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INVISIBLE IMMIGRANTS, VISIBLE EXPATS?

Americans in Finnish discourses on immigration and internationalization

Abstract

This article examines contemporary immigration discourses in Finland using experiences of immigrants originating from the United States as a case study. This research shows that the notion of an "immigrant" (*maahanmuuttaja*) is a highly racialized and class-based category in Finland. The difficulties of finding work that fits Americans' educational qualifications and their discouraging experiences of speaking "broken Finnish" reveal the fluidity of the division between foreigners who are seen as immigrants and those who are not. A specific lens through which these questions are tackled is immigrant visibility, which is defined not only in visual terms but also in audible terms through language use and as "non-sensorial" visibility at the level of discourses. The study argues that the politics of visibility is an important mechanism of labeling foreigners as "immigrants" in Finland.

Keywords

Immigration discourses • immigrant visibility • whiteness studies • immigration to Finland • U.S. immigrants

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1 Introduction

> I do have the advantage of being a fair-skinned white person, and an American – so at least I stand a little bit of a chance!

This quote is from a survey response that I received in 2008 from a California-born woman who moved to Finland in 2000 to marry her Finnish spouse. In the quote, the woman was reflecting upon foreigners' difficulties of finding a job in Finland, pointing out that her status as a "white" American had been an advantage when looking for employment. Indeed, many Americans living in Finland who participated in this research considered themselves to be privileged compared to many other groups of immigrants. At the same time, most Americans resisted being labeled as an "immigrant" (*maahanmuuttaja*) in Finland: their self-image did not fit with the ideas that the term evoked in them. Rather, they saw themselves as "expatriates" or simply "Americans living in Finland".

In this article, I use these experiences of American immigrants to examine contemporary Finnish immigration discourses, arguing that the notion of an "immigrant" is a highly racialized and class-based category in Finland. As a starting point, I use Huttunen's (2002: 13–14) idea of the existence of dualistic discourses regarding globalization and immigration in Finland. On the one hand, there is a positive discourse of internationalization that produces visions of a world of border-crossings, new perspectives, and enriching influences on the assumed monocultural Finnishness. This discourse focuses on improving Finland's exchange with Western industrialized nations. On the other hand, immigration to Finland is depicted in more negative terms; it is something that needs to be carefully controlled and governed. The immigration discourse is thus problem-oriented and associated with people originating from Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Global South. Americans, I argue, provide an interesting case for studying the Finnish discourses of internationalization and immigration. As representatives of a cultural, political, and economic superpower, and as speakers of a high-status global language, their presence in Finland is usually "unproblematic", even welcomed. At the same time, their legal status is that of an immigrant, and they are, as I will show, still influenced by the negative immigration discourses.

European scholarship on migration rarely focuses on middle or upper class, "white" immigrants. In social sciences in particular the

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main concern is often social *usefulness* of research. The question is, as Varro and Boyd (1998: 7) put it, "why study a population that poses no problem to the receiving society?" My contention is that it is important to understand why and how the term "immigrant" becomes associated with only certain classes and racialized groups of migrants. I show that the definition of an "immigrant" is not stable but contextual: a person who in one context is not considered an immigrant may be seen as such in the next. While I found that Americans did not see themselves as "immigrants" in Finland, and that they (as well as other immigrants from Western industrialized nations) were invisible in public and academic discourses on immigration, their privileged status in Finnish society as "non-immigrants" was not guaranteed. For example, when looking for employment in Finland, many Americans felt that they were being discriminated against simply by virtue of not being a Finn and/or a native Finnish speaker. In other words, despite their denial of the immigrant label, their position in the Finnish labor market was often just as insecure as that of groups of seemingly lower social status.

A specific lens through which I tackle these questions is immigrant *visibility*. The study of immigrant visibility has typically focused on physical visibility of immigrant bodies. I see immigrant visibility not only in visual terms but also in audible terms through language use and as "non-sensorial" visibility at the level of discourses. My research on American immigrants in Finland reveals that immigrant visibility is contextual, shifting, and often related to language use. As noted above, Americans rarely attract much (at least negative) attention in public and academic discussions on immigration. While white Americans may be able to "pass" as part of the dominant population, the fact that the majority of the Americans who participated in this study used American English in their daily lives in Finland marked them as "visible".[1] This kind of visibility is not necessarily negative in the eyes of the majority population – as many Americans noted, Finns were often pleased to meet Americans and to get an opportunity to practice their English. This exemplifies how Americans can be perceived to be part of the welcomed "internationalization" of Finnish society. Speaking "broken Finnish" (Finnish with an accent), on the other hand, evoked a more negative reaction – perhaps because the speaker was then seen as an "immigrant". Immigrant visibility is thus contingent on specific national and temporal contexts, in which hierarchies based on race, class, nationality, and language intersect to produce different kinds of visibility for different groups of foreigners. While in every-day social interactions Americans' visibility as non-Finnish speakers may be received positively, in the labor market the lack of Finnish language skills can be a detriment even for Americans.

2 Sources

My sources include 21 interviews conducted in 2008–2009 with Americans (10 women, 11 men) living in Finland, mainly in the capital region, and 106 responses to an online survey of Americans who were living in Finland in 2008. Because this article grew out of my earlier research on international marriages between Finns and Americans (Leinonen 2011, 2012), all the interviewees were married to or in a relationship with a Finn. I also interviewed 18 Finnish spouses (13 women, 5 men) of Americans in Finland. All except one of the American interviewees were "white" Americans of European descent. The one exception was a man who had immigrated to the United States from South America as a child with his family. None of the Finns who participated in this study had any immigrant background to Finland. The American interviewees formed a well-educated group: only one had not completed a college degree.

I found my interviewees mainly using the snowball sampling method: through networks of friends, colleagues, and those who had already participated in my research. I also advertised my research on the Internet (e.g. on a blog called *Finland for Thought* and on the websites of the *International English Speakers' Association of Finland* and the *League of Finnish American Societies*). In addition, I contacted the President of the American Women's Club, who enthusiastically invited me to attend their monthly meeting. The Club has operated in Helsinki since 1970.

The interviews I conducted were semi-structured; the questions were mainly biographical and revolved around the migrants' experiences of single or multiple migrations, life in an international marriage, and living in and adjusting to Finnish society. The interviewees selected the language in which the interviews were conducted. All the interviews with Americans were conducted in English and those with Finns, unsurprisingly, in Finnish. The duration of the interviews varied from one hour to four hours. Seven interviewees invited me to their homes; the rest of the interviews were conducted in coffee shops or in interviewees' offices.

The online survey was anonymous, and I distributed information about it mainly through the aforementioned websites as well as through networks of colleagues, friends, and those who had participated in my interviews. Out of the 106 survey respondents almost all were Americans of European descent. The exceptions were three Asian Americans, two African Americans, and another two Hispanic Americans. Of those who reported gender, 57 percent were women. Like my interviewees, the survey respondents were a well-educated group: out of the 106 respondents, 40 percent had a Bachelor's degree, 33 percent a Master's degree, and 9 percent a Ph.D. degree.

The questions mostly dealt with Americans' connections to the homeland and their process of immigration to Finland (in addition to basic variables such as occupation, education, year of immigration, etc.). The richest source of information turned out to be generated by my last, very open-ended question, "please write freely about your experiences of coming to and living in Finland". Almost all the respondents (95 persons) answered this question, many extensively. Many used the question as an opportunity to tell about their difficulties with the Finnish language and with finding employment that fits their educational qualifications – issues that I did not inquire about in my survey questions.

3 Finland – a nation of immigration?

In Finnish scholarship, the history of immigration to the country is usually narrated in a way that highlights its "newness" to the country. According to this narrative, Finland did not transform from a country of emigration to that of immigration until the 1990s (Keskinen, Rastas & Tuori 2009: 18; Tuori 2007a). It is true, of course, that in 1990, there were only about 26,000 foreign citizens in Finland, and by 2010 the number had multiplied to almost 170,000. During this same time period, the number of U.S. citizens in Finland steadily grew from about 1,500 to 2,500 (Statistics Finland 2011a, 2011b). The causes for the increase in the number of foreign citizens can be found in the important transformations that took place in Finland as well as in global power relations during this time period. In the 1980s, criticism on Finland's restrictive immigration policy mounted, as the country rapidly prospered and expanded its welfare. Debates started to prioritize Finland's responsibilities in the global arena over the country's national interests. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, Finland opened up possibilities for immigration from the East (mainly Russia). Immigration was further increased as Finland accepted a growing number of refugees and asylum seekers, and after the country joined the European Union in 1995 (Forsander 2002; Lepola 2000).

While the number of immigrants has certainly grown considerably during the past two decades, there has always been immigration to the country. However, Finland, like many other European nations, has erased the history of immigration from its collective memory – despite the fact that migration historians have demonstrated how the idea of a "sedentary Europe" is false: migrations to, from, and within Europe are nothing new (Moch 2003: 1). This historical amnesia renders immigration a "permanent exception" in Europe, rather than a normal and historical aspect of interaction between countries. Scholars have attributed this invisibility of the immigrant past to "the dominant ideology of the nation-state" – the idea of European nation-states as homogeneous nations with stable and static populations (Lucassen 2005: 13–14, 198).

In Finland, too, the common narrative regarding the Finnish nation contains the idea of a homogeneous, monoethnic nation. Researchers have traced this idea back to the latter half of the 19th century, to the nation-building project that aimed "to incorporate peripheral domains and to assimilate diverse peoples into the body-politic" (Häkkinen & Tervonen 2004: 22). The 19th century witnessed the expansion of both nationalism and racism, and scholars have long debated the relationship between these two ideologies. For example, while Nairn (1977) claimed that racism is a derivative of nationalism, Anderson (1983) famously argued that nationalism and racism are opposite ideologies. Miles, on the other hand, pointed out in 1987 that racism and nationalism are ideologies that simultaneously "overlap and contrast". Both see the world's population dividing into naturally distinct groups, but only nationalism proposes a specific political project within defined spatial borders. These borders can be legitimated by racism, Miles proposes, and indeed, nationalistic movements have in practice often utilized racial vocabulary in power struggles both within the nation and beyond its borders (Hobsbawm 1994: 134–135; Raittila 2004: 25).

In the Finnish context, it has been argued that racism did not play a significant role when the process of nation-building was initiated in the 19th century (Raittila 2004: 33). However, researchers have also pointed out that eugenic thinking did gain a firm foothold in Finland in the early decades of the 20th century (Keskinen, Rastas & Tuori 2009: 18). Isaksson (1996), for example, reveals how Finnish anthropologists appropriated racial theories when trying to "prove" that Finns were racially unrelated to Mongolians – unlike the Sami people, as they claimed. The long-lasting impact of the "Mongolian theory" in the Finnish mental landscape can be seen in Heikki Waris's 1948 study *Suomalaisen yhteiskunnan rakenne* (*The structure of Finnish society*) that underlines Finns' "racial purity". Waris writes (p. 23–24) that "the racial homogeneity of the Finnish nation is strengthened by the fact that there are only three small and completely insignificant racial minority groups", the Sami, Romany, and Jews. He emphasizes that the two latter ones are "racially completely unrelated" to Finns.

Thus, in the early 20th century, in particular after the divisive Civil War of 1918, the new nation intensified its efforts to build a homogeneous nation through ethnopolitics that were based on discourses erasing the presence of ethnic minorities and on concrete political and administrative procedures aiming to assimilate, and sometimes to downright repress, the largest minorities (Häkkinen & Tervonen 2004: 21–25; Puuronen 2006: 42–43). The discourse of Finnishness as a uniform and homogeneous identity was further solidified by the experience of World War II and the subsequent Cold War. Urponen (2010) shows in her study of the 1952 Summer Olympic Games and the simultaneous crowning of Armi Kuusela as Miss Universe, how post-war Finland strove to portray itself as a white, western European nation through these international events. Urponen (p. 10) argues that these events marked "a 'whitening' of the Finnish people as well as a distancing from their previous designations in racial hierarchies". By doing so, Finland necessarily reproduced and complied with racialized relations of power originating from the histories of colonialism.

These examples illustrate that while Finland often sees itself as an "innocent" nation when it comes to racism and colonialism, racial thinking has played an important role in the construction of ideas concerning the Finnish nation during the 20th century. As Vuorela (2009: 21) points out, even though Finland did not directly participate in colonial conquests, "people's minds were 'colonized' into an acceptance of colonial projects" (see also Rastas 2007: 138). These historical processes of nation-building have a profound effect on the ways in which the presence of immigrants and other foreigners in Finland is negotiated today (Clarke 1999: 98; Mulinari *et al*. 2009: 5). For example, scholars have noted how colonial depictions of Africans are sometimes reproduced in present-day stereotypes concerning immigrants originating from African countries (Keskinen, Rastas &

Tuori 2009: 18). Furthermore, in racially structured societies visuality plays a major role in determining who can be considered as part of the nation. While some groups are able to "pass" as "one of us", others are marked visibly different and end up (unwillingly) at the center of stigmatizing debates surrounding immigration (Gray 2002: 267; Nagel & Staeheli 2008: 86). In other words, it is through the politics of visibility that certain groups of foreigners are racialized as "immigrant others" in Finland.

4 Visible and invisible immigrants

In this section, I examine how white Americans are located in different domains of immigrant visibility in Finland: in terms of visuality – who is visually identified as an immigrant – and at the level of public and academic discussions on immigration. In Finland, as in most European countries, "whiteness" is an unmarked and normative racial category that functions as a marker of domination and superiority (Dyer 2002: 177–178; McDowell 2009: 28). At the same time, "whiteness" is not a uniform category. Griffin and Braidotti (2002: 227) argue that "(t)he black-white dynamic leaves untouched the whole issue of diversity among groups seemingly of one color, the intra-group differences that account for many of the most serious racial and ethnicized conflicts in Europe". To highlight these hierarchies within "whiteness", I also briefly discuss the situation of Russian immigrants in Finland, focusing on public discourses. Despite their "whiteness", Russians are a highly visible group in Finnish discussions surrounding immigration. For example, Raittila and Kutilainen (2000) found in their analysis of media coverage of immigrant groups in Finland in 1999–2000 that there were nearly twice as many news stories about Russians as about Somalis. Americans and Russians provide an intriguing comparison: while Americans can be seen as "iconic of the West and modernity", the position of Russians is often difficult due to the complicated historical relationship between Finland and Russia (Piller 2008: 61–62).

In public and academic discourses, immigrant visibility is often linked to being considered as threatening or problematic by the majority population in economic, social, or cultural terms (Findlay 1995: 515). For example, migration scholars have used the term "invisibility" to describe a lack of interest in certain immigrant groups or minorities by scholars and the media because of the "unproblematic" nature of these communities (Garcia 1980). In the two earliest studies that I found to have used the term "invisible immigrants", MacDonald's 1972 statistical survey of Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish immigrants in the UK, and Erickson's 1972 study on English and Scottish immigrants in the 19th century United States, invisibility was associated with being a white European immigrant group that quickly "melted" into the mainstream society.

Immigrants originating from Western industrialized nations form approximately one-third of the immigrant population in Finland. As Martikainen, Sintonen and Pitkänen (2006: 31) point out, these immigrants are largely ignored in public discussions on immigration. Their presence is considered unproblematic by the dominant population due to their high social status and "acceptable" reasons of immigration (marriage, employment, studies). Migration scholars have also neglected this immigrant population precisely because of their assumed unproblematic position in Finnish society. The only study I have found on Americans in Finland is Latomaa's 1998 study on Americans' language learning in the country. Due to this lack of research, "white and middle-class" becomes "the unmarked, self-evident description of an American abroad" (Varro & Boyd 1998: 6). And again, almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy, this very presupposition renders American immigrants as uninteresting for migration researchers and consequently perpetuates the idea that all Americans are white, well-off, and middle-class.

The case of Russian immigrants in Finland provides a contrasting example of how race, nationality, and class are all at play when immigrant groups are rendered visible or invisible in public and academic discourses. Finland's relationship with Russia has been problematic at least since the 19th century. After the Finnish Civil War of 1918, the relationship between the countries deteriorated and Russians and Russian-origin people in Finland became victims of intense discrimination and persecution. Fear of the large and powerful eastern neighbor intensified in Finland during the World War II and Cold War years. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, the attitude changed from fear to feelings of superiority over and contempt for Russians (Jerman 2009: 99; Paananen 1999: 40–42).

This historical baggage makes the position of Russian immigrants in Finnish society difficult, and renders them a highly visible group in public discourses. The negative visibility is gendered, too: Russian women are more visible than Russian men. The stereotypes of Russian women as prostitutes or fortune-hunters who marry Finnish men in order to immigrate to Finland are persistent (Jerman 2009: 99; Reuter & Kyntäjä 2006; Urponen 2008). The question of visibility is tied to class status as well: Reuter and Kyntäjä (2006: 117) discovered in their interviews with intermarried Russian women and Finnish men that well-educated couples with high social status rarely encountered negative stereotypes regarding their marriage.

The position of Russian immigrants in Finnish society challenges the idea of racial characteristics as the only marker of immigrants' visibility. Being a predominantly "white" immigrant group does not "save" Russians from being highly visible in immigration discourses and from persistent discrimination in Finland (Tanttu 2009). At the same time, being visible can often be a very bodily experience. Scholars have importantly highlighted the ways in which "particular bodies, marked by skin color, disability, cultural affiliation, sexuality, age, or gender, are deemed to be 'out of place' and disruptive of the 'natural' or 'normal' order of things" (Nagel & Staeheli 2008: 85). For example, Ruohio's (2009: 28, 31) study on international adoptees from Asia, Africa, and Latin America in Finland reveals the importance of physical characteristics in "becoming visible": despite the adoptees' Finnish citizenship, Finnish-sounding names, perfect

Finnish skills, and social and cultural upbringing in Finland, their Finnishness was continuously contested, for example by Finns addressing the adoptees in English.

The case of Darryl Parker, an African American professional basketball player who left Finland in 1995 because of racial harassment by skinheads, further highlights how immigrant visibility is tied not only to nationality and class but also to race and ethnicity. Parker, quoted in the Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat on November 8, 1995, explained that "I simply don't have the courage to be about in the city anymore, and I don't feel safe here". Thus, different groups of Americans likely experience visibility differently. At the same time, even within "blackness", there are hierarchies based on nationality. Harinen (2003) demonstrates in her study on the media discourses surrounding the Parker case that in the midst of the media upheaval, groups of Somali refugees pointed out that they had been experiencing racism in Finland for years without sparking any alarm or interest in the media.

Like the Californian woman whose quote started this article, a few other interviewees and survey respondents recognized their skin color as a factor facilitating their adaptation in Finland. An American man who responded to the online survey noted: "My immigrant experience has been very good, but I am a unique case – comparatively. I have a Ph.D. and no kids. So employment has been good and expenses have been low. I have not suffered any prejudice of importance because I am Caucasian". While the quote that started this article tied together nationality and race as factors facilitating adjustment in Finland, this one brings class into the picture: the American related his positive immigration experiences also to his education and good employment situation. Yet another American pointed out: "I have many times been reminded that I am a privileged migrant here, that my skin color and country of origin has made a huge difference in how Finns relate to me". Again, the U.S. origin and whiteness were seen as advantages when this immigrant associated with members of the dominant population.

Another interviewee, an American man who was born in South America but immigrated to the United States as a child with his family, and had lived in Finland for four years at the time of the interview, commented that if he "shave[d] and cut" his hair, people would not pay attention to him - unless he said something. In other words this American noted that he could "pass" as a Finn if he "hides" his dark hair, but this "camouflaging" only works if he does not open his mouth and reveal that he does not speak Finnish fluently. This quote draws attention to both visual and audible factors when people make distinctions between "us" and "them". Indeed, my interviews reveal a subtler way of making difference between "us" and "them" in the case of "unproblematic" immigrants like Americans in Finland. The way they "became visible" – or, more accurately, audible – was often related to language use: Americans' lack of Finnish skills or a foreign accent when speaking Finnish rendered them visible in public places (see also O'Connor 2010: 6). The following quote, written by an American who arrived in Finland in 2004, poignantly reveals how language use can mark a person visible: "I arrived in Finland the same day George W. Bush was re-elected. The first few months in Finland I faced many prejudices by random Finnish [sic] on the streets, especially in Helsinki *when I would speak English out loud*. They would say I was murdering people in Iraq (…)".

In this quote, it is the use of American English (and the association of the language with U.S. actions abroad) that marks the American visible on the streets of Helsinki and evokes negative reactions from "random Finnish". Similarly, a Finnish wife of an American man noted that during the Iraq War, they were careful when speaking English in public places: "We tried to speak to each other quietly in trains and such so that we wouldn't annoy people". As these examples reveal, Americans' "audible visibility" may sometimes be received negatively in Finland. However, the high status of the English language and of being an American usually guarantees positive reactions from the dominant population. A few of the Finnish interviewees told about excited reactions when people heard that their spouse is from the United States. A Finnish wife on an American man explained that "for Finns, being an American is really good (…), people's facial expressions change completely when they hear that he is American, they become so interested!" One of the Americans noted, "most Finns still want to create a positive impression on English speakers". Many Americans also told that Finns were often excited to have the possibility to speak English with a native speaker of English: "Learning Finnish is difficult, not only because it's a difficult language, but because so many people insist on speaking English to you".

Overall, in the Finnish context, language seems to play a major role in marking immigrants as visible (Irni 2009: 181–182; Rastas 2009: 58). According to Paananen (1999: 22–23), in the process of nation-building, the special character of the Finnish nation was found in the Finnish language: "The language made the nation an intimate and closed community of similar-minded people". In this context, those with imperfect Finnish skills – let alone those who do not speak Finnish at all – are left outside the exclusive "circle of Finnishness" (Lepola 2000: 328). An American woman who responded to my online survey noted: "Now that I have learned Finnish well – about as well as it is possible – I am frustrated to find that often people withdraw from you when they pick up on the fact that you are not a native (perfect) speaker". Ironically, Americans' efforts to use the Finnish language were sometimes discouraged by Finns themselves. An American interviewed by Latomaa (1998: 62) commented: "Many people will not try to understand when they realize you are a foreigner".

In sum, Americans' visibility is highly contextual: while they may sometimes "pass" as a Finn, their difference from the dominant population becomes visible through language use. Interestingly, for many Americans being visible as an English speaker was preferable to being visible as a non-fluent Finnish speaker. English is a global language with a high social status. Moreover, speaking English implies that a person is staying in Finland only temporarily, whereas "broken Finnish" marks the speaker as an immigrant in Finland. An American woman pointed out in a survey response that "in the end

I discovered that if I want decent service, it's better to use English, since the attitude is then noticeably better". This experience is not limited to native-speakers of English: the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE News 2009) reported that many immigrants received better service in Finland if they spoke English, in contrast to speaking Finnish with an accent. The news story quotes an Algerian man who has lived in Finland for a decade: "I think that if I speak English, they assume I'm a tourist, so the service is better. If I speak Finnish, they think 'he's just one of these foreigners who live in Finland". In other words, Americans living in Finland find themselves in an ambivalent position: speaking English usually creates a positive reaction, but categorizes the speaker as somebody who is not in Finland to stay. Speaking Finnish with an accent, on the other hand, may suggest that the speaker is not an American at all, but an immigrant – which conjures up a completely different mental imagery.

5 "Just an American living abroad"

In Europe, current immigration discussions are predominantly wrapped in the vocabulary of threats, restrictions, and problems that immigrants may cause for their host societies. The discussions typically focus on the (incompatible) cultural, religious, and ethnic differences between the native and immigrant populations. Moreover, the concepts "immigrant", "refugee", and "asylum seeker" are constantly conflated in public discussions in Europe. The small group of refugees and asylum seekers is disproportionately visible in the media, and the concept of an immigrant becomes associated with ideas of oppressed victims fleeing their home country or opportunistic asylum seekers looking for social benefits in prosperous European welfare states. For example, White (2002: 106–107) found that in Ireland, the general assumption is that all immigrants were asylum-seekers (while in fact only one-fifth entered the country in search of refuge). She also found that "blackness" became associated with being a refugee or an asylum seeker. Consequently, the term "immigrant" is racialized to refer to people originating from "poorer", non-white areas of the world who are seeking to gain residence in rich Western countries. For example, Gullestad (2002: 50) notes that in Norway, the term *innvandrer* typically creates images of persons who have a "'Third World' origin, different values from the majority, 'dark skin'". Even in the "nation of immigrants", the United States, the immigrant category is similarly stigmatized: "[Immigrants] are desperate, they are dirty, and they are brown" (Croucher 2009: 18; see also O'Reilly 2000: 140).

In Finland, too, immigration discourses focus on refugees and asylum seekers – who form only a minority (in 2010, 13 percent) of admitted immigrants in Finland.[2] Moreover, negative characteristics are intrinsically linked to public perceptions of persons who are considered to be immigrants, regardless of legal status, in Finnish discourses. Immigrants are seen as a uniform, undifferentiated mass, originating from non-Western parts of the world, and associated with pre-modern gender and family systems (Huttunen 2004: 135; Säävälä 2009: 39; Tuori 2007b: 158; Vuori 2009: 212, 215). When it comes to small numbers of middle-class people moving from one highly industrialized country to another (like immigrants originating from Western and Northern Europe or North America), the term immigrant seems incongruent in many people's minds. Race, nationality, and class are all at play in meanings attached to the term immigrant. Consequently, the term is seldom applied to Americans living in Finland or elsewhere in Europe, either by members of the host society or by Americans themselves (Varro & Boyd 1998). Brady (1989: 2, n. 5), for example, found in his study on Americans in Sweden that Americans did not seem to fit the category of an immigrant in Sweden:

> In conversations conducted with personnel at *Invandrarbyråer* and *Statens Invandrarverk*, and in less formal conversations with Swedish people, it was apparent (…) that Americans are not regarded as immigrants in the true sense of the word. In other words Americans did not enter into the mental imagery of immigrants (…) and instead of being associated with the term immigrant, which usually carries with it some derogatory connotations, Americans appear to be set apart and accorded a higher status.

Also the Finnish spouses of the American interviewees did not usually see their American spouses as immigrants. Many were surprised when I asked about it – they had not thought of their American partner as an immigrant in Finland. When musing on the question, many acknowledged that their spouse was, technically, an immigrant in Finland. However, the American spouse did not seem to comfortably fit this category that many associated with "people coming from poorer countries or just as refugees", like a Finnish husband of an American woman noted. This man worked in an international company with many professional employees from abroad. After pondering the question, he commented that "I suppose my colleagues are also immigrants, but I never think about it".

Americans' use of English in Finland adds to the conception that they are not in the country to stay (as immigrants would be). They are expected to be staying in the country temporarily, perhaps as expatriates – a term that conjures up completely different images than the term immigrant. It evokes visions of international globetrotters who are privileged, middle or upper class, separate from immigrant classes. Expatriates also enjoy a greater freedom of movement than immigrants, who are often unwelcomed and subject to immigration laws restricting their mobility across borders (Croucher 2009: 19–20).[3]

Not only does the larger society fail to see professional and highly skilled movers as immigrants, but also these migrants themselves. Their technical, legal status may be that of an immigrant but they do not identify themselves as such (Baldassar, Baldock & Wilding 2007: 38; Favell 2008; Guild 2004; Weiss 2005: 707). Indeed, the Americans I interviewed often wanted to distance themselves from

the category of an immigrant. Here is an example of a response to the question whether the interviewees saw themselves as immigrants in Finland: "No, no. (…) I am thinking about Russians, the Romany, Somalis, those people are immigrants, [they have] issues of education and integration into the community. I have never felt those issues of being an immigrant". This quote is from an interview that I conducted with an American man who moved to Finland first in 1982 and then, after living for years in different parts of Europe, again in 1996. He associated being an immigrant with having problems of integration into Finnish society, which he personally had not experienced – and therefore he was not an immigrant. In addition, many Americans emphasized how they were not immigrants because they *chose* to come to Finland, and they could go back to the United States whenever they wanted. In other words, they too conflated the categories of immigrant, refugee, and asylum seeker.

One easily finds examples of Americans living in other countries who identify themselves in a similar way. For example, Michael Adler of the Association of American Wives of Europeans, who lives in Paris, proclaims: "We or our children are *neither immigrants nor refugees*. We are *Americans* (...)" (Michaux 1996: 138). Croucher (2009) found in her ethnographic study on Americans living in Mexico that they too were not accustomed to thinking of themselves as immigrants. A comment by one of her interviewees mirrors strikingly the "typical" response that I received when enquiring about Americans' identity in Finland: "I am just an American living in Mexico" (p. 18). These examples illustrate the social stigma that the label immigrant carries with it, as well as the privilege that certain groups of migrants have to refuse this label.

6 "The language is a big issue"

Despite the fact that neither Americans themselves nor the surrounding society regarded this group as immigrants, in practice their status as a foreigner in Finland still affected their integration and career prospects. This highlights how the notion of the immigrant is not a stable one: a person who is not considered an immigrant in one context can be seen as such in the next. Americans' experiences in the Finnish labor market provide a poignant example of this point. Despite the high educational attainment of the Americans who participated in this research, many had had difficulties with finding employment that fit their educational qualifications. Many suspected that their lack of Finnish language skills prohibited them from finding a good job: "It is very difficult to find employment here if you do not speak the native language, despite how much education you have". It seems that quite a few Americans ended up teaching English as they could not find work in their own field. For example, an American woman who moved to Finland in 2004 wrote: "It's pretty much impossible for me to get a job here apart from teaching English, since my Finnish skills are sub-par (…). I would love to stay in Finland forever. But I'm just so sick of teaching English and failing at all other things that I've tried".

A majority of the Americans who participated in this study were not fluent in Finnish, even after years in the country. Many lived in a completely English-speaking environment. For example, an American woman who moved to Finland in 1990 wrote: "I have attempted to learn the language, hoping that it will make me feel more at home, but my language skills are still rudimentary after all these years, probably because it is too easy in Helsinki to speak and get by in English. And my husband's family all use English with me". After 18 years in Finland, the woman still lived in an English-speaking world, unintegrated into Finland in ways that would not be acceptable for immigrants from poorer countries. Finnish is a small language worldwide and when "a speaker of a globally very powerful language (English)" enters Finland, he or she might assume that learning Finnish is not expected or even necessary (Latomaa 1998: 56).

The lack of Finnish language skills affected Americans' integration into Finnish society on a broader level too. Many felt that this problem played a crucial role in their experiences of feeling like an outsider in Finnish society. For example, an American who moved to Finland in 1992 wrote: "The language is a big issue, it's very difficult, and although Finns think it doesn't matter because so many people speak English, it does matter, because the culture is Finnish, in Finnish. It's very hard to feel like part of the culture here". Another American articulated his feelings of not belonging in Finland in the following way: "There is a vicious cycle about not feeling at home here because I don't speak the language, and not really feeling motivated [to learn the language] because I don't feel at home". In those few cases in which the American *did* see himself or herself as an immigrant in Finland, the interviewees associated being an immigrant with not being able to speak Finnish fluently. For example, an American man noted: "An immigrant? Oh sure, yeah. In Finland it's very difficult (...) if [one] doesn't speak Finnish correctly (…) people will pick on it". Again, "broken Finnish" appears to be the factor that immediately marks the person an immigrant.

While the lack of Finnish skills was often identified as the main reason for difficulties with finding a job, some Americans argued that the underlying problem was the discriminatory attitudes of Finnish employers:

> Finding employment as a foreigner has been nearly impossible outside of the Helsinki area. Foreigners are still treated with distrust and suspicion – of course, by law a potential employer cannot tell you that, but he can tell you the position is no longer available, and like other foreigners, I hear it all the time, despite my degree and work qualifications. I also hear about my lack of language skills, which is another well known excuse that foreigners hear when Finnish employers are xenophobic.

Thus, despite the very high educational level of the Americans who participated in my study, experiences of discrimination in the Finnish

job market were not uncommon. Huttunen (2004: 140–143) argues that foreigners looking for a job in Finland are often clumped together into a homogenous and abstract category of "foreigners" that contains ideas about inadequate language skills and unfitting education. In other words, the foreigner is not seen as a concrete individual with personal characteristics, skills, and educational qualifications. A foreigner is, by default, an unwanted employee.

These experiences of my American interviewees and survey respondents call attention to the fact that even those who seem to belong to the global mobile elite experience problems that are more often associated with immigrants of lower social status. While Americans' presence in Finland may be seen as part of (welcomed) internationalization of Finland, their actual experiences of living in Finland are still influenced by the negative immigration discourses. Lehtonen, Löytty, and Ruuska (2004: 258–259) argue that there seems to be two forms of "othering" taking place when Finns negotiate the presence of immigrants in their country. There are *exclusive* others that are at the margins of society: they are the opposite of self, victims or threats. However, others can also be *inclusive*: they can be seen as part of us, maybe even part of our (desired) identity, different, yet not opposite. It seems that Americans – and other Western immigrants – can be seen as inclusive others in Finland. Meeting an American in Finland might be exciting to many Finns, but the American still remains "the other". "Othering" is fundamentally based on an unequal relationship and denies the possibility of complete belonging. As an American noted, "many Finns seem to have a dualistic attitude towards Americans – on the other hand they seem to idolize all things foreign, but on the other hand being different in even a minor way creates distance".

7 Conclusion

Americans have the privilege of not being associated with the racialized and class-based connotations that the category "immigrant" carries with it in Finland. They are considered as unproblematic, perhaps even desired, foreigners in Finland who may bring international "flavor" to Finnishness that often appears as boring, banal, and bland (Lehtonen, Löytty & Ruuska 2004: 31). In other words, Americans, with their use of American English, can be argued to be part of the discourse of internationalization in Finland, not that of immigration. Despite sometimes harsh criticism of the United States in Europe, the country still fascinates people due to its status as a global political, cultural, and economic superpower. Thus, one could assume that Americans' integration into Finnish society would be smooth and unproblematic – and of course in many cases it has been. At the same time, the difficulties of finding work that fits Americans' educational qualifications and their discouraging experiences of speaking Finnish with an accent reveal the fluidity of the division between foreigners who are seen as immigrants and those who are not.

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Notes

1. The fact that so many of the interviewees were not fluent in Finnish may be related to their residence in the capital area of Finland where English is commonly spoken, as opposed to smaller cities or rural areas of the country.
2. In 2010, the Finnish Immigration Service made 16,322 positive residence permit decisions based on employment, family ties, Finnish origin, or studying in Finland. In the same year, 1,784 asylum seekers were granted an asylum and 634 quota refugees were admitted to Finland (Finnish Immigration Service 2011; Sisäasiainministeriö 2011: 8).
3. This meaning of the term "expatriate" is a relatively new invention, as Nancy Green demonstrates in her 2009 article.

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