

How do Locals in Finland Identify Resident Foreigners?

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Abstract

This study examines the identification by Finns of foreign residents in Finland by analyzing data from a representative sample survey carried out in 2002. When people were asked to name a group of foreigners residing in Finland, the majority first mentioned Somalis, despite the fact that only 4 percent of foreign residents are Somali and 6 percent of foreign-language speakers speak Somali. The general tendency when identifying resident foreigners is to refer primarily to ethnic or national groups; references to status (e.g. refugee, return migrant, guest worker) or religion (e.g. Muslim) are rare in the survey. In terms of ethnicity, identifying foreign residents in Finland is inconsistent, particularly as Russians and Estonians, the two largest groups, are not readily seen as foreign residents. The prevalence of answering 'Somalis' could be considered an outcome of the maximally visible difference between Finns and Somalis. A logistic regression analysis is used to examine whether identifying resident foreigners differs according to socio-economic and educational characteristics, age, gender, region, and attitude towards the number of resident foreigners in Finland. The variables that significantly influence the probability of answering 'Somalis' and 'Russians' are the respondent's region, age, attitude towards the number of foreign residents in Finland, and to some extent, gender and higher education. Respondents' occupational status, vocational education or income does not have a significant impact on the answers. Regional differences appear to be a major factor affecting how foreigners are identified, which shows that although the need to consider resident foreigners as visibly, culturally and linguistically maximally different may be a nearly universal base line for creating difference and identity, identifying foreign residents in Finland is not entirely independent of demographic realities.

Keywords: Immigration, stereotypes, regional differences, Somalis

Introduction: The need to make distinctions

People everywhere differentiate; group membership is created through images of 'us and them' and, consequently, identity is essentially relational (Hall 1999, 1997). Making distinctions is part and parcel of cultural self-identification, as it is impossible to construct a conscious image of oneself without a counterpoint. What constitutes the determining and most relevant feature of difference, however, may differ from place to

place. In some contexts, the most important source of difference may be language, in others marriage practice, religious denomination, customs related to food, or physical characteristics. In a society such as Finland, long been characterized by an ideology of homogeneity, immigrants may eventually come to take the place of the elemental, 'culturally alien' groups previously represented by the Roma and the Sami, the country's indigenous ethnic minorities.

In social sciences, this tendency to create difference has been explained through a number of theoretical frameworks: in various lines of structuralist thought it is through to reflect naturally-occurring, binary opposition that is ingrained in the structure of language itself or in the structure of communicative action. In anthropology, difference is based on the symbolic construction of borders in social life and in the universal tendency to categorize. In the psychoanalytical tradition, the idea of difference is ingrained in the development of the human psyche and is thus reflected in all human interaction (Woodward 1997). Evolutionary psychologists maintain that in-group versus out-group action is an innate characteristic of the human species (Thienpont & Cliquet [eds.] 1999).

No matter which theoretical point of view we consider the best explanation for the human need to differentiate, the fact remains that differentiating and constructing stereotypical identifications of the Other, in one form or another, appears to be a universal human tendency. The forms and repercussions of the constructions of the Other are nevertheless not self-evident, but vary from one context and situation to another. Stereotypes may lead to prejudice, discrimination and even violence, while in some contexts they take more benign forms, enabling constructive interaction through which stereotypes are also transformed. In complex, multicultural societies the desirable state of affairs would be to downplay difference and reduce rigid stereotypes.

In the present world, interaction between different groups of people – in all senses of 'different' – is intensifying at an unprecedented pace. As Jonathan Friedman (1994) has pointed out, part of the process of global connectedness is not, paradoxically, cultural homogenization, but a conscious need to emphasize cultural specificity and create difference. Finland, along with the rest of the world, has been undergoing a rapid rise in immigration since the beginning of the 1990s: the number of foreign residents quadrupled in twelve years (Statistics Finland 2006). Receiving immigrants, who look different, speak a foreign language, and often come from very different social and cultural backgrounds, prompted growing intolerance in public attitudes towards foreign migrants, especially in the first half of the 1990s, although attitudes have more recently returned back to the level of the pre-recession time (Jaakkola 2005; Söderling 1997; Söderling 1999). The influx of 'return migrants' with Finnish ethnic ancestors from Russia and Estonia and large groups of Somali and former Yugoslavian refugees coincided with a severe economic recession and spiralling unemployment. It is important to pay close

attention to the ways in which the general public perceives people who come to Finland, because discrimination and prejudice profoundly affect the possibilities and modes of integration of the newcomers (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2002). Thus, studying stereotypes and how foreigners are identified in the eyes of the native population is both ethically and practically vital in a situation where immigration continues to grow.

This article examines the extent to which the identification of resident foreigners is affected by socio-economic differences. It also studies attitudes towards immigration and analyses the extent to which those attitudes reflect the actual regional composition of the immigrant population. Specifically, the prevalence of the commonly held stereotype that resident foreigners are Somali will be examined, as will the rationale behind the persistence of this identification, despite the changing migration scenario in Finland.

The underlying questions of cultural difference and the stereotypes of the Other that this article builds on are theoretical and have been mainly studied in Finland through qualitative, interpretative materials (e.g. Kaartinen 2004; Raittila 2004, Suurpää 2002). Qualitative studies give us important insights into how Finns see residents of foreign origin. Qualitative studies nevertheless do not provide a generalisable depiction of the opinions and views of the population. Jaakkola's (1989, 1995, 1999, 2005) extensive surveys on general attitudes towards immigrants and foreigners in Finland present that kind of generalized view, although they in turn give less insight into how the population actually identifies foreign residents in Finland: Who do people have in mind, when they speak of immigrants? In surveys as well as in public debate, the term 'immigrant' is used as a self-evident term. This study helps to decipher what people actually have in mind when they discuss 'immigrants' or 'foreign residents'.

Material

The survey data on identifying foreign residents and attitudes towards immigration was collected in conjunction with a wider study, the Population Policy Acceptance Study (PPAS), which was funded by the European Commission (DIALOG, see Kontula & Miettinen 2005). In eight countries (Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Slovenia, and Finland), questions related to migration and attitudes towards resident foreigners were included in the questionnaire. The database on migration issues (Avramov & Cliquet 2007) contains data on over 21,000 respondents of which 3,800 are from Finland. The national surveys were undertaken between 2000 and 2003; the Finnish survey was carried out in 2002 by means of a self-completed survey. The overall response rate in Finland was 56, which is considered satisfactory. The data has not been weighted and consequently, youth, males and less educated groups are somewhat underrepresented in the material.

Data and findings

Resident foreigners are first and foremost ‘Somalis’

In the survey, respondents were asked, ‘When speaking about resident foreigners in Finland, what groups come to your mind?’ (“Kun puhutaan Suomessa asuvista ulkomaalaisista, mitä ryhmiä tulee mieleenne?”) The questionnaire form provided three numbered lines for writing down three answers. In this article, only the answers on the first line are used as data for analysis. The term ‘resident foreigners’ (“maassa asuvat ulkomaalaiset”) was chosen after an intensive international debate as the most appropriate, comparable and least loaded term, to be used in all participating countries. One could speculate whether the answers would have been different, had the term ‘immigrant’ (“maahanmuuttaja”) been used instead. At least in Finland, the term immigrant would have been more negatively laden than ‘resident foreigner’ and could have led to more stereotyped and negative answers. As it is, the question did not give any hint of naming ethnic groups in particular, but simply asked about groups, letting the respondent choose if s/he wanted to name ethnic, religious, occupational or any other groups.

As the range of answers to the open-ended question was quite diverse, the answers were classified into 20 categories. Classified first answers given by the respondents are presented in Table 1. The most commonly given first response, provided by more than half of the respondents, was ‘Somalis’. ‘Russians’ was the second-most common response, given by 21 percent of those respondents who answered the question. After that, the third-most common answer was ‘Refugees’, given by 7 percent of respondents. The rest of the answers were scattered among a number of nationalities, negative references, and other categories, which can be seen in Table 1.

Generally speaking, it is interesting that ethnic and national identifications appear nearly universal: 89 percent of the first answers refer to a country of origin or an ethnic group, while only 11 percent refer either to a social role (student, family member), migration status (refugee, migrant worker, return migrant), religious characteristic (Muslim) or are negative or racial references (blacks, ‘thieves from Russia’ etc.; see Table 2). In the beginning of 2002, Nieminen (2003: 22) estimated that approximately 19 percent of foreign nationals in Finland were of refugee background.¹ Thus, in people’s minds, refugee status does not appear to receive the importance it has in objective numbers. However, it should be kept in mind that for many Finns, the term ‘Somali’ might be roughly equivalent to ‘refugee’. It seems important for the Finnish common man and woman to identify foreigners primarily through an ethnic or national characteristic, rather than through a social or political role or some other kind of characteristic. The near absence of negative references is striking.

¹ In the population registry, immigrants are not registered according to their residence status, and thus, this figure is based on an estimate.

Table 1. First group of resident foreigners spontaneously identified in Finland, 2002; regrouped.

First-mentioned group	N	Percent
Somalis	1805	52
Russians	733	21
Refugees	236	7
Kurds/Turks	153	4
Ingrians	71	2
Former Yugoslavs (Kosovars, Serbians, Bosnians etc.)	64	2
Vietnamese	57	2
Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians	54	2
People from other Nordic countries	39	1
Negative reference (e.g. 'thieves from Russia')	34	1
Roma, Gypsies	30	1
Classification by religious group (in most cases, Muslim)	25	1
Migrant workers	24	0.5
Expressions related to skin colour (e.g. 'blacks')	24	0.5
People from Asian countries (other than Vietnamese)	22	0.5
Africans (also from northern Africa)	21	0.5
Arabs (people from Iran, Iraq, other Middle-East Arab country)	20	0.5
Students	18	0.5
Other nationalities	22	0.5
Other	19	0.5
TOTAL		100
Total N		3471

Source: PPAS database, Population Research Institute.

Table 2. First group of resident foreigners spontaneously identified in Finland (%), 2002 (N=3471).

Classification of immigrant group	Percentage of first answers
Ethnic or national group	89
Refugee or migrant worker	7
Negative reference or skin color	2
Religious classification	1
Other	1
Total	100

Source: PPAS database, Population Research Institute.

Respondents cite people from Somalia as their first answer, although the three largest groups of foreign nationals in Finland during the survey were (and still are) Russians, Estonians and Swedes. This reflects the history of immigration in the 1990s: in the beginning of the decade, suddenly, a large number of Somalis entered the country as refugees. Finland was largely unprepared for such an onslaught and was simultaneously suffering from a deep economic recession. Furthermore, there had been few black immigrants in Finland before.

The high prevalence of ‘Somalis’ as the first answer does not reflect the high number of Somalis in Finland per se. Only 4 percent of all foreign nationals residing in Finland in 2002 were Somali nationals (see Table 3). Taking into account the number of Somali-speakers – many Somalis have been naturalized – does not change the basic picture: 6 percent of foreign-language speakers in 2002 spoke Somali (Statistics Finland 2006). As the respondents were not asked to identify resident foreigners only in ethnic or national terms, a one-to-one comparison of the actual proportion of a particular nationality in Finland with the answer proportion is only indicative. However, the fact remains that Russians and Estonians, both substantial nationality groups, remain unnoticed, while Somalis are very prominent in people’s perceptions even though they are a relatively small group. Only 2 percent of the respondents mentioned Estonians (or other Baltic nationalities) as the first group that comes to mind in terms of foreigners, even though Estonians are one of the largest groups of foreign nationals. They outnumber Somali nationals, for example, nearly three-fold. Evidently they are so close to the Finns – culturally, linguistically and physically – that they do not attract attention as stereotypical ‘foreigners’.

Comparing Finland with several other European countries

In the survey of eight EU countries (Avramov & Cliquet 2007), a few countries manifested the same tendency as Finland: in the Czech Republic and Poland, the groups that came to respondents’ minds when asked about resident foreigners do not reflect the largest foreign nationalities in those societies. In the Czech Republic, the most commonly cited group was the Vietnamese, a relatively small but visibly different immigrant group, and in Poland, the most commonly mentioned groups were Russians and the Roma (each mentioned by one in four respondents), while the most populous, legal immigrant groups are in fact Germans and Ukrainians. The reference to the Roma as foreigners derives at least partly from the fact that a number of ethnic Roma have entered Poland from Romania, and they are not natives of Poland (Säävälä, forthcoming).

However, among the eight countries surveyed, there were also countries where respondents frequently identified groups of foreigners that actually did represent the largest groups: in Germany, the Turks were the most common first answer, and in Estonia, the Russians (Säävälä, forthcoming). In Hungary, we have an anomalous case that does not follow the rule that people tend to name a group they consider maximally different. Hungarians most commonly identified Transylvanians as foreign residents, referring to the largest immigrant group in the country, who are ethnic Hungarians from Romania. They share both ethnicity and language with Hungarian Hungarians but are nevertheless considered foreigners. In the Czech Republic, in turn, where the largest group of foreign nationals is Slovaks, the group is hardly mentioned by respondents. Possibly, Slovaks fail to be considered as foreigners due to the long, common political history with the Czechs, as well as their linguistic and cultural proximity. The divergent cases

of Hungary and the Czech Republic show that identifying foreign residents is far from straightforward and does not necessarily implicate the group that is the most different in physical, linguistic or cultural terms (*ibid.*). Coming back to the case of Finland, the tendency to identify the resident foreigner as the maximally different Somali should not be taken as self-evident, and should be subjected to further investigation.

Table 3. Largest groups of foreign nationals in Finland, 2002 (%).

Nationality	Percentage of foreign residents in Finland
Russia	24
Estonia	12
Sweden	8
Somalia	4
Serbia & Montenegro	4
Iraq	3
United Kingdom	2
Germany	2
Iran	2
Turkey	2
United States	2
China	2
Thailand	2
Vietnam	2
Others	29
Total	100

Source: Statistics Finland 2006, Table 2.

Social, regional and attitudinal differences

The geographic distribution of immigrants, especially of Sub-Saharan African origin, is highly uneven in Finland, the majority residing in the Helsinki metropolitan area. Of the Somali nationals who migrated to Finland between 1991 and 2001, 84 percent live in the Helsinki metropolitan area (Pohjanpää, Paananen & Nieminen 2003, 26). A much smaller proportion of immigrants from Russia (35 percent in 2001; *ibid.*) also live in the metropolitan area. Eastern Finland has a concentration of Russian-speaking immigrants, and there are very few immigrants of other origin in the region. For example, in the province of South Karelia, Russians form 67 percent of all resident foreigners in the area. Due to differences in the regional composition of the foreign population, the prevalence of the responses of ‘Somalis’ and ‘Russians’ as resident foreigners among the respondents could be hypothesized to differ from region to region. If such differences cannot be detected, the identification of immigrants simply

reflects the urge to name a maximally different, stereotypical image of “foreigners”, regardless of demographic realities. Table 4 presents a cross-tabulation of frequencies of particular identifications of foreign residents according to geographic area.

Table 4. Percentages of first identifications of ‘Somalis’, ‘Russians’, ‘Refugees’ and ‘Negative reference’ among Finnish respondents by geographic region 2002.

First group of foreign residents mentioned	Uusimaa Province	Southern Finland	Eastern Finland	Central Finland	Northern Finland	All respondents
Somalis	58	49	47	49	51	52
Russians	21	24	25	16	19	21
Refugees	5	7	7	8	8	7
Negative reference	1	1	2	1	1	1
Other	15	19	19	26	21	19
Total, %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	830	1121	419	403	334	3115

Chi²=50.156; df=16; sig= .000

Source: PPAS database, Population Research Institute.

Despite the near absence of Somalis in Eastern Finland², nearly one in two respondents refers to Somalis as the group that first comes to mind when thinking of resident foreigners. However, people living in the Eastern part of the country tend to refer to Russians more commonly than people in Northern and Central Finland. In the province of Uusimaa, refugees were the first answer less commonly than elsewhere, especially when compared with Central and Northern Finland. The placement of refugee centers in the less densely populated and rural areas might be reflected in this fact. In the cross tabulation, Uusimaa appears to have the largest proportion of respondents who chose the answer ‘Somalis’ in the survey.

In order to examine whether regional differences disappear when controlling for age, gender, education, socio-economic status, and attitude towards the number of immigrants in Finland, a binary logistic regression analysis was applied. Earlier research (e.g. Jaakkola 2005) has shown that in Finland, the attitude towards resident foreigners differs between men and women, and between educational and age groups, and it is thus meaningful to include these variables in the model here as well. The correlation coefficients between the variables in the model used to analyze this survey material remain relatively low (e.g., significant correlations of .093 between age and attitude towards the number of resident foreigners; .021 between region and attitude towards the number of resident foreigners; and .22 between vocational education and occupational status) and thus, it is acceptable to include these factors in the same regression model.

² Only less than 2 per cent of foreign residents in the area are Somali nationals (Statistics Finland 2007).

The answers given to the open-ended question asking respondents to identify foreign residents in Finland were re-coded into 1=Somali and 0=all other answers, in order to examine whether we can find differences in the factors that predict the tendency to identify resident foreigners as Somali. When asked to identify resident foreigners in the country, the answer ‘Somalis’ is here considered a proxy for an unrealistic, distancing and stereotyping relationship to immigrants, possibly reflecting a lack of meaningful interaction with people of immigrant origin. If such an interaction were to exist, hypothetically it would create a more nuanced identification of foreigners that would better correspond with the heterogeneity of the immigrant population.

The variables included in the logistic regression model were:

- age (three age groups: 18–29, 30–49 and 50+)
- gender (male, female)
- level of vocational education (no vocational training; vocational courses or vocational school; post-secondary level; polytechnic or university; other or can’t say)
- occupational status if a wage-earner (executive; upper white collar; lower white collar; blue collar; agricultural; entrepreneurial; other or can’t say)
- geographic area (Uusimaa Province; Southern Finland; Eastern Finland; Central Finland; Northern Finland)
- attitude towards the number of foreign residents in Finland (too many; neither too many nor too few; too few)
- economic position (net household income per household member)

The results of the logistic regression analysis are represented in Table 5. In the model, there was a significant difference in the odds ratios for identifying foreigners as Somalis in terms of age, region and attitude towards the number of foreign residents in Finland. Answering ‘Somalis’ was more common among the young than in other age groups, among residents of Uusimaa compared with other areas, and among those who thought there were too many foreign residents in Finland. Those with polytechnic or university education appeared to answer ‘Somalis’ considerably less often than those with no vocational training, although there were no significant differences between other educational groups and those without vocational education. Occupational status, here used as a proxy for social status, does not appear to influence the probability of answering ‘Somalis’, and neither does per capita net household income.

Table 5. Variables projecting the tendency to identify foreign residents as ‘Somalis’ among respondents in Finland in 2002 (odds ratios significant at the confidence level $p < 0.05$ are in **bold**).

Factors predicting the answer of ‘Somalis’	Significance	Odds ratio
Age:		
- 18–29	,036	1
- 30–49	,039	,788
- 50+	,011	,731
Gender:		
- male		1
- female	,829	,982
Vocational education:		
- none	,000	1
- vocational courses or school	,206	1,191
- lower tertiary level	,637	,928
- university or polytechnic	,020	,684
- other or don’t know	,528	,711
Occupational status:		
- executive	,823	1
- upper white collar	,978	1,006
- lower white collar	,879	,967
- blue collar	,939	1,017
- agricultural	,574	1,201
- entrepreneurial	,522	,844
- other	,550	,863
Region:		
- Uusimaa Province	,000	1
- Southern Finland	,000	,608
- Eastern Finland	,000	,519
- Central Finland	,000	,574
- Northern Finland	,003	,645
Attitude towards the number of foreign residents in Finland:		
- too many	,000	1
- neither too many nor too few	,000	,607
- too few	,000	,306
Income (scale):	,211	1,000
Constant	,000	3,467

Source: PPAS database, Population Research Institute

If we take another approach to analyze respondents’ first-choice answers in identifying foreign residents in the survey, and examine the prevalence of ‘Russians’ as the first answer according to the same logistic regression model and the same variables as above with those who answered ‘Somalis’, it turns out similarly that age, region and attitude towards the number of foreign residents in Finland are the main predictors of the tendency to refer to ‘Russians’ as the foreigners (see Table 6).

Table 6. Variables projecting the tendency to identify foreign residents as 'Russians' among respondents in Finland in 2002 (odds ratios significant at the confidence level $p < 0.05$ are in **bold**).

Factors predicting the answer of 'Russian'	Significance	Odds ratio
Age:		
-18–29	,016	1
- 30–49	,010	1,448
- 50+	,006	1,523
Gender:		
-male		1
- female	,001	,725
Vocational education:		
-none	,001	1
- vocational courses or school	,729	,941
- lower tertiary level	,141	1,331
- university or polytechnic	,006	1,717
- other or don't know	,681	,727
Occupational status:		
-executive	,251	1
- upper white collar	,408	1,211
- lower white collar	,706	1,093
- blue collar	,502	,851
- agricultural	,237	,637
- entrepreneurial	,847	1,057
- other	,543	,847
Region:		
-Uusimaa Province	,000	1
- Southern Finland	,014	1,355
- Eastern Finland	,012	1,487
- Central Finland	,158	,774
- Northern Finland	,487	,881
Attitude towards the number of foreign residents in Finland:		
-too many	,000	1
- neither too many nor too few	,000	1,655
- too few	,000	2,791
Income (scale):		
Constant	,516	1,000
	,000	,107

Source: PPAS database, Population Research Institute.

The attitude towards foreign residents predicts the tendency to refer to Russians in this context, so that those who think that there are too few foreign residents in Finland are nearly three times more likely to answer 'Russians' compared with those who think there are too many foreign residents in Finland. Regional differences are clear here, too, with people in Southern and Eastern Finland more prone to answer 'Russians' than those in Uusimaa. In terms of age, the youngest group, aged 18 to 29, is somewhat less prone to answer 'Russians' than the other age groups. In terms of gender, there is

a difference in the probability of answering 'Russians', unlike in answering 'Somalis'; women are somewhat less likely than men to identify resident foreigners as 'Russians'. This might reflect the fact that many Russians have entered the country as partners of Finnish men. The level of vocational education, occupational status and income had no significant effect on the odds ratios, apart from respondents with polytechnic or university education who differ from those without vocational education in that they are more likely to answer 'Russians'.

Discussion: Reality, media and stereotypes

It is difficult to say whether the tendency to identify resident foreigners primarily as Somali is the cause or the effect of the negative attitude towards foreign residents in general; it is a hen and egg situation. Survey research (Jaakkola 2005) shows that in the ethnic hierarchy, the general public in Finland views Somalis as among the least welcome immigrants. It seems that respondents who are the most xenophobic also create images of foreigners that correspond with a generally negative valuation, and are hindered from realizing the heterogeneity of the resident foreigners in Finland. It is possible that a negative attitude keeps the stereotypical image alive, but it could just as well be that the stereotypical images help maintain separation from foreigners and thus strengthens already negative attitudes.

As Somalis' physical appearance differs noticeably from Finns, and Somali women commonly dress in unique clothing and cover their heads in public, they are a highly visible minority wherever they go. Thus, they attract attention and are viewed as different by native Finns. 'Somali' is the most common answer not only in the Helsinki metropolitan area, but also in other parts of the country, where relatively few Somalis or other Sub-Saharan Africans live.

Based on Tables 5 and 6, it seems that the image of foreigners is not totally independent of the realities of immigration, although the idea of the Somali as the epitome of the resident foreigner comes up everywhere as the most commonly mentioned group. Where there are more Somalis, they are mentioned more often, and where there are more Russians, they are mentioned more often than in other places, even though nowhere do they seem to get the attention in the public's imagination that corresponds to their actual numbers in society. Russians are among the groups that fare poorly among the native population in terms of ethnic hierarchy (Jaakkola 2005), and thus their non-mention could hardly be seen as proof of a lack of prejudice towards them. The rationale behind the 'non-mention' of Russians and Estonians is evidently quite distinct.

Is the reason for the prevalence of Somalis as the epitome of resident foreigners, then, a result of media coverage in which they are depicted more often than other immi-

grants? Raittila (2000) has analyzed media coverage of ethnic and immigration topics in 1999–2000. He reviewed both regional and national newspapers during that period, coming up with more than 2,700 stories related to ethnicity. Raittila discovered that by far the most commonly cited ethnic group in the newspaper media was Russians: the frequency of stories referring to Russians appeared nearly twice as often as stories referring to Somalis. This would lead us to think that the ‘flawed’ media coverage is most probably **not** the underlying explanation for the prevalence of Somalis as the most spontaneously identified foreigners.

Along the lines of Suurpää’s (2002) analysis of young people’s tendency to draw an image of the immigrant as a hierarchically lower, helpless victim, devoid of individuality, helps us to understand the persistence of people identifying Somalis as the Other. In her group interviews with 17–18-year-old boys and girls, the most prevalent image of the foreigner was a tame victim, a refugee with no social competence to live successfully in Finland. Furthermore, according to Raittila (*ibid.*), Somalis are most commonly depicted in media coverage as victims, not as active agents. People refer to Somalis as immigrants for different reasons, and their answers have different meanings: for those who tend to lean towards racist and discriminatory or at least anti-immigration ideas, it implies that immigrants are not welcome in Finland because of their utter difference from Finns, while to someone else, ‘Somali’ may refer to a more benign reference point, meaning that immigrants are innocent, though hierarchically lower, victims whose existence strengthens native Finnish respondents’ feeling of agency and control. The survey material is unable to answer whether these interpretations are supported; it cannot interpret the categorical answers people give. A survey can only point to general tendencies that more qualitatively oriented research may answer.

This interpretation, referring to the need to consider the foreigner as a patronized victim, gets further support from the fact that Estonians occupy a marginal role in Finns’ spontaneous image of the resident foreigner. They appear so resourceful in the eyes of Finns that they do not come directly to mind when thinking about ‘resident foreigners’. Examining the most commonly given answers in all the European countries that participated in the PPA survey (Avramov & Cliquet, *forthcoming*), it becomes evident that all of the frequently-given answers referred to groups that are either socially marginal in the country and/or suffer from prejudiced stereotyping: Turks in Germany, Bosnians in Austria and Slovenia, Vietnamese in the Czech Republic, Transylvanian Hungarians in Hungary, and Russians in Poland and Estonia. The identification of foreigners tends towards the negative.

The near absence of discriminatory and derisive comments on this open-ended question in Finland was remarkable. Although undoubtedly there is prejudice and discrimination against foreign residents, surprisingly few negative answers in what was an anonymous postal survey point to this. By the turn of the millennium, the ethos of the public

discussion about immigrants had transformed from the social and economical costs of immigration towards acknowledging the resource that immigrants represent for the economy and society (see e.g. Jaakkola 2005: 34–36). Along with general media coverage, also the public attitude towards immigrants started to show signs of a more positive inclination. According to Jaakkola (2005), between 1993 and 2003, negative attitudes towards foreign job-seekers declined from 61 percent to 38 percent. However, it could be hypothesized that the shock effect of the years of recession that coincided with the influx of Somali refugees might have had such a deep impact on people's perceptions and imagination that it could not easily be washed away by more recent media coverage or personal experience. Another potential explanation comes from a more structural consideration: in order to feel themselves to be 'Finns', people tend to create an image of the 'most different Other' they can think of, to strengthen their own identity. This kind of 'us and them' thinking appears very persistent, and even intensifies as globalization moves forth (see e.g. Friedman 1994).

In Söderling's (1999) study, survey respondents were asked to draw a picture of 'a foreign family living in Finland' and 'a Finnish family'. As a result, nearly half of the respondents included pictures in their questionnaires, adding to 300 pictures. Out of these, 61 pictures were included in a printed report. In more than half of the printed pictures, foreigners were represented as visibly black, as Africans or Somalis. Thus, even in visual imagery, the dark-skinned African commonly rules the Finnish imagination of what constitutes a foreigner.

The survey material used here as the basis of the analysis is not the very latest; however, no drastic changes in the immigration scenario have occurred during the five years since the survey, and hence, the results of a repeat survey would most probably not differ substantially from the situation in 2002. In terms of validity, the answers to the question asking to identify foreigners in Finland reflect the stereotypical image of foreigners that prevails among the general public. As there were no sudden media or other events related to immigration preceding the survey, the results most probably represent a true inclination in identifying foreigners. Here, a quantitative analysis of survey material is taken further with a more qualitatively oriented discussion on the image of the Other and the creation of difference among the Finnish public. Having a very stereotypical image of foreigners could be hypothesized to lead to prejudice, because it shows that people describe the Other through maximal visible difference, which leaves little space for a more nuanced understanding of the immigrant as an individual. The results show, however, that the undoubtedly strong stereotyping and distancing tendency is not overarching, as we can detect clear regional differences in how resident foreigners are identified that reflect the composition of the local immigrant population. Thus, there is hope of more realistic and interactive image building to emerge in the future.

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