LANGUAGE DEATH OR MURDER? THE FATE OF INGRIANS AND THEIR LANGUAGE SINCE 1944

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This article examines the reasons behind the language shift which has taken place among the Ingrians. Over the past hundred years, the number of Ingrian language speakers has declined from approximately 16,000 to just a few individuals. The article focuses on one particular period in the history of the Ingrian people: late WWII and the early post-war years. This period, in our view, had the most significant impact on this language shift. Specifically, we discuss the period beginning with the signing of the Moscow Armistice between Finland and the USSR in 1944 and continuing until the mid-1950s. The primary aim of the article is to present the Ingrian people's perspective on this period in the light of life stories and narratives. The study is based on sociolinguistic interviews conducted during expeditions to Ingria between 2006 and 2014. These interviews explore the main hardships the Ingrians encountered upon returning to the USSR from Finland, as well as attitudes towards the Ingrian language among both the Russian-speaking majority and the Ingrian speakers themselves. The findings illustrate how the circumstances faced by the Ingrian population effectively eliminated the possibility of transmitting the language to the next generation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Ingrian language is one of the minor Finnic languages of Ingria.[1] The first documented data on the Ingrian population date back to the mid-nineteenth century: in 1848, Köppen (1867) reported a total of 18,489 Ingrians, which can also be considered an approximate estimate of the number of speakers at that time. By our estimation of the current state of Ingrian,[2] the number of speakers

1 We express our deep gratitude to all the Ingrian language speakers who worked with us, as well as to all participants in the Ingrian linguistic expeditions and other colleagues involved in collecting the sociolinguistic material presented in this article. We wish to thank Kirill Levinson for providing valuable historical comments and references. We are also very grateful to Riho Grünthal and two anonymous reviewers for their useful comments on this paper. The work on this article was funded by Estonian Research Council grant PRG2651.

2 Also labelled as *Ižorian*; in Finnish *inkeroisen kieli*; in Estonian *isuri keel*. It should not be confused with the Ingrian dialects of Finnish.

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does not exceed ten people, most of whom are elderly. In Rožanskij & Markus (2013: 292), Ingrian is categorized as 8b "nearly extinct" on the EGIDS scale (Lewis & Simons 2010).

According to the 1926 census, the number of Ingrians was 16,137 (Musaev 2004: 178; Ernits 2007: 15), which suggests an uneven decline in their population. Apparently, neither the second half of the nineteenth century nor the first quarter of the twentieth century, including the Civil War, which had a serious impact on Ingria (Musaev 2004: 60–171), produced a significant reduction in the Ingrian population. Thus, the transition of Ingrian from the status of "vigorous" (6a on the EGIDS scale) to "nearly extinct" has taken place within the past hundred years. According to Gruzdeva's classification (2022: 68), Ingrian should be considered as having moved from Group 2 "The languages are still in limited use within the community, but intergenerational transmission is either completely interrupted or is interrupting" to Group 1 "The languages are not transmitted to the following generations and are not used by the members of the community" over the past few decades.

In recent decades, publications have emerged attempting to analyse the reasons for the decline of the Ingrian language (Čuš"jalova 2010;[3] Rožanskij & Markus 2013; Kuznetsova, Markus & Muslimov 2015). Among other factors, long-lasting repressions, deportation during World War II,[4] and the hostile attitude of the Russian-speaking population have been noted (Kuznetsova, Markus & Muslimov 2015: 162–163). However, there has not yet been a detailed study that not only lists these factors but also assesses their relative importance with substantiated arguments. One reason for the lack of such research is the scarcity of relevant data: first, the published quantitative data do not inform us

3 Note that some of the conclusions drawn in the article (Čuš"jalova 2010) appear absurd. For example, among the main reasons for the shift of the Ingrian population to Russian the author names the development of infrastructure, and in particular the construction of the Ust-Luga port. The construction of this port officially began in 1993, but the actual work was carried out in the mid-2000s, when fluent speakers of Ingrian under 60 were already a rare exception, so the construction of the port cannot have had any significant impact on the Ingrian language.

4 By the term "deportation" we mean a relocation of the population which was de facto forced. In particular, we apply it here to the events of 1943–1944, when the Ingrians were relocated to Finland. Although formally this relocation was voluntary, in our material we have no evidence that any Ingrians at all wished to go to Finland. In the same sense we use the expression "forced relocation". The return of Ingrians to the USSR was a more ambiguous process, combining features of both voluntary and forced relocation. On the one hand, many Ingrians wanted to go back to their native villages; on the other, the Soviet authorities made significant efforts to make all Ingrians return, and the destination was not the one that Ingrians themselves wanted. The word "relocation" without the attribute "forced" is used in the article as a neutral term, which does not indicate the voluntary or forced nature of the process.

about the motivations and language choices of the Ingrian people, and second, substantial firsthand information on this topic from the Ingrians themselves has never been published. Without detailed and representative data, researchers cannot assess how specific events affected the Ingrians and their attitudes toward their language.[5]

The goal of this article is to publish excerpts from interviews recorded during Ingrian linguistic expeditions, which could serve as material for more in-depth research on this topic. It should be emphasized that the history of the Ingrian people in the twentieth century contains many gaps, primarily because the majority of the Ingrians were rural residents unaccustomed to recording or publishing their reminiscences.[6] Available historical studies rely mainly on official documents, but this approach does not provide a comprehensive picture, as small ethnic groups lacked administrative status, had no official representatives, and their lives were largely regulated by titular nations pursuing their own interests. For example, as will be shown below, the nationality recorded in passports depended less on a person's self-identification and more on state policies or even the will of individual officials.

From this perspective, the Ingrian Finns found themselves in a significantly better position. As a people who were, firstly, more numerous and, secondly, had cultural and religious ties with Finland, the Ingrian Finns attracted more attention from researchers than the Ingrians or the Votes. They were the focus (either entirely or predominantly) of studies such as *Inkerin suomalaisten historia* (1969), Nevalainen (1991), Musaev (2004), Flink (2010), and others. A crucially important aspect is the fact that, in addition to research relying primarily on documentary sources, recent decades have seen growing attention paid to "oral history", which allows the historical narrative formed from documents to be significantly expanded (and sometimes revised). In particular, the opinions, views, and experiences of the Ingrian Finns are presented in works by Riionheimo & Kivisalu (1994), Mullonen (2004), and Reuter (2023).[7]

In contrast to the Ingrian Finns, the history of the Ingrian people and their language, even in the relatively recent twentieth century, is marked by poorly researched periods. For instance, it remains unclear how the Ingrian language was

5 It should be noted that quite a number of publications exist which are devoted to the fate of Ingrian Finns in the 20th century. Although there are many points in common between the fate of Ingrian Finns and Ingrians, the transfer of the experience of Finnish to Ingrian people is unjustified. The difference in religion, names, and places of residence creates many significant distinctions between these peoples in their attitude to events and, primarily, in their sociolinguistic situation.

6 A rare exception is the autobiography Filatova (2003).

7 See also the chapter *Totuus ja vain totuus* [The truth and only the truth] in Flink (2010).

affected by repressions prior to 1937, when cultural autonomy was still preserved and active efforts were being made to develop the written Ingrian language and its teaching in schools. There are also very limited firsthand data regarding the relocation of Ingrians to Finland during the Second World War, which was often viewed by the Ingrians quite differently than by the Ingrian Finns.

The present article does not address the pre-war period or the deportation to Finland; instead, it focuses exclusively on the period starting with the signing of the Moscow Armistice between Finland and the USSR in 1944 and lasting until the mid-1950s. This period has been selected for two reasons. First, according to our preliminary assessments, this period crucially changed the linguistic situation, leaving no chance for the preservation and development of the Ingrian language.[8] Second, this period has received very little attention in existing scholarly literature.[9]

It should be highlighted that the main goal of this publication is to present the views and evaluations of the Ingrians themselves, as they lacked the opportunity to publicly discuss this period before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Today, there are almost no living witnesses in a position to recount the events that affected the Ingrian people during that time.

The material proposed can be analysed from various perspectives: in the context of the national policy of the USSR, in the framework of language death studies, in the context of sociolinguistic relations between majority and minority languages, and so on. The scope of this article does not allow for a detailed analysis within any of these contexts; therefore, this study should primarily be regarded as a source of material rather than a completed investigation on any of these topics.

The structure of the article is as follows: section 2 contains information about the data and methods used, section 3 describes and exemplifies the main hardships that Ingrians had to face when returning to the USSR, section 4 focuses on attitudes towards Ingrian among the Russian-speaking majority and among Ingrian speakers themselves, and section 5 formulates the main conclusions.

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8 It should be emphasised that although in this article we exclusively cite data from Ingrian speakers, the Votic people underwent a similar experience.

9 One of the few exceptions is the chapter in Musaev (2004: 324–339), but the main focus in this chapter is on Ingrian Finns, not on the Votes and Ingrians. Reuter (2023) talks about the return of Ingrian Finns to the USSR and has only a couple of pages (a section entitled *Uhanalaiset inkerikot*) devoted specifically to the fate of the Ingrians.

2. Data and methods

The quotations presented in the article are taken from interviews with Ingrian speakers recorded during linguistic expeditions conducted between 2006 and 2014. These interviews were collected using a sociolinguistic questionnaire specifically designed for these expeditions.[10] Unlike grammatical questionnaires, which required a predetermined sequence of questions, sociolinguistic information was collected in the context of a semi-structured interview. This approach enabled conversations to go beyond the questionnaire framework and provided diverse material in the genre of oral history.

After each quotation, a three-digit file index from our collection of recordings is indicated, along with a two-letter code for the speaker. This is followed by the speaker's gender and year of birth. For quotes in dialogue form, the interviewee is identified by a two-letter code and the interviewer by a single-letter code.

The interviews cited in our article were recorded by the following researchers (all single-letter codes used are given in parentheses):

Olga Biryuk (O), Tatyana Borzenko, Aleksandra Zabelina, Petar Kehayov, Bogdan Kravtsov, Ksenia Kuzmina (K), Natalia Kuznetsova, Nadezhda Makeeva, Elena Markus (L), Margarita Nikolaeva, Fedor Rozhanskiy (F), Agafiya Serdyukova, and Alina Tarshina (A).

Two quotes were taken from an interview conducted in 2011 with an Ingrian speaker (code LU) by Nikita Dyachkov, an employee of the Ingrian Museum in Vistino.

Any individual testimony or recollection may contain information of varying reliability: a person may confuse details, misremember events, or forget something important. Therefore, this article seeks to provide quotes from interviews with different individuals to substantiate each claim. In most cases, our material includes additional similar testimonies, but the scope of this article does not allow us to include them all.

The interviews were conducted in Russian. In preparing the English translations provided here, we minimally edited some nuances of colloquial speech: incomplete words were finished, semantically insignificant repetitions were removed, and certain discourse markers were omitted if no adequate English equivalent was found. The scope of this article does not allow us to include the original quotes in Russian, but we hope that in the future the interviews will be published both as translations and in their original form.

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10 This questionnaire is published in Rožanskij & Markus (2013: 295–296).

In the quotations provided, the symbol <...> indicates that part of the text has been omitted as it was deemed irrelevant to the situation being described. To improve coherence and clarity, we sometimes restore words that were implied but not explicitly spoken. These words are enclosed in square brackets.

3. LIFE EXPERIENCES OF INGRIAN PEOPLE AFTER FINLAND

3.1 From Finland to the Motherland

At the turn of 1943–1944, most of the Ingrians were relocated to Finland.[11] Among the 70 Ingrians we interviewed, 53 (76%) had been in Finland, while only 17 (24%) had remained in the USSR for various reasons (some were outside Western Ingria at the time, while others were on the frontlines or managed to hide in the forest).[12] In September 1944, the Moscow Armistice was signed between Finland and the USSR (Musaev 2004: 311; Flink 2010: 139–142), and those Ingrians who had been relocated to Finland (as well as the Ingrian Finns and Votes) faced the decision of whether to return to the USSR. The Soviet government wanted those who had left to be returned (see, for example, Musaev 2004: 312–314; Flink 2010: 82–84), and as subsequent events revealed, only those who migrated rapidly to Sweden were able to avoid returning (Musaev 2004: 315–317).

Our material does not allow for a balanced assessment of the full spectrum of views among the relocated population, as our interviews were conducted with individuals who, by the twenty-first century, resided in their original Ingrian territories – either having returned from Finland to the USSR or never having

11 Although the Ingrians' relocation to Finland has been discussed in scholarly literature more extensively than their life in the USSR after relocation, the period 1941–1944 remains insufficiently described from the perspective of the Ingrian people. Their experiences during the occupation by German forces, the relocation process, and the time spent by the Ingrians in Finland require detailed research in the genre of oral history. In this article, we deliberately refrain from addressing these topics to avoid giving a superficial analysis of this exceptionally important and complicated period in the history of the Ingrian people.

12 We have no information on how many Ingrians were deported from Ingria to Finland. However, Musaev (2004: 320) provides a table indicating the number of people with different ethnic affiliations who returned from Finland to the USSR and were resettled across the regions of Central Russia. According to this table, 3019 Ingrians returned. It should be noted, however, that Votes are not indicated in the table. It is possible that they were not distinguished from Ingrians.

been relocated there in the first place. However, our data suggest that many people (especially from the older generation) were eager to return to their homeland.[13]

(1) My mother worked at a factory. As soon as the news came that we could go home, she quickly packed up without hesitation. Even though our neighbours begged us to stay... We already had nothing left [in the USSR]. My mother knew her husband had died, and when we were leaving, we received the notification of his death. Our house had already burned down. There was nowhere to return to, but she still decided to go home. "No, I'm going home, no other options. I won't stay here." (052VV, female, 1937)

(2) When I returned to the farm, my mother said: "They called and asked if we wanted to go home." She said: "Well, the Russians have already come, and I told them: yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, we want to go home." I said: "Oh, Mum, how wonderful! We're going home!" (203NP, female, 1927)

(3) Of course, when my mother was asked the first time if she wanted to go home, she immediately said: "How could I not? Of course I want to go home!" (675LU, female, 1932)

Many noted that their Finnish hosts often understood the situation better and tried to dissuade people from returning to the USSR (see also Filatova 2003: 25–26).

(4) And as the professor said – we were working for the professor, he had an estate here in Helsinki, and my mother worked there – he said: "Maria, stay, your country is so devastated. We will give your girl an education." "No, koĭtii, koĭtii![14] Home, home!" <...> Practically no one stayed, even though life there was far more, let's say, civilized than ours. (086ZF, female, 1939)

(5) The Finns knew... But the Finns didn't tell us either. You see, no one said anything. Only once did our mistress say: "Don't go, don't go!" They really wanted us to stay. But we said: "No, we want to go home, we want to go home, we're going." She said: "The radio says they're taking you to Central Russia." And I told her: "These Americans always lie!" You see? And so we went. (203NP, female, 1927)

(6) My Finnish master really wanted me to stay. They had no children. <...> "Oh no, no, no! I'm going home. I'm going home." And he said: "If you go home, they'll send you to Siberia." We said: "What do you mean?" (864ZP, female, 1933)

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13 A significant divergence between the Ingrians and the Ingrian Finns can be noted in their attitudes towards returning to the USSR. Reuter (2023: 282) states that, according to Valpo (Suomen Valtiollinen Poliisi), less than half of the Ingrian Finns wanted to return. Unlike the Finns, the Ingrians did not feel a historical connection to Finland. The Finnish language, although related, was foreign to them, and the Ingrians were Orthodox Christians rather than Lutherans. Another critical factor may have been that Western Ingria, where the Ingrians lived before deportation, was not a site of intense military action.

14 *Koĭtii* means 'home(ward)' in Ingrian.

Sometimes it was not only the Finns who understood the danger of returning to the USSR. Although most Ingrians dreamed of returning to their native villages, some understood that the return might not turn out the way they had hoped.

(7) She [the speaker's sister] said, "I dropped my hands.[15] I knew immediately that you were leaving." So I came and put my suitcase on the veranda. George – my brother-in-law – said: "What are you doing, Anya? You're making a big mistake!" I said: "You know what? Maybe I am. But they'll find us here too!" He said: "No, they won't. We'll escape to Sweden. They won't find us; just don't go!" "No, I'm going!" (028AM, female, 1928)

The Soviet authorities monitored the return of those deported to Finland. Propaganda campaigns were conducted (Filatova 2003: 25; Musaev 2004: 312–313). However, information about where the Finno-Ugric peoples would actually be sent was not disclosed.

(8) An officer, or maybe a captain, came to us in Finland. My father was disabled, he'd lost a leg. He'd been wounded in Königsberg in 1914 and became disabled. Then the officer came and said:
– Papa, do you want to go home?
– Of course we do. Everyone is drawn to his homeland.
So, they took us to Hyvinkää, then to Vyborg. We thought they'd take us straight home, but no, those devils took us to the Pskov region instead. (001OM, female, 1931)

(9) I personally spoke to another lieutenant – but I was naive, you know. I asked: "Do you know if Bolshoe Kuzemkino was burned?" We'd left, but we didn't know what had happened to the village. He said: "No, we don't know. Don't worry; if your village burned down, you'll live in the neighbouring one, and then you'll rebuild." As if building a house was like buying a hat! I thought to myself: "Well, fine." I asked: "Are they taking us home?" "Home," he said. (203NP, female, 1927)

The deceit became apparent only when the trains carrying the returnees reached Soviet territory (Filatova 2003: 28; Musaev 2004: 319; Reuter 2023: 282–284). Musaev (2004: 319) notes: "From Vyborg, the returnees were sent, as stipulated in the resolution, to settlements in the Velikiye Luki, Pskov, Novgorod, Kalinin,[16] and Yaroslavl regions, i.e. areas affected by military actions or German occupation."

Table 1 provides information on the regions where the Ingrians were distributed, based on our interviews (data from 44 individuals) and information on

15 This Russian expression signifies a loss of hope.
16 The Tver region was called the Kalinin region in the period 1935–1990.

all Finnic returnees presented by Musaev (2004: 319) from the Russian State Archives. As can be observed, our data align closely with the overall situation.

Table 1 Distribution of the Finnic people by regions of Central Russia.[17]

	Our data		Musaev 2004	
Region	Number of people	%	Number of people	%
Yaroslavl	15	34	19359	35
Kalinin	11	25	14158	25
Novgorod	7	16	10513	19
Velikiye Luki	6	14	5577	10
Pskov	5	11	6335	11
Total	**44**	**100**	**55942**	**100**

3.2 Life in Central Russia

In the villages of Central Russia, the Ingrians faced hunger and poverty, conditions they were unaccustomed to in their native villages. The lack of familiar elements of civilization (baths, cattle sheds, etc.) horrified the newcomers. The living conditions were extremely harsh.

(10) Grandfather didn't like the Finns. Grandfather always complained: "One way or another, we must go home." When they brought us to Russia... oh! When he saw there was nothing in Russia... boys walk along the trains, through the carriages (they were cattle carriages at the time), saying: "Give us a piece of bread! Just a crumb!" (003MM, female, 1920)

(11) We were in the Kalinin region. There was real hunger there. The region itself was poor. Well... Mother spun wool; they had wool there; we bought wool there, my mother spun all the time, my sisters knitted jumpers and sold them to these Kalinin region locals. That was what we lived off. (004GI, female, 1936)

(12) When they took us from the station, boys met us in the Yaroslavl region in winter. We had to cross the Volga to reach our destination. There were only six little houses in the village, and they put us in one of them – four families in one house. (025LS, female, 1927)

(13) We were brought from Finland to the Yaroslavl region. There was terrible hunger there, such hunger and cold we saw there! We were put in such a cold house. I don't know how long we stayed there, but then we moved... we kind of received an invitation. (052VV, female, 1937)

17 Central Russia is an ambiguous term. In this case, we use it as a label to refer to several regions in European Russia where the Ingrians were resettled after returning from Finland.

(14) People came to the Kalinin region, to Krasny Kholm, and from there we were brought 18 km to the village. I had never seen a cow standing in the house before. There were no cattle sheds there, just cold yards. A cow stayed in the house. I cried so much... (065LM, female, 1930)

(15) We were brought to the Kalinin region, to the Brusovo station. Oh Lord! The year was 1944. What horror! Villagers came to meet us with bulls! We had never seen such a thing – bulls harnessed! In our village, we didn't have such a thing; we had horses. With bulls! I cried so much! Mother asked, "Why are you crying?" I replied, "Where are we going? Where are they taking us?!" And 18... our luggage was loaded onto these bulls, and we walked behind them for 18 kilometres! <...> When we arrived, we were exhausted and worn out and we fell asleep immediately. They distributed us among the houses. Oh Lord, they robbed us, those people from the Kalinin region! She had a brother, Vasya... We all had suitcases. All the belongings were in suitcases and wrapped in blankets. You never know what will happen: we might be bombed or something else. So they stole Vasya's entire suitcase; he was left with nothing. And our luggage, our belongings were in the corridor. It was them who stole everything; there was no one else to blame. All our belongings were cut open, and all the food was taken. Our mother was such a type... – we had money in Finland – and she bought a whole barrel of salted sprats. She was saying, "We're going to a village; there's nothing to eat there. Maybe we'll find some potatoes, and we'll eat sprats." And she was dreaming that later she would clean this barrel and make... she would pickle cabbage there. You know, how people used to think before?
But they stole... they carried off the entire barrel, all our belongings were cut open. We awoke in the morning, there is nothing to put in the mouth. <...> there were food supplies there [in the suitcases]... And then... in Finland, there were lots of blueberries, I picked blueberries and dried a big sack [of them]. They stole everything. They cut everything open and stole. All the food was stolen. <...> We were so distressed and said, "We won't live with you thieves. Find us another house! You're such thieves; you have stolen everything from us!" (203NP, female, 1927)

(16) [They washed] in stoves. My mother didn't go in, so naturally we didn't either. How could I climb into a stove? I'd be covered in soot. But the old lady, the hostess, climbed in, washed herself, rinsed off, and came out all clean. It was bizarre to us. It was something strange. Then, all the household work was done by the children, meaning the hosts' work. In spring, they transported dung on bulls. (675LU, female, 1932)

3.3 Attempts to return to the native villages

The Finno-Ugric population wanted to return to their native villages. However, they were not granted permission to return. Exceptions were made only for those

who had fought on the frontlines[18]. Those who returned from the front had to "petition" to obtain permission for their families, but success was not guaranteed. As a result, it sometimes happened that a man who had returned from the front could live in his native village, but his wife, who had been in Finland, was not allowed to stay.

(17) MM: They wouldn't let us go home. There was a border zone.
F: And when did you return, was it in 1947? Or when?
MM: Then only those who had a military man [in the family were allowed to return home]. My brother was in the military. He managed to get permission [for us to return] home. In 1946, we came [back] here. (003MM, female, 1920)

(18) In December 1944, we were already in the Kalinin region. <…> Then I wrote to the military recruitment office and others that my father was at war, and I even had his death notice in hand. Without that, it was forbidden [to return] here. Some Ingrian people stayed where they were, because they had no way to come back, no one petitioned for them. (008OP, female, 1927)

(19) SM: In 1945, we returned again. My father, who had returned from the war, came to us, to the Pskov region. He brought us back here from there.
Son of SM: Don't you remember [what was said] to Grandpa? Tell them about it too. Grandpa was told, "Take your children from there, but leave your wife there."
SM: And they wouldn't allow [his] wife, my mother, to live here.
Daughter of SM: She stayed here, but she was always in hiding, sleeping in haystacks.
SM: Because she had been in Finland, she was an Ingrian. (027SM, female, 1936)

Even those who had not been to Finland could face problems returning to their native villages.

(20) When we came back, they didn't register us for a long time. They kept sending us from one place to another. Then my sister went to Leningrad: "How is it that my husband was killed [in action], and we weren't anywhere – not in Finland, not anywhere, [we were] evacuated – and now we are not allowed to go home?" But eventually, they gave us permission and registered us. (073EM, female, 1930)

Nobody wanted to remain in the Central Russian regions.[19] Those who could not obtain permission either relocated to Estonia (Musaev 2004: 334–335) or attempted to return illegally to their native villages.

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18 "An exception was made only for participants in the war who had received government awards and for members of their families" (Musaev 2004: 330).

19 Musaev (2004: 332) notes: "According to the regional executive committees, of the 11,354 families from Ingria who left the regions where they were settled, only 26 families returned".

(21) LK: Yes, our Tanya [and] our Tamara were in Finland, Aunt Olya was in Finland, Uncle Sasha was in Finland – they were all there, Grandma was in Finland. They were all in Finland, but some of ours stayed here. Later, they weren't allowed to return, they weren't given permits. If someone came, every village had two or three policemen who would immediately notice that someone had arrived at your place. And they would come straight away <...>. They gave you 24 hours. You had to leave straight away. There was a road from Kotly – Kotly, Bereznyaki – through the forest here across the Belaya Stream. People walked through the forest. In that direction people walked. They passed by our house again, asking, "Can we stay the night?" We had benches made for them. They slept on these benches, they sleep a little – after all, you can't sleep outside – and then get up again while it is still dark and leave. So that they wouldn't be seen during the day. And at night, the border guards on horses [can catch you] right away ...
O: And did they take them somewhere?
LK: Yes. He... what was his name? Makhnev he was, I think. Everyone was afraid of him. There were so many problems. (047LK, female, 1949)

(22) We came back, and they didn't register us... I don't even want to remember! My mum and I went to the Velikiye Luki region. Three families of us lived there. We rented a carriage, brought our cow, and all who were in the Velikiye Luki region came. But my mum and I weren't registered because we didn't have anyone in the army, no one had served. We left everything behind, and then, on top of that, they imprisoned us for a year for nothing. We were in prison; nobody believed that [we had been sent there]. We left behind our home, our cow, everything. When we returned, nothing was given back to us. Another woman had taken over our house. Oh, I don't want to remember those times! They were awful! I saw really terrible times. Nothing good [came of it]. (225VD, female, 1927)

(23) AN: My father came back from the war, and he was allowed to live in the village, in Mishino, but they didn't register my mother because she was in Finland.
MK: Mum had to hide for years.
AN: When the police [come], she runs away. [He] was riding around on a horse. Oh, I remember. Who [is there]? As soon as I see that it's him – he had a grey horse – [I shout]: "Mum, hide! Makhnev is coming!"
MK: Yes, Makhnev is coming, yes.
AN: I'd say that Mum... there are stone buildings, they are ours.
MK: That's where she was [hiding].
AN: She was hiding there all the time. She speaks so energetically: "My husband is here, and I'll stay here. I'm not going anywhere. If you drive him out, I'll go too. That way it's OK. But if you don't, I'm staying! If you drive him out, I'll go too. Only in that case. Otherwise, I won't go anywhere!", she says. With energy. There was so much persecution in those days. Such were the times. That's how the policy was again. (092AN+MK, females, 1940 and 1932 respectively)

Inconsistency was practically the defining feature of Soviet ethnic and national policy. Just as in the early and mid-1930s, when significant efforts were made to grant the Ingrian language written status and introduce it into schools, only for this to be abruptly replaced by the closure of schools and repression of teachers, so too Ingrians were kept in a constant state of fear and uncertainty after the war. Shortly after many people had been allowed to return to their villages, a new wave of bans on living in their native villages began.

(24) They were all sent to Finland during the war and then scattered across different regions: Yaroslavl, Kalinin, Vologda.[20] Then they were allowed back home, but a year later, the border zone was re-established, and they were resettled again. It was sheer torment! (121PM, male, 1923)

(25) What persecution there was after the war! It was horrific! Nearly the entire population… My grandmother and grandfather came back in forty … in '46 they came – not these ones, but my father's relatives. They had two sons who died [at the front], but even so, in '47 they were expelled from the Kingisepp district. The persecution of the Ingrians was so intense – it was a nightmare! You had 24 hours to leave, you did not have the right [to live here]. You were traitors to the Motherland because you'd been in Finland. Under machine guns, with little children! Through concentration camps. And we were the guilty ones. (041ZE, female, 1935)

(26) LE: Then we came home, lived there for a year, and were expelled again.
O: Again? Where to?
LE: To the Pskov region. We lived there for eight years. (044LE, female, 1926)

(27) We arrived here in Smenkovo, where there was still an old village hall remaining. Half of it was bombed out, and the other half was… And we, well, we lived in that club, in the last room there. Then there was this man, Makhnev, a policeman, who started going around, searching… driving everyone out. He gave everyone 24 hours. What saboteurs or spies were we, having lived here all our lives? They drove us all out. <…> After that, they sent us to Kotelsky, to the village of Marfitsy. <…> Marfitsy is an Estonian village. And [they sent] us there. The people there received us so kindly. We had three children, and they gave us a small room, and we lived there for, I don't know, seven or eight years. (052VV, female, 1937)

(28) If your passport said 'Russian', then you were Russian. My mother was Russian, and we, the twelve families who lived in that village, we were all Russian. But then… And later, when we came back home here, we were Russian, so they didn't expel us, but the ones who were Ingrians were driven out again, for the second time, to different places. Some went to Estonia, some… who knows where. But we, as Russians, stayed. (065LM, female, 1930)

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20 We have no evidence that any Ingrian or Votic people were sent to the Vologda region.

(29) We were registered, and I worked every day on the kolkhoz, cutting hay. <…> In April 1947, we were harrowing at that end of the village, harrowing. Suddenly, Nura, from our village, comes running and says, "They're calling you to the village council, and you're being driven out of your house!" I said, "What's this now?" I started crying. I had a friend, and she said, "What are you crying for, you fool? Let's go somewhere!" I said, "Where can we go?" (203NP, female, 1927)

(30) Yes, we came to Kikeritsy in 1947, to Kikeritsy. No, we had a house. We arrived in Peski; we had our own house there. But at that time there were persecutions, and [they drove] us out of our house… And our native house still stands there. They drove [people] out of their homes. Even though my father had died in the war, but you know, those were the times, you know what kind of times those were, and so they drove us out, and we went to Kikeritsy. My mother had many children – there were six of us, three brothers and three sisters. (596IN, female, 1941)

In such circumstances, many people tried to obtain passports that marked their nationality as Russian. This gave them a chance (though no guarantee) of remaining in their native villages.

(31) You know, back then, when we were getting passports, it was important to get a Russian passport in any case so we wouldn't have [problems]. (008OP, female, 1927)

(32) I had a relative living in Vistino, and she worked… well, not in the passport office, but in the police. Back then, the police were all in Kingisepp, but right after the war, they were in Ust-Luga. She said, "The passport policeman will go on holiday, and someone else will be issuing passports. I'll make it so that they'll change your passport." And so we managed to change it. After some time, this policeman came to me and said, "Give me your passport!" I handed it over. He looked at his book, then at the passport:
– How did you manage to change it!? You're an Ingrian! And you changed to Russian and got a Russian passport!
– Well, they have given me a Russian passport now.
– I'll burn it!
– Well, that's your choice.
– You're an Ingrian!
I say, "I don't know if I'm Ingrian or not. I went to a Russian school, not an Ingrian one. And at school, we were only taught in Russian. I was baptized in a Russian church, not an Ingrian one, so if I was baptized in a Russian church, then I'm Russian!" He scolded me for a while and then left. And so I became Russian in my passport. (011EA, female, 1913)

(33) In Kronstadt, [my father] was involved in the defence of Leningrad. Back then, he said his nationality was 'Ingrian', but it was like… you know, "heroes have to be Russian", so my father became Russian. And after the war, when

they started issuing passports, if there wasn't a Russian [parent] in the family… they'd assign it exclusively from the parent's passport. But we all took our father's passport; we all wanted to be Russian. (030LP, female, 1939)

(34) You know, almost everyone here has Russian passports because, for one thing, they wouldn't register us anywhere, and we couldn't get a job [without it]. (044LE, female, 1926)

(35) In my passport, I wrote 'Russian' because at that time, for some reason, they were deporting Ingrians somewhere, at one point they even deported [people] from here. Later, things got better. (071MI, female, 1925)

3.4 A new life in the native villages

As a result, the Ingrian population ended up scattered across many different regions and settlements. The compactness of this small ethnic group was lost. Even those who returned to their native villages found themselves in a situation entirely different from how it had been before the war. Firstly, many houses and even entire villages had been burned down, leaving nowhere to live.

(36) The house was completely destroyed. Some people's houses were burnt down but everyone wanted to go home. Everyone wanted to return to their homeland, so they built houses – whatever they could manage. But everyone wanted to go back, no one wanted to stay behind. We lived in Kommunary; they cleared out a cowshed and moved us there, into the cowshed. And we lived there. (024MB, female, 1928)

(37) AN: My father returned from the war in 1945, and that's when we came back. But we didn't return to Mishino, we came back to Yugantovo, a nearby village. There was a house still standing there. How many families lived there including us?
MK: Three families.
AN: Three families. We all lived in one house, and then we started building this house…
MK: Later, we lived in a cabin…
AN: Yes, we lived… there was a cabin here.
MK: One of those cabins they used to take out to sea, when I was young…
AN: How big was the cabin?
MK: About the size of a porch, roughly…
AN: No, probably smaller. Smaller, smaller. How big is it? About two and a half,[21] maybe.
MK: One and a half. Just a little. A little smaller, yes, just about that.
AN: And we lived in that cabin through the autumn, then moved [from there]. (092AN+MK, females, 1940 and 1932 respectively)

21 These numbers probably refer to measurements in square metres.

(38) After the war, I lived in Slobodka and also in Mishino. First in Mishino, in an earth house – there was nowhere else to live. Then in a fisherman's cabin, then in Slobodka, renting a room from an old woman. And later we moved back to Mishino, we bought a small house there. (230VF, female, 1929)

Secondly, there were no longer any areas where the Ingrians did not feel like a minority.[22] Initially, they were scattered across Russian villages. Those who could not return home found themselves living among another people. Even their native Ingrian villages had been resettled with Russian people.[23] The attitude of Russians towards the Ingrians was often negative.

(39) Such bad [attitudes] – they immediately labelled us "traitors to the homeland." (046EK, female, 1920)

(40) They called us names, like *talapans,*[24] Finns <...> well, we were [considered] Finns. Whenever possible, in school, wherever: "Finns, Finns!" You know how upsetting that was? (052VV, female, 1937)

(41) You know, those were years of persecution. We were mocked in every way, at school, everywhere: "Talapans, Ingrians, Chukhna – they called us all kinds of names. So we hid [our ethnicity]; we tried to speak Russian, also in school... (596IN, female, 1941)

(42) That's why they didn't want to see that we were Ingrians, yes, Ingrians. And generally, among Russians: "Ah, that's not a real nationality. There's no such thing." You know, we did not even admit, at [work]... we worked, and even though we spoke Ingrian [among ourselves], we didn't admit we were Ingrians. (899AU, female, 1932)

Some people did not even understand that the Ingrian population was indigenous to the area.

(43) She [teacher] told him: "Your parents, wherever they came from, they should be sent back home! Why are you asking such questions?" He had asked her: "Sofya, Sofya Markovna, they say people in America live better than we do. So, tell us, how do they live in America? You must know better." And she replied: "Your parents need to be sent back." (029AM, female, 1928)

Although state-sanctioned repressions against the Ingrians ceased after Stalin's death in 1953 and Russian attitudes towards the Ingrians gradually improved over time, instances of negative attitudes based on ethnicity still occurred.

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22 The term "minority" is intended here in its sociological sense, i.e. the Ingrians did not constitute the dominant population, in a position to establish both legal and informal rules in society.

23 See Musaev (2004: 332–333) on the policy of settling Ingrian villages with residents of the central regions of Russia.

24 See Krjukov (2012) on this ethnonym.

(44) My brother came to visit once – and there was [a guy named] Petya from the two-storey building. One day, he [the speaker's brother] came back and said, "I'm not coming to see you again!" I asked, "What's the matter?" "Petya has been calling me all sorts of things, "Ingrians – you should have all been killed long ago…"" (549ZP, female, 1932)

4. ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE INGRIAN LANGUAGE

Such negative attitudes of the non-Finnic population towards the Ingrians extended to the Ingrian language. Language use often turned out to be the main focus of non-Finnic people's negative stance towards the Ingrians.

(45) … but we were all considered Russian. Because back then, it [being Ingrian] wasn't allowed. It wasn't allowed, and we were scolded for speaking in Ingrian. It was strict. (001OM, female, 1931)

(46) For some reason we started speaking… in our own [language]. We were walking in a group, and some young lads came towards us: "Where have they brought these Chukhnas from now?" We started speaking to them in Russian, and they ran off so fast, there was no sign of them. I said, "We'll show you 'Chukhna'! We'll show you 'Chukhna'!" See, that's how we had to live. That's how we had to live. So, [you had to] live like that. (003MM, female, 1920)

(47) We had an elderly woman in Gamalovo, she didn't know a single word of Russian. She must have been over 80 years old, though I'm not sure exactly how old she was. Very old. I came up to her, and I said to her… I spoke to her in Russian. She said to me in Ingrian, "You know, I can't stand, I'll go sit down, buy me a loaf of bread." And I, for no reason, responded to her in Ingrian. I said, "I don't need money, I'll buy it for you myself and bring it to you, and you go home without any hurry." And none other than my own neighbour <…> said to me, "Oh, the Talapans have arrived!" (028AM, female, 1928)

(48) There's a Russian family living behind us, and he can't stand us. He calls us Talapans. Once at the club, on the Day of the Elderly last year, he said, "Oh, they've started to speak the Talapan language! There are Russians sitting here too!" I got so angry, I said, "Yura, you left this place. Why did you come back to the Talapans? The Talapans, wherever they wandered, all returned to their homeland and didn't stay in Estonia or anywhere else. And yet you came back here. You live among the Talapans, you can speak Russian if you want, but we'll speak our language. Show some respect." (073EM, female, 1930)

(49) After the war, they relocated us to the Novgorod region; you've already heard that story… so we all immediately started speaking Russian. We learned it instantly. The Russians laughed at us, the children mocked us, so of course we had to quickly learn to speak Russian. (086ZF, female, 1939)

At the same time, mixed marriages between Ingrians and non-Finnic people (Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians) were not uncommon. In such cases, the situation depended on the individuals involved, and the spouses and their families did not always have a positive attitude towards speaking Ingrian.

(50) My mum didn't speak Russian for a long time at all because... well, in general, she didn't speak Russian for a long time. But when I married a Russian – my husband served at the border post – he said, "Don't you dare speak that language around me!" So, my mum would speak to me in Ingrian, and I'd respond in Russian. Maybe he thought we were talking about him, I don't know. (004GI, female, 1936)

(51) And then we had a large family, and our daughters-in-law were Russian. They forbade us from speaking our language. So eventually, we just stopped. (030LP, female, 1939)

(52) MN: I mostly spoke my own language, but now that I have married a Russian lad, sometimes I forget, and I mix up the words, Russian and mine.
K: And he didn't learn to speak Ingrian?
MK: Nooo! He passed away last year. Nooo. He always insisted: "Don't you dare speak your language!" (092MN, female, 1925)

(53) My dad [who was Mordvin] absolutely hated it when aunt Masha Baranova, my mum's cousin, came over [because] they only spoke in Ingrian. "dya-dya-dya, dya-dya-dya", "today, today", aunt Masha would start with *tänäbää.*[25] (086ZF, female, 1939)

Negative attitudes towards the Ingrian language also spread among the Ingrian population. Their native tongue was considered a hindrance which only made their lives harder.

(54) F: And as a child, did you start speaking Ingrian first?
ZE: You see, I barely remember... no, [I started speaking] Russian, because my dad wouldn't even let me visit his mother, my grandmother. We lived separately. He said it would make my studies harder – the Ingrian language would get in the way. (041ZE, female, 1935)

(55) L: But your grandmother spoke to you in Ingrian?
AG: She did, yes. But when I started school, we stopped because she was worried – God forbid! – I would speak with an accent. (595AG, female, 1936)

Schools played a significant role in promoting the rejection of Ingrian in favour of Russian. A key argument was that Ingrian-speaking children would have difficulty in learning Russian.

25 *Tänäbää* means 'today' in Ingrian.

(56) In the past, Ingrian wasn't allowed in schools; it wasn't allowed because we were scolded. For example, my youngest son, when he was in school, he didn't want to understand; all the teachers would come to me: "Don't teach him Ingrian, teach him Russian." (003MM, female, 1920)

(57) But then it started here as well. I was just a schoolgirl, I think it was terrible, the way they treated us for it [i.e. speaking Ingrian]. (004GI, female, 1936)

(58) When I was in second grade, anyone who spoke Ingrian was looked down upon because they wrote poorly in Russian. <…> Even the teachers, who were Ingrians themselves, showed disdain. (012AG, female, 1936)

(59) Well, I was a post-war child, so we spoke Russian in our family. Firstly, there was a policy at the time; at parent meetings, our class teacher would say, "Speak Russian at home! Your children write incorrectly!" That's how it was. By my time – I was born in 1953 – we were already speaking Russian at home, as far as I remember. (030OI, female, 1953)

(60) At that time, all of this was persecuted because the Ingrians were not tolerated at all. At school, if you wrote a dictation or, heaven forbid, made a spelling mistake in the letters, everyone was persecuted for it. There were persecutions. For this reason, we were driven out from here to Kotly, and we lived in Pumalitsy. (595AG, female, 1936)

As a result, there was effectively no question as to whether children should be taught Ingrian or not; the answer was obviously negative. Many Ingrians mentioned that during that period "the idea never even occurred to them".

(61) L: Didn't you teach your children your language at all?
GI: No, I didn't teach them, and they didn't show any interest. <…> It all started back in my school days; you know what [kind of attitude] there was… I say, how they oppressed us here, just to eradicate [us]!
L: And at school, Russian only?
GI: Of course, of course! (004GI, female, 1936)

(62) You see, there were problems with the Ingrian language throughout life, in my opinion. The problems arose when we were deported to Finland during the German occupation, and when we returned from there, we were not allowed back home. We were treated as enemies of the people…– I was in the Kalinin region, and he was in the Novgorod region – because they considered us as some kind of volunteers, that we had gone voluntarily. What do you mean voluntarily?! The Germans went from house to house with their [machine guns]… driving us out! And there was already a steamboat in Ruchyi, on which we were taken away. And on this basis, it somehow happened that we did not try [to teach our language]… we did not speak Ingrian in front of the children at all, so they would not get involved in it; it [the Ingrian language] was not needed by anyone. (008OP, female, 1927)

(63) I spoke Ingrian with my husband. But I spoke Russian with our children so that they would learn Russian better. I spoke Russian with our children. (031LF, female, 1931)

(64) ZD: We also spoke Russian with the children…
K: So, you didn't try to teach Ingrian to your children?
ZD: By no means! Because those were the times when people had suffered a lot after the concentration camps. <…>
K: But in general, if those horrors hadn't taken place, would you have wanted your children to know Ingrian?
ZD: Well, if… there hadn't been those horrors, then why not… an extra language wouldn't hurt, would it? But as it was, of course not. Why would it be necessary for them to suffer after us as well? (090ZD, female, 1936)

(65) K: Do they [the children] know Ingrian?
VI: No, they understand it, but they don't speak it.
K: Did you try to teach them?
VI: No, I didn't.
K: Why? Because it wasn't allowed or…?
VI: There was no point in teaching it, no point.
K: But would you have liked your children to be able to speak Ingrian too?
VI: At that time, I didn't think about it. (100VI, male, 1925)

(66) At that time, there was not enough food, nor… how to put it… no bread, nothing… those were the times, there was neither clothing nor shoes. And my husband did not live in this house either. There was a barn, it was put together from an old one. <…> So I got married [and moved] from a granary to a barn. I had been freezing there [in the granary], and we were freezing here [in the barn]. <…> And since, after all these trials, we… – according to the passport, we were Russian, you see – we [the speaker's parents' family] were not driven out of this granary. But my husband and his mother had Ingrian passports, so they were given 24 hours and expelled from here again. This was already under Stalin, by our own people. That's it. So [they sent us] onward, to Kotly. Staying in Kotly was allowed, but not here. That's why we didn't even teach our children the Ingrian language. For this reason. (090ZD, female, 1936)

This attitude towards the Ingrian language, when it was perceived not as an asset but only as a burden, has remained with many people throughout their lives. Although there was a revival of national identity after the fall of the Soviet Union – an Ingrian community emerged, folklore ensembles were created, and the Ingrian museum began to operate – many older Ingrians still saw no point in maintaining their native language.

(67) L: Would you like it if they taught it, the Ingrian language, in schools now?
EK: I don't care any more. (046EK, female, 1920)

(68) What use is this language now? Why is it needed? (071MI, female, 1925)

(69) A: But you didn't try to teach your children, did you?
MB: No, why would I? Anyway, there's no such subject in schools, so why teach it then? (055MB, female, 1928)

5. CONCLUSIONS

The presented material clearly demonstrates how, within a very short period, the Ingrian language, once native to an entire people, lost all prospects for a sustainable future.

Firstly, within just one decade, there was no longer any area where the Ingrians constituted an ethnic majority. Even in their native villages, they found themselves in the position of an ethnic minority.

Secondly, the attitude of the Russian-speaking majority towards this minority and its language was negative.

Thirdly, the memory of the repressions of the 1930s, which affected many Ingrians, was compounded by the fear of losing their homes, triggered by forced relocations, the destruction of houses, lack of residency permits, and similar issues. National self-identification was not only seen as lacking prestige but was also deemed dangerous. Speaking their native language was frowned upon, and knowledge of the language offered no practical benefits (unlike, notably, knowledge of Russian).

Under these circumstances, assimilation into the Russian population seemed a very natural step, aiding the preservation of the people. The fact that the Ingrians had long been Orthodox in religion and thus bore "Russian" names and surnames already, facilitated this assimilation. The only remaining issue was the language – many Ingrians did not speak Russian purely enough. This led to a logical solution that seemed to ensure the survival of the younger generation: Russian should become their primary language, and it would be better for them not to hear the Ingrian language at all.

In conversations with Russian-speaking residents of Ingrian villages, we sometimes encountered the opinion that the extinction of the language was a natural process and that there was no reason to grieve over the impending extinction of Ingrian. However, the material we have presented clearly shows that in the case of Ingrian (as well as other minor languages of Ingria), it is impossible to speak of a natural process – the language was actively and forcibly eradicated as a result of deliberate state policy, supported by the Russian-speaking population.

It should also be emphasized that this resulted in a traumatic experience for the Ingrian population, which became a barrier to the revitalization of the language

in the future. In particular, many members of the older generation came to lack any motivation to revive the language.

The situation described also serves as an illustrative case from the perspective of fieldwork methodology: young researchers often enter the field with the assumption that ideas about the value of a language and the necessity of its preservation are immutable truths shared by the language community. The case of Ingrian shows that the reality can be significantly more complex and ambiguous than anticipated.

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