Karelian has changed over the course of their life, and if so, when, why, and how. We also talked about what being Viena Karelian, as defined by the interviewee, means to them personally, and what they think it meant to their parents and grandparents, and means for their children and grandchildren. I also asked if the interviewee remembered situations in which they felt particularly Viena Karelian, and situations in which they did not want or dare to bring being Viena Karelian to the fore. Finally, we discussed the interviewee's views on the future of being Viena Karelian in Finland.

By the time of the writing of this paper, all interviews had been fully transcribed using a simplified GAT 2-based transcription system.[5] The first data analysis step involved a thorough content analysis of the entire data, with one of the aims being to identify discourses where the interviewees construct their identities as Viena Karelians. Building upon the standard definition of 'identity' in contemporary sociolinguistics and sociology,[6] I understand Viena Karelian identities as multidimensional, multi-layered, fluid, dynamic, and contextually and temporally situated identifications as Viena Karelian. This definition serves as the foundational framework for analyzing Viena Karelians' identity construction as a complex process that takes place within discourses and unfolds through in-depth analyses of grammatical and lexical choices that people have made in the discourses.

The content analyses proceeded as follows. I initiated the process by closely reading all of the interviews, establishing an inductive coding framework based on categories emerging directly from the data. The researcher's prior knowledge can influence the identification of themes, even in an inductive and open-minded approach. I have consciously worked to mitigate the impact of my pre-existing understanding of Karelianness which derives from the contexts of Karelian-speaking and Finnish-speaking war evacuees. From the start, I made a conscious effort to set aside any preconceived assumptions concerning what constitutes being Viena Karelian in Finland. This process began during the preparation of data collection tools, as mentioned earlier. Additionally, I intend to conduct a focus group interview with a few of the interviewees to seek their input on my interpretations later in the project. Throughout the project, I have also consistently and transparently documented the research process, thereby showcasing the rigor of the methodology and the reasoning behind the methodological decisions.

While reading, I tagged instances where the interviewee engaged in identity construction. I assigned preliminary category names to these places and then employed the names to other places which appeared to fall under a category that I had already established earlier. To maintain consistency and

5. GAT 2 is a revised version of the discourse and conversation-analytic transcription system GAT (*Gesprächsanalytisches Transkriptionssystem*) that was launched in German conversation analysis and interactional linguistics in 1998; for the principles of minimal transcript, see, e.g., Couper-Kuhlen et al. 2011: 8–18.

6. The contemporary identity concept that gained prominence in sociolinguistic research around the turn of the 1990s and 2000s (see, e.g., De Fina et al. 2006) draws from modern sociology: identities are multidimensional, multi-layered, fluid, and dynamic senses of self that are shaped by experiences, beliefs, and values, and are influenced by social, historical, economic, and cultural factors (see Hall 1990; 1992; 1996; Giddens 1984; 1991; Bhabha 1994; Sen 2006).

track the categorization criteria across the dataset, I recorded all category names and criteria in an Excel table. After analyzing a few interviews, I reorganized the categories, merging some into broader categories and renaming them as needed. I then applied these categories to the remaining interviews, adding new categories when needed. After analyzing and coding all the interviews, I examined the data using the categories to explore their relationships and how they could be combined into discourse themes. These themes were grouped under broader categories, which I will refer to as 'discourses'.

Section 3 below presents the two major identity discourses emerging in the interviews with refugee-background Viena Karelians, focusing on the themes and topics frequent within them. Due to space constraints and the need for having results from the analysis of language usage patterns before drawing more general and far-reaching conclusions, I do not provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of these contexts themselves, nor do I compare the refugee results with those concerning the other two Viena Karelian groups in Finland. I also refrain from making comparisons with previous studies related to Karelians in Finland or other minority groups in Finland or elsewhere.

All these decisions are deliberate. The experiences of Finnish-speaking and Karelian-speaking evacuees have been investigated with varying foci (e.g., Waris et al. 1952; Sallinen-Gimpl 1994; Raninen-Siiskonen 1999; Fingerroos 2007; 2013; Kananen 2010; Neuvonen-Seppänen 2020), while Viena Karelian refugee experiences in Finland have been only foregrounded in a few academic studies, including Hyry (2011), Kyyrönen (2013), and Jalagin (2021a; 2021b). Regardless of how widely some of the experiences may be shared by other Karelians or other groups of people, for my Viena Karelian interviewees, they are unique, very personal, intimate, and often marked by pain. I want to pay respect to that by treating their experiences as such at this early stage of publishing about the ongoing Viena Karelian project. Adhering to my inductive methodological approach, I also want to keep the interpretation open for now concerning the extent to which the experiences of refugee Karelians and Karelian evacuees can ultimately be considered identical and how they may possibly differ from each other. Differences underneath the similarity at the surface may arise, for instance, because the evacuees' displacement was state-internal and, though triggered by the war, was managed by government actions, while, by contrast, both the arrival of refugees over the state border from a very different society and their settling in Finland happened in more chaotic circumstances.

3. Displacement and the struggle for belonging

Based on the results of the content analyses, there are two repeatedly emerging major identity discourses in the interviews. I have named these "Discourses of displacement and deprive" and "Discourses of longing and belonging". Each of these two major discourses entails recurring discussion topics, through which the depiction of the components of Viena Karelian identities in Finland today becomes more precise.

3.1. Discourses of displacement and deprive

Despite 80 years having passed since the end of WWII, a considerable number of interviewees, mostly born and raised in Finland, sometimes still feel displaced and uncomfortable in what they experience as environments hostile to being Viena Karelian. These range from leisure activities to work. For example, according to what Lilja told, her appearance, which is atypical for Finns and inherited from her Viena Karelian great-grandmother, has repeatedly led to unpleasant encounters:

> "Different situations. For example, sometimes in a bar someone has been like what Russian whore do we have here? [Interviewer: What did you say?] Well at least to those Russian whore comments that yeah, yeah, yes, yes, just that" (Lilja, 1986, 36).[7]

While Lilja shared her experiences in nightlife, Paro reported the following workplace encounter that led to permanent discomfort related to revealing her Viena Karelian heritage throughout her professional life:

> "When I worked at the University of Helsinki there was another student assistant with whom I talked, and they seemed to know quite a lot about things related to the Soviet Union. I said that my roots are in Russia, in Viena Karelia. [––], and they became very weird towards me after that. [––] So [I understood that] maybe I should not boast about my roots even here at the university". (Paro, 1961, 13–14.)

The discourse topics often relate to what people know about their family's pre-migration experiences that led people to seek refuge in Finland in the first place, and about their escape journey fraught with danger and difficulty. Once

7. Since this paper is not concerned with any linguistic analysis, to save space, I only provide interview quotes as edited content-translations from Finnish into English. The source references (e.g., Lilja, 1986, 36) include the interviewee's pseudonym (Lilja), year of birth (1986), and the page number for the quotation in the transcript (36).

in Finland, those who had relatives or friends already living there often settled with them, while others ended up in refugee camps. Over time, most Viena Karelian refugees found a new home somewhere in Finland. A recurrent topic is the socio-economic challenges and difficulties people experienced when settling in Finnish society. Like many other interviewees in her age cohort, Eijuska, who was good at school, had to leave it at the age of 14 to work first as domestic help taking care of several small children. Soon she became a shop assistant although she still was so small that she needed to stand on a chair to reach over the shop counter. Ever since, for her "It was work, work, and work." (Eijuska, 1945, 4.) Life in post-war Finland was characterized generally by hardship and hard work, impacting the native Finns and the evacuated Karelians as well. However, several interviewees talked about how they believe that as stateless refugees, Viena Karelians faced even greater challenges than Finnish citizens, stressing how restricted employment options constrained their career advancement and how children had to contribute to their family's financial support soon after completing compulsory education, which additionally limited their prospects for further advancement, including higher education.

In addition to limited education opportunities, Viena Karelian refugees have suffered from structural inequality, which left them at a disadvantage compared to Finns and Karelian-speaking evacuees from Border Karelia. These were Karelians who had Finnish nationality prior to the war and whom the state systematically resettled in various parts of Finland, also paying compensations for the property that they had left behind in the regions Finland had to surrender to the Soviet Union in 1944. (Waris et al. 1952: 86–133). Between 1918 and 1958, Viena Karelian and other refugees received assistance from refugee welfare (see Nevalainen 1999: 104–126), but as citizens of the Soviet Union, they were not entitled to the compensations that the evacuees received. One of the discourse topics raised by several interviewees is that refugees and their offspring feel being Karelians of the lowest value in Finnish society:

> "The long-term frustration that the Viena Karelians are considered worse than other Karelians even today in Finland. The Karelians that came last [as evacuees] are better. They have always been treated better and even society has participated with its repressive policy even after the wars" (Mikko, 1955, 63).

Almost all interviewees talked about the fear of being returned to the Soviet Union which shadowed them in the 1920s and 1930s (see Nevalainen 1999: 58–103) as well as in the post-WWII decades (see Kyyrönen 2013: 46–61). Some recounted what they had heard about extreme cases of, e.g., mothers returned with numerous children who ended up in Siberia or worse, but most talked about their own or their family members' experiences:

> "When a black car drove in the middle of the village, dad always left home and went somewhere in the woods. And granny said dad is afraid he'll be returned [to the Soviet Union]". (Airila, 1947, 30–32.)

A further recurrent topic in the displacement discourses is the legal and administrative challenges of living in Finland as a stateless person, or as a holder of a Nansen passport, a certificate issued by the League of Nations in the 1920s and 1930s to provide identification and protection for stateless refugees and displaced persons who were unable to obtain regular passports (see, e.g., Hieronymi 2003). For Viena Karelian refugees, the Nansen passport was a significant financial investment, as it had to be renewed every five years, which might explain why quite a few people I learned about through the interviews remained aliens without any nationality at all until the end of their lives.

The immediate social contexts and networks have been important in shaping the experiences of Viena Karelian refugees in Finland. While many refugees struggled to find support and resources, particularly in the early days of their settlement, my interviewees' family memories of Finns who had received Viena Karelian refugees kindly and with respect are rare, while they all talked about various forms of hostility from neighbors, colleagues, authorities, and even their Finnish in-laws. When discussing intra-family tensions reflecting the outright hatred of the Finnish relatives towards the Viena Karelians, whom they perceived as enemies, even though these Viena Karelians had fled the enemy they actually shared with Finns, Airila recalled how she and her siblings "were not allowed to visit [the non-Karelian] grandmother in that house on the side of the road we walked up and down to school every day." (Airila, 1947, 6).

Several recurring discourse topics revolve around the difficulties arising from cultural disparities between Viena Karelians and Finns. One of those is discrimination due to practicing the Orthodox religion. Eijuska (1945, 16) remembered how "the neighbors didn't come to grandpa's [Orthodox] funeral, and none of them visited granny afterwards ever again", and Paro (1961, 37) recalled how her peers at the local parish youth group once made their judgment about Viena Karelians clear by stating that "If the end of the world came now, all the rest of us would go to heaven, but Paro would stay here".

Regardless of their age, most of my interviewees shared their experiences of others referring to Viena Karelians by the derogatory term *ryssä* 'Russian'. Discrimination experiences have caused intergenerational traumas, whose effects on health and well-being were raised as a discussion topic by many interviewees. Airila (1947, 28) analyzed her father's and her own experiences, and their life-long personal consequences as follows:

> "It has affected my life a lot that my dad came from Viena Karelia, because he came to such a small archipelago village that is extremely narrow-minded and prejudiced. We were beaten and discriminated against a lot. [––] He was so Russian-looking, a Karelian charmer, tall, skinny, dark, and lovely. But so often bullied, at work as well. [––] That's discrimination. And, of course, based on that "ryssä". [––] But to fully understand how such bullying can affect a person's entire life. School bullying. And childhood bullying."

Yet another central discourse topic emerging from the interviews is intergenerational silence and identifying as a Viena Karelian via the shared experience of having been deprived of knowing one's roots. Pena (1947, 7) shared his experiences of the concealed origin and history of his family:

> "Mom spoke Karelian until the end of her days. But I remember her life being shrouded in complete silence. And what I've understood afterwards is that there must have been some unbelievable fear in the family. A lot of people asked my mom about things and, if she replied she only very quietly discussed those things, and I understand that it was the fear, which was the fear of being taken somewhere or something bad that might happen. I don't remember there having been many of these conversations. My son started interviewing his granny in her late days. And I've regretted that I didn't realize sooner. I was in a situation again that I was not interested. I was an Ostrobothnian stubborn guy and that was enough for me. For some weird reason, I felt I had to protect myself. As it wasn't talked about, I became like that, too. I'm not interested. That is how I assume it in retrospect."

The culture of silence became an ingrained practice across generations in many families. Multiple interviewees conveyed their belief that this practice has posed challenges to identifying as Viena Karelian, and in certain instances, such as Pena's, it has become a significant obstacle to embracing their Viena Karelian heritage. Like Pena, several of the interviewees also deeply mourned the fact that so much family-related information has been lost. Like Pena's son, many have worked hard to uncover the history of their family, and their genealogy research is a recurring topic brought up by the interviewees.

Another recurrent discourse topic in the interviews is that when the right to know about the family history has been taken away, the right to the building blocks of one's Viena Karelian identity, including access to the ancestral language, was deprived as well. The interviews support the view that the Viena Karelian language has been rarely passed on to the second generation and even less frequently to the third generation (see, e.g., Jeskanen 2005: 249,

259, and Sarhimaa 2017: 268). A few fortunate individuals talked about how they had acquired the language. One of them is Matvei (born in 1957), who learned Viena Karelian from his father. Another is Ossippa (born in 1971), who learned it from his grandmother. Even today, these two friends frequently converse in Viena Karelian. Although none of their children have become active speakers, like many other interviewees, in the background questionnaire they rated their receptive Viena Karelian skills as quite good. The findings from the language biography section of the interviews further corroborated the notion that even in the absence of proficient language skills, Viena Karelian continues to hold a special place in the hearts of contemporary Viena Karelians in Finland. During the final segment of the interview, too, when I inquired about what being a Viena Karelian is today in Finland, almost all interviewees mentioned the ancestral language as a key point of identification.

3.2. Discourses of longing and belonging

Based on the interviews, first-generation Viena Karelian refugees remained in a state of emotional limbo, torn between the desire to return home and the need to settle down and establish a sense of belonging in their new environments. As demonstrated above, Viena Karelians' right to belong has frequently been challenged or even denied, which may explain why the yearning for belonging and the pursuit thereof play a significant role in the identity construction of subsequent generations born in Finland as well. In the discourses of longing and belonging there are four primary topics that served as key sites for constructing one's Viena Karelian identity: customs and cultural heritage, longing for the feeling of being at home, kindreds and lineage, and family history.

Identification with Viena Karelian customs and cultural heritage emerged prominently during the interviews, primarily through discussions on life values and qualities perceived as Viena Karelian. This included hospitality, generosity, friendliness, care for others, helpfulness, and the warmth of Viena Karelian people compared to Finns.

Another common discourse topic revolves around objects brought from Viena Karelia by ancestors, often displayed as tangible reminders of Viena Karelian heritage. When reflecting on the significance of these objects as carriers of her Viena Karelian identity today, Iro (1932, 15) confessed that as a child, she hadn't fully grasped the value of the few remaining items her family had managed to bring from Viena Karelia:

> "It's granny's shawl, she gave it to mom. But I ruined it. During the war I had taken the shawl and nailed it to the wall as a wall hanging, with wickedly large nails which made big holes in the shawl." (Iro, 1932, 15)

Some interviewees also showed me objects they had acquired as souvenirs from their own trips to Viena Karelia, prompting interesting discussions about their connection to the owner's Viena Karelian identity.

A recurring topic in the longing and belonging discourses is the perceived strong connection to Viena Karelia as a place. While most second- and third-generation Viena Karelians considered Finland as their homeland, some felt that some sort of "true home" is still in Viena Karelia: "There I felt that I am at home here, that it is so good to be here." (Iro, 1932, 55.) The generations' overarching inclination to glorify the ancestral homeland that has been lost for so long was also depicted by Ronja (1992, 5) whose "Granny just talked about something that her granny had always recalled, some sandy beaches and fishy lakes and berries in the forest, that there had been so much more of everything there [in Viena Karelia]."

Despite a certain mystification of the past, the interviewees have a very realistic picture of Viena Karelia today as a marginalized region, whose economic and societal problems are a recurrent discourse topic, too. The collapse of the Soviet Union made it easier to travel between Finland and Viena Karelia than before, and almost every interviewee had visited their family homelands at least once. As Alexandra (1965, 16) explained, the mythical Viena Karelia is often contrasted with the Viena Karelia of today:

> "Mom is totally carried away now, she must get there every year, the atmosphere there is so -, so. I may not be quite so excited, but I like to go there too. I do experience the spirit of those most beautiful poetry villages somehow, it's like there -. But it's a bit ambiguous, as on the other hand, it's quite depressing there. Those who live there now, and especially the younger people, and adults, don't have any work for example, and in a way, like some of the buildings are a bit rotten and there are a lot of maybe alcoholics and things like that, you don't have such terribly rosy visions of life."

Except for three interviewees belonging to the same nuclear family where both parents were Viena Karelians and one of them only has lived in Finland since getting married, when constructing their Viena Karelian identities, the interviewees usually identify with Viena Karelia "back then".

In Viena Karelian families, there were usually many children in all generations, which is why the kin also have many members in exile. The interviewees' primary object for identification as Viena Karelians is their extended family (in Karelian: *heimo*), which, in contrast to *pereh* 'family' (KKS s.v. *pereh*), refers to the family as a 'clan' or a 'tribe' (KKS s.v. *heimo*). A frequent discourse topic in the interviews is how *heimolaiset* 'kinfolk' were the only ones who knew who people really were and where they came from and why,

and how the kindreds stuck together and helped each other for better or worse. The terms *heimo* and *heimolainen* cover a very widely understood extended family not only in generations back in time but also on both sides of the border between Finland and Russia. Visits to and from relatives across the border are frequently discussed in the interviews. As the earlier quote from Alexandra illustrates, for many interviewees, these visits have played an essential role in strengthening their Viena Karelian identities. Since the Russian mass aggression in Ukraine in February 2022 gradually closed the Finnish-Russian border, the connections have been greatly limited and for many completely cut off.

Many interviewees' awareness of their family lineage extends far, up to ten generations ago, which is one of the factors that has held the Viena Karelian community together in exile: people know their kin and who belongs to them now and who belonged before. Knowing one's lineage is a part of family history and therefore important for identity construction. As Emil (2001, 19) explained, identifying as Viena Karelian today means belonging to the chain of generations and respecting family heritage:

> "Being Viena Karelian means a lot to my father, and my father means a lot to me, so being Viena Karelian means a lot to me, too. I feel myself like it's 25 percent Viena Karelian."

While there are some published Viena Karelian family histories, it is important to note that, as is mostly the case with minorities, the broader history of the minority is primarily transmitted orally only. Written history, on the other hand, tends to remain silent about minority experiences, focusing on the majority, especially the dominant or victorious groups who wield the power to shape the national Grand Narrative. In the interviews with Viena Karelians, knowledge about past generations and their lives are passed down from one generation to another often in a fragmented form in everyday communication, e.g., as anecdotes circulating in the family or brief statements about something that had once happened to someone in the family. The interviews also contain several identity-constructing family Grand Narratives, of which family members belonging to different generations all gave me their own versions and which some interviewees explicitly said still impact the lives of family members today. These narratives offer the framework for understanding the world from where people had to escape and how that world had broken them and made them vulnerable. A frequent topic emerging from them is deeply traumatic experiences inherited across generations. What people talked about often revolved around violent incidents during the war or back in Viena Karelia, such as partisan attacks or the harrowing account of a young father and his baby being shot at home while sitting in a rocking chair, shared with me by Iro (1932, 38–39), Mikko (1955, 7–8), and Lilja (1986, 12).

4. Concluding remarks

This paper gives an overview of two prominent categories of identity discourses derived from interview data and offering a versatile perspective on the shaping of contemporary Viena Karelian identities in Finland. The Displacement and deprive discourses center on constructing identity based on a sense of otherness in exile, while the Discourses of longing and belonging explore the search for a collective sense of belonging and the delineation of "we". Altogether the findings highlight the significance of knowing, remembering, and the pursuit of belonging in understanding the complex processes of identity construction in exile communities.

The discourses emerging from the interview data and their characteristic topics emphasize the importance of knowing and remembering in identity construction in many ways. To be able to identify with something, one must know about it at least a bit. In the interviews, knowledge about being Viena Karelian is primarily shared in recollections concerning family history and one's individual memories. In Assman's (2011: 41) memory model, this type of remembering is called the communicative memory. To a lesser extent, Viena Karelian identity construction also draws from the other type of collective memory as defined by Assman, i.e., cultural memory, which extends beyond living memory far into the shared Viena Karelian history.

The more widely conceived Karelian identity, primarily based on the Karelian language, which has been on the rise in Finland since the 2010s, did not emerge in these interviews conducted in 2019–2020 as an element of refugee Viena Karelians' ethnic identity. Based on the interviews, they primarily acquire the building blocks of their contemporary Viena Karelian (refugee and refugee-background) identities from other, typically older, family members. In the process, the Discourses of longing and belonging transmit positive cultural memory knowledge of belonging together with other Viena Karelians and having had a "true" home in Viena Karelia, while the Discourses of displacement and deprive carry forward negative communicative memory knowledge of discrimination and having been denied the right of belonging.

The common denominator in both major types of identity discourses is the universal human pursuit of a sense of belonging. Displacement and deprive discourses depict the profound anguish endured when individuals are denied the right to belong, forced to leave their homes for the unknown, and be faced with rejection for who they truly are. By contrast, the longing and belonging discourses reflect the quest for acceptance and appreciation, seeking solace and connection within the broader context of collective heritage. The Viena Karelian refugee-background interviewees' efforts to forge connections helps them to achieve the desired sense of rootedness and empowers them to construct their identities as Viena Karelians in Finland today.

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