

## ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MEANING OF ETHNIC IDENTITY: STRENGTH AND MEANING OF ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG RESIDENT AND EMIGRANT ESTONIANS\*

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**Abstract.** Quantitative and qualitative data from three generations of resident and emigrant Estonians showed that the meaning of ethnic identity varied considerably among people with equally strong ethnic pride and feeling of belonging. The two different groups who have lived apart for more than half a century described differently the target of their attachment, the group they belong to, the fellow ethnic group members, Estonian history, etc. The differences probably stemmed first of all from the mono- or bicultural nature of identity respectively among resident and emigrant respondents, different definitions of the ethnic in-group and different salient out-groups. In addition to variations across the contexts, the identification of three generations were compared to each other: younger people showed weaker ethnic pride and attachment compared to older generations.

### 1. Introduction

A nation may be defined as an imagined political community “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members” (Anderson 1996:6). The same is usually valid about ethnic groups. Besides the attachment to the few fellow ethnic group members one happens to know, there exists also an attachment to the imagined group as a whole. These two kind of attachments are described by Prentice, Miller, and Lightdale (1994) as member attachment and group attachment. Ethnic identity is generally defined in terms of group attachment while the attachment among group members is restricted to a very limited number of friends and relatives. Members of an ethnic group primarily belong together because they share their past, language, territory, etc., not because they know and like each other. The common ground for this attachment that is acquired from parents, grandparents, school and media, among others, may change from time to time and may vary between members of an ethnic

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group because the conditions of socialisation differ. At different historical periods, political and economic conditions and family environment, people form a different image of their ethnic group (De Vos 1980). Even more distinctive are the pictures about fellow ethnic group members. While every group member personally knows a different segment of a group, the target-group of ethnic attachment may largely vary across people. Due to these variations, people from the same ethnic group may have rather different images of their group and group members.

A number of previous studies (e.g. Rosenthal and Hrynevich 1985, Driedger 1976) have shown that for different ethnic groups, different features of their culture may contribute to an individual's sense of ethnic identity. Phinney (1992: 157) concluded, for example, that "political attitudes are important in measures of Black identity, language is salient in Mexican-American measures, and cultural attitudes play a major role in Asian-American identity". As a classical rule in cross-cultural psychology states, individual differences in psychological characteristics are almost always bigger than cultural ones (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, Dasen 1998). The same principle should be valid in the case of ethnic identity. Differences in the meaning of ethnic identity may be expected to exist also among members of the same ethnic group. That possibility, however, is rarely mentioned. The only studies made within the same culture that refer to the shift in the meaning of ethnic identity are made about ethnic identity development (Parham 1989, Phinney 1989). Different people, especially from different age groups have been found to be at different levels of ethnic development: an achieved ethnic identity, usually characteristic of adults, is considered to be more a conscious and secure sense of ethnicity compared to the lower stages, e.g. diffusion, foreclosure and moratorium of ethnic identity.

Other studies have measured the strength of ethnic identity among people of the same ethnic origin: comparing males to females (e.g. Phinney 1990), younger people to older people (e.g. Simic, 1987), and people residing at their homeland to emigrants (Rosenthal and Feldman 1992). Females and older people usually tend to identify less strongly with their ethnic groups than males and younger people. Studies made about the shift in the strength of commitment to one's ethnic group over time found weaker ethnic identity or weaker external aspects of ethnic identity among those who have lived longer in the new country (Rogler, Cooney, and Ortiz 1980, Rosenthal and Hrynevich 1992).

In stable societies where the grandparents were raised in the same political system as their grandchildren, and the core values of society have not changed for a certain period, the essence of ethnic identity might be rather similar for different generations. The current research is carried out among Estonians who have faced very different political and historical developments during the last 60 years. The older generation in our study was born before the Second World War when Estonia was an independent state. In 1944, approximately 7% of the Estonian population emigrated in fear of the Soviet occupation. Half of our sample consists of these emigrants, namely Estonians living in Sweden. The members of older generation emigrated themselves, the second and third generation are their

descendants. These people preserved their Estonian identity in a very different context compared to their contemporaries who stayed in Estonia. The Soviet occupation in Estonia lasted until 1991 when Estonia restored its independence. However, for those who were born in the early 1930s or even earlier, the critical period of ethnic identity development passed. Thus, the ethnic identity of the older generation of emigrant as well as resident Estonians may be expected to be similar in several aspects. Most differences probably appear in comparison of the groups of the middle generation who were born and grown up in two very different political systems, often even without a chance to visit the other kind of system and/or the homeland. At the same time the identity of both groups of this age was threatened by another cultural identity. While acculturating to the host society, emigrant Estonians became bicultural or lost their ethnic identity. The identity of resident Estonians was faced with the severe Russification policy that resulted either in protective identity, consciously opposing Russians and the Soviet identity or in some cases in the loss of identity. The younger generation could again be expected to be more similar. Nearly half, and considering the development of ethnic identity, the more important half of their life was spent in a more or less free society with a possibility to visit each others' countries. At the same time the ethnic identity of the third generation emigrant Estonians should not have any salient identity components stemming from the Estonian current reality. Their Estonian identity is largely based on an interpretation of the stories told by their parents and grandparents and, thus, rather rooted in the pre-war period.

Besides the meaning of ethnic identity, we also measured the strength of ethnic identity in comparison of the different age groups and contexts. While the differences in the meaning of ethnic identity among members of the same ethnic group are very rarely mentioned, a lot of research is done about the quantitative side of identity: strength or salience of ethnic identity. Different authors (see Phinney 1990) have investigated how strongly people feel attached to a group, how negative or positive are the feelings towards one's group, how many in-group friends one has, etc. In our study we suppose that younger people and emigrants show weaker ethnic attachment compared to elder respondents and resident Estonians.

Although we hypothesised to find differences across generations and contexts both in the strength and the meaning of ethnic identity, we did not expect that the quantitative and the qualitative side of ethnic identity correspond precisely. Measuring the strength of feeling of belonging to one's ethnic group as it is usually done, there is no evidence to say what people mean by identifying strongly or weakly with their group. Do they feel attached to a group of people, to the traditions of their ethnic group, to a piece of land, to some specific values, or something else? If they are proud of their ethnic group – what is it then they are actually proud of – is it the past, present or even future of their ethnic group, achievements of their fellow ethnic group members or something else?

In the current paper we aim to study the meaning and strength of ethnic identity among people from one ethnic group living in two countries. Among the extensive amount of research dedicated to ethnic identity, there is a rather small number of

studies that compare people from the same ethnic group, residing in different contexts.

We propose that the meaning of ethnic identity varies across different ethnic and age groups and that the variance in meaning is not necessarily related to the strength of ethnic identity. People with equally strong ethnic identity may differ in how they understand their identity. Emigrant Estonians are likely to be more conscious of their ethnicity and what it involves than resident respondents. At the same time their ethnic identity strength is probably weaker than that of the residents. Younger people are also expected to have weaker ethnic identity compared to older generations.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Data for the present research were collected in March-April 1997. The sample for the quantitative study consisted of 199 persons of Estonian ethnic origin; 142 of them lived permanently in Estonia (resident sample) and 57 in Sweden (emigrant sample). The qualitative study – structured interviews, were conducted with 36 people, half of them from Estonia and half from Sweden. To afford a comparison by generations, the samples were divided into 3 age-groups: (a) people older than 60 years = older (I) generation; (b) 31 to 60 years = middle (II) generation; (c) younger than 31 years = younger (III) generation. These groups (with minimally 16 people in each category in the quantitative study and 6 in the qualitative study) mark conventionally the first, second and the third generation. The first-generation people spent their childhood, and many went to school before World War II, during the independent Estonian Republic. The second generation is viewed as their children; they were mostly born during or after World War II and had their major experience in life in Sweden or occupied Soviet Estonia respectively. The third generation has spent most of their adult life either in Sweden or in the re-independent Estonia.

### 2.2. Quantitative study

(1) The resident sample. The mean age of the group was 52 years ( $SD = 17,1$ ), ranging from 17 to 80. Forty nine respondents belonged to the first, 73 to the second and 20 to the third generation. Fifty four per cent of the respondents were female. All were born in Estonia.

(2) The emigrant sample. The mean age was 51 years ( $SD = 20,1$ ), ranging from 20 to 84 years. Twenty five respondents belonged to the I generation, both II and III generation were represented by 16 participants. Fifty eight per cent of the respondents were female. About 50 % of the respondents had left Estonia during WW II (later emigrants were not included in the sample), the rest were their Swedish born descendants. During World War II, especially in 1944, approximately

70,000 people fled Estonia, mainly to Sweden and Germany. Although many of these people later moved to other countries (e.g., Canada, the United States, and Australia), Sweden remained the centre of Estonians in exile. Today, about 25,000 people of Estonian origin live in Sweden.

Respondents for the resident sample were randomly selected from Tartu, the second largest town in Estonia, and the county of Tartu (the random-choice list was ordered from the population register of the Tartu city council). The names of the potential participants in Sweden were obtained from an address-book of Estonians in Sweden with the help of their community leaders in Stockholm. In both cases a letter, asking for the person's participation and explaining the goals, a questionnaire and a stamped envelope were mailed to altogether 450 subjects; the rate of return was 42 % in Estonia and 27 % in Sweden.

### *2.3. Qualitative study*

Thirty six respondents were distributed equally between three generations (respectively, in either sample each generation was represented by 6 people; 3 males and 3 females).

(1) The resident sample. All 18 resident participants were Estonians by self-identification, they were born in Estonia and resided presently in Tartu or its neighbourhood. In the older generation, the ages ranged from 63 to 73, in the middle generation from 36 to 57, and in the younger generation from 19 to 26 years. The participants were recruited from the random sample who had completed the ethnic identity scale; participation was voluntary.

(2) The emigrant sample. The emigrant sample consisted of 18 people who had emigrated from Estonia during World War II and their second- and third-generation descendants, four of whom had one Swedish parent. All participants admitted that they were Estonians or of an Estonian ethnic origin and all but one had mastered Estonian. In the older generation, age ranged from 60 to 84 years, in the middle generation from 33 to 54 years, and in the younger generation from 23 to 30 years. The Swedish participants were also volunteers, recruited from the Estonian communities in Stockholm and Lund.

(Explanatory note: the Estonian participants in Sweden are subsequently referred to as Estonian emigrants, rather than immigrants in Sweden, in order to stress the specific relation to their country and nation of origin.)

### *2.4. Measurement*

The study consisted of two parts. In the quantitative study the participants completed an ethnic identity scale. The qualitative study consisted of a structured interview.

#### *2.4.1. Quantitative study*

In order to measure the strength of ethnic identity, a twenty-item ethnic identity scale (EIS) was applied to the samples (Valk, Karu in press). The scale comprises

two sub-scales that measure ethnic pride, belonging and commitment (EP subscale) and ethnic differentiation (ED subscale). In the present study only the results of EP subscale (see Appendix 1) are analysed. The Cronbach alpha for EP subscale is .86.

#### 2.4.2. Qualitative study

The interview consisted of mainly open-ended questions addressing the key issues in the meaning of an Estonian's ethnic identity. Questions were asked about an ethnic group as a whole as well as the fellow ethnic group members, traditions, history, and culture of the ethnic group, with an aim to find out the meaning of these phenomena to the respondent and associations connected to these questions. The exact questions of the interview are provided in Appendix 2 (only questions used in the current study are given).

The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 3 hours (relatively longer with the emigrant participants). The emigrants were given a choice of the language. All but one person from the younger generation (with whom the interview was conducted in English) preferred to converse in Estonian. The participants were also asked for the permission to tape-record the interviews; the tapes were later transcribed verbatim and analysed with regard to differences and similarities in attitudes and experiences quoted. When these could be detected, the patterns of the more frequent themes and categories were brought out and contrasted by contexts and/or by generations. Besides, we attempted to present direct quotations that expressed either very typical or very untypical opinions. For Estonian speaking readers, the original quotations from interviews are given in brackets.

The quotations were coded on the following principle: the cases will be referred to by context, gender, generation and number, for example SF 3/18 refers to the Swedish female from the third (i.e. the younger) generation, whose personal code-number is 18.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Strength of ethnic identity

Differences between the samples and generations became obvious in self-identification: while in the resident sample all people identified themselves as Estonians, in Sweden 100 % of the older-generation respondents defined themselves as Estonians, in the middle generation this number had shrunk to 37.5 %, while 50 % identified themselves as simultaneously Estonian and Swedish and 12.5 % as simply Swedish. Interestingly, also 50 % of the younger generation "labelled" themselves as Estonian and Swedish, but other numbers were reversed: 37.5 % chose to be purely Swedish and 12.5 % Estonian.

The results of the one-way ANOVA reveal that there exist generational differences in ethnic identity ( $F = 12.3$ ;  $p < .001$ ). A general tendency, as expected, was that the strength of ethnic identity was the weakest in the younger generation, increased in the middle generation and achieved the strongest level in

the older generation. Unexpectedly, the ethnic identity salience did not differ across samples – no statistically significant differences appeared either in comparing generations or total samples. For an exact result see Table 1.

Table 1

Means and standard deviations (in brackets) of ethnic pride and belonging by generations and country of residence

	EP			n	
	Resident	Emigrant	p	Resident	Emigrant
Older generation	36.2 (4.6)	34.6 (5.2)	.160	51	25
Middle generation	32.9 (5.8)	32.2 (7.1)	.654	70	16
Younger generation	30.8 (5.4)	30.1 (6.0)	.694	21	16
Total sample	33.8 (5.6)	32.7 (6.2)	.202	142	57

Note. EP, ethnic pride and belonging, Scores range from 0 to 40, higher scores refer to stronger ethnic identity.

### 3.2. Meaning of ethnic identity

The key words referring to the meaning of ethnic identity that were used in the Ethnic Identity Scale and also mentioned in the interview were ethnic group, ethnic group membership, importance of ethnic origin, ethnic pride, fellow ethnic group members, traditions, and history of one's ethnic group.

#### 3.2.1. The essence of being an Estonian

The first question that concerned the meaning of the ethnic group was as follows: when you think about the fact that you are an Estonian (of Estonian origin) – what first comes to your mind, what do you associate with being an Estonian? For the resident respondents it was the land – whether Estonia as a whole or a piece of land in their native place or in the native place of one's mother or father – that was firstly and most often mentioned in association with the ethnic group membership. Approximately half of the residents, but only one emigrant Estonian referred to it in response to the above-mentioned questions. The best example are probably the words of one 45-year-old man who said: *An image of a complex that could be summarised with the word homeland or anything that for me equals Estonia. I am not entirely sure, but I think that Estonians are home-centred and the place – starting from one's back yard and ending with the whole country – is important for them. So I guess it is very important (Ettekujutus ühest kogumist, mida võib ühe niisuguse sõnaga kokku võtta, nagu kodumaa, või mis Eestimaaga võrdsustub minu jaoks. Ma ei ole küll päris kindel, aga ma arvan, et eestlane on üsna paikne inimene ja koht on tema jaoks tähtis, alates oma krundist või õuest ja lõpetades terve riigiga, nii et ma arvan, et sellel on väga suur kaal.).* Language and standing for one's independence, opposing other nations, were the second important associations among residents. Somewhat surprisingly, emigrant Estonians (except one) did not mention the struggle for Estonian independence

that, however, was for some period one of the main missions of Estonians living in exile. Emigrant subsample mentioned relatives, parents or friends (7 respondents) and the Estonian language (7 respondents) when asked about associations to their ethnic group membership or ethnic background.

### 3.2.1.1. Importance of ethnic origin

When inquired about the importance of being an Estonian, only 4 resident and 11 emigrant respondents considered this to be very important. Explaining the importance of ethnicity, emigrant Estonians gave reasons like: *Being Estonian is what I really feel I am. My parents are Estonians and it is important (Jah, see on ju kes ma olen, ma olen ju Eesti vanematelt ja see on tähtis)* (SF 2/8) and *It is rather important. It is, after all, a part of my identity (See on täitsa oluline, see on ikkagi osa minu identiteedist)* (SM3/14) and *My life would be quite dull, were I not an Estonian. I could not have stayed in Estonia, I could not have entered another society the way I did in Estonia (Mul oleks päris igav elu, kui ma ei oleks eestlane. Ma ei oleks Eestis saanud olla, ma ei oleks teise ühiskonda pääsenud niimoodi sisse nagu ma võisin olla Eestis)* (SF 3/18). Twelve resident and six emigrant (mainly from the older generation) participants claimed that they took their origin for granted since it is impossible to change it. Resident Estonians added that they did not think much about their ethnic background and, if they belonged to any other ethnic group, it would not have mattered either: *I could not imagine myself being anybody else. Most probably it is not important. If I compare myself to others, I compare myself, not my ethnicity. I am conscious of the fact that I am Estonian, but it does not make any difference in my life (Ei kujutaks ennast kellegi teisena ette. Ilmselt ei ole see oluline. Kui ma võrdlen ennast teistega, siis ma võrdlen ennast, mitte enda rahvust. Seda ma ikka teadvustan, et ma olen, aga see ei muuda minu elus midagi.)* (EM 3/13). Some people could not find any answer to the question about the importance of being an Estonian. That obviously refers to a rather small and unconscious role of ethnicity in their identity. Among emigrant Estonians it is possible to draw quite a clear distinction between older and younger generations. Older respondents, all of whom were born in Estonia and raised in a “pure” Estonian family, had never had a real reason to reflect on their ethnic origin. Most of them said that it was difficult to give an answer to the question about the importance of ethnic background, and that *At my age it is impossible to be anybody else than Estonian (No ei ole üldse võimalik midagi muud olla minu eas inimesel kui eestlane.)* (SM 1/2). Only one of them stated that the fact of being an Estonian was quite important for him. All respondents from the younger generation for whom being Estonian was a matter of conscious choice, on the other hand, claimed the fact of their Estonian background to be very important: *Very important... It is broadening your perspective (Väga oluline... See annab nagu laiema perspektiivi.)* (SF 3/16).



### 3.2.1.2. Ethnic pride

All emigrant Estonians, except one middle-generation person who claimed that being of Estonian origin (both parents were Estonian) did not mean anything to him, reported that they have always been proud of their ethnicity. Several people stressed that Estonian immigrants are well-known and respected by Swedes. The main reasons for their pride were also mostly associated with the achievements of the Estonian community abroad: their political manifestations, cultural events, famous people and, especially, their conviction that Estonians are better than Swedes. Three persons summed this feeling up in virtually the same words. According to SF 1/4: *I always feel proud when I say I am Estonian. Because we are just the best here, this can be seen at once! (Ma ütlen alati uhkusega, et ma olen eestlane, sest me oleme siin kõige paremad. Seda on ju kohe näha.)* Other causes for pride included: the Estonian state and Estonian people residing elsewhere (twice) and the achieving of independence and further developments in Estonia (three times) : *I am very proud of this. I am proud of my emigrant-Estonian friends, I am proud of Estonia and the Estonian flag. I was proud when Estonia gained its independence. (Ma olen väga uhke selle üle. Ma olen uhke oma sõprade üle ja Eesti üle ja Eesti lipu üle. Ma olin väga uhke, kui Eesti sai iseseisvaks.)* (SF 3/18).

Resident Estonians were more modest in expressing their ethnic pride. Five of them said that they did not feel special pride of the fact that they were Estonians or that maybe they felt some pride when Estonia restored its independence. The others suggested that the main reasons for pride were the accomplishments of Estonians which have been valued also by out-groups (for instance, gaining freedom, sports, Eurovision song contest), big national festivals or other national events which have induced the feeling of attachment with the group and, finally, the conviction that, however small the nation is, Estonians have a highly developed cultural life.

### 3.2.1.3. Attitudes towards ethnic belonging

A very clear difference between emigrant and resident Estonians emerged in the answers to the question about the advantages and disadvantages of their ethnic belonging. In the Estonian context this question did not seem to make much sense - most of the resident respondents were obviously puzzled and said something like: *I don't know. What advantages or disadvantages could one nation have. (Ei oskagi arvata. Mis plüsse ja miinuseid ikka saaks olla ühel rahvusel)* (EM 2/12). Emigrant Estonians, on the other hand, found numerous arguments to explain both the advantages and disadvantages of their ethnic belonging. Broadened perspective, more contacts, richer social life, a strong sense of group-belonging and the possibility to "switch" between the two communities were mentioned as some of the advantages of belonging to two cultures. Not a single emigrant respondent regretted his fate. Expressed in the words of a young Swedish-Estonian: *It has given me a lot. Being an Estonian here has offered me a wider*

look at the world. You are better able to understand people who come from other countries and you have more than just the narrow Swedish perspective. As I am bicultural, I can view things from different angles. (See on andnud mulle palju, see on nagu suurem perspektiiv maailmast, saab nagu rohkem aru inimestest, kes tulevad teistest maadest ja et sul ei ole ainult see Rootsi vaade, nagu rootlased võivad olla kitsarinnalised. Kuna mina olen mõlemad, siis mul on võimalus vaadata asju mitmest seisukohast.) (SF 3/17). As clearly as they were able to bring out positive moments of their bicultural status, emigrant Estonians were also conscious about the disadvantages of belonging to two cultures. Negative sides of the bicultural life were, however, mostly consigned to the past: the first generation recalled the feeling of being different, strangers, a status that was accompanied by economical difficulties after arriving in the country and the experience of not being wholly accepted by the native Swedes. Younger people mentioned some negative childhood experiences in connection with Estonian life in exile: being bullied for their different name or the accent, and attending Estonian complementary school, were the events most frequently recalled. Estonian complementary school that functioned in the evenings or Saturday mornings and was made compulsory by parents was rather unpopular: *Father ordered me to go to this school, but I hated this thing! Actually it is surprising that I haven't become any more anti-Estonian, because he really pushed this school on me... If he hadn't, perhaps I would have liked to move to Estonia for a while, but now I really react against him* (SF 3/17). The same feeling of existing in two cultures or between two cultures that was usually perceived as an enriching and stimulating fact, was viewed by two persons as difficult at times, being outside and confused: *I don't know where I belong even now. When I go to Estonia, I am a stranger, when I go to the States I am a stranger, and when I am here I am a stranger, too. I belong nowhere, I am a mixture.... My heart is very much in Estonia. No, Sweden is not my homeland, it can't be, because I was brought up in an Estonian home. And homeland is based on the atmosphere at home. But it wasn't good to be brought up like that because it may make a person unhappy.* (*Ma ei tea, kuhu ma kuulun kuni tänapäevani, sest kui ma Eestisse lähen, siis ma olen võõras, kui ma Ameerikasse lähen, siis ma olen võõras ja kui ma siin olen, siis ma olen ka võõras. Ma ei kuulu ju õieti kuhugi, ma olen ju üks segu. ... Süda on väga Eestis. Ei, Rootsi ei ole kodumaa, see ei saa olla, sest ma kasvasin Eesti kodu üles. See on kodu atmosfäär, mis kodumaa kujundab. Aga ega see ei olnud ju ka hea niimoodi üles kasvada, sest see võib teha inimese õnnetuks*) (SF 2/8). While younger people from the emigrant subsample named the pluses and minuses of their ethnic belonging easily, the older generation was in their answers rather similar to the resident sample, being unable to recall significant advantages nor disadvantages of their ethnic background.

### 3.2.2. Fellow ethnic group members

In addition to the questions concerning ethnic group as a whole and the respondents' perception of their ethnic belonging, the following questions about

their fellow ethnic group members were asked: a) According to your experience – how would you describe typical Estonians? What characteristic features have they got, what do they like? b) Now, having described Estonians – did you actually mean Estonians in general, Estonians here, in Sweden, or Estonians in Estonia? c) In your opinion – what defines an Estonian person? Can a person be considered an Estonian if he/she cannot speak the Estonian language?

### 3.2.2.1. Typical character

Resident Estonians described typical Estonians as reserved (mentioned 11 times), hard-working (6), and egoistic or envious (4). While among I generation industriousness and envy were mentioned most often, all younger people from III generation described Estonians as reserved or taciturn. Although not asked to compare Estonians to other nations several people did so, comparing Estonians to Russians. Emigrant Estonians, in their turn, compared Estonians to Swedes, or resident Estonians to emigrants (or described a rather small group of people from their own circle of acquaintances). This freely chosen ground of comparison may be one of the reasons why the picture of a typical Estonian varied considerably across the samples. While residents had formed rather stereotypical picture about a typical representative of their fellow ethnic group member, emigrants expressed highly diverse image of Estonians, describing them as hard-working (1), decent (1), friendly (1), honest (1), etc. None of the characteristics was mentioned more than once. The most typical answer (7) was that it was impossible to describe a typical Estonian. This view was expressed by four people from the older and three from the middle generation. None of the residents refused to answer. This difference in the answers may be also caused by the fact that, as appeared, most of the residents described Estonians living in Estonia while most of the emigrants drew a picture of Estonians living in Sweden.

### 3.2.2.2. Criteria of being an Estonian

Although the characteristics of a typical Estonian differed a lot across the samples, the critical conditions that determined an Estonian were similar. Approximately half from each sample considered the fluency of the Estonian language an inevitable condition for belonging to the group. Personal feelings of belonging to the group were the second most often referred determinant of an Estonian. *What is most important, in my opinion, is that a person considers himself an Estonian. Then he/she is Estonian, although he/she has never learned the language. It is also important to have the knowledge of Estonian culture and history.... It is not enough just to have roots, one has to show interest in your origin. (Ma arvan, et kõige tähtsam on see, et inimene ikka peab ennast eestlaseks. Siis ta on ka, mis sest et ta seda keelt pole õppinud. Oluline on see, et ta teaks Eesti kultuuri ja ajalugu.... Mitte ainult juured, aga ta peab sellest huvituma.)* (EF 3/17). Some people also stressed the knowledge, interest and love for Estonia to be of crucial importance while deciding about belonging to Estonian nation. -- *You*

*have to love your nation, your country, because if you don't love it, you are not an Estonian. It has to be inside you. You should be proud of your nation. (Peab armastama oma rahvust, oma maad, sellepärast, et kui sa seda ei armasta, siis sa ikka eestlane ei ole. See peab olema sees, uhkust peab tundma oma rahvuse üle.)* (EM 1/3).

### 3.2.3. Culture

There was one general question about Estonian culture and some specific questions concerning its history and traditional holidays. The general question – If you think about Estonian culture – what comprises it? – was supported by some additional questions – If you had to introduce Estonian culture to a foreigner – what would you most certainly mention? What are the characteristic features that distinguish us from other nations?

More than a half of both samples referred to Estonian music, choirs, song festivals, singing traditions, etc., areas connected with music and singing. These phenomena were more often mentioned by the older people from I and II generation. The younger generation resident respondents considered Estonian folk traditions, peasant life and pre-Christian pagan beliefs even more characteristic of the Estonian culture.

#### 3.2.3.1. History

Estonian history was touched upon in two questions: (1) Which particular period or an event might be regarded as the beginning of Estonian history? and (2) Please describe briefly the process of Estonian history as you see it – which remarkable events and persons would you highlight? Three different starting points for Estonian history were mentioned: 1) the time (approximately 5000 years ago) when the first people came to this piece of land; 2) the 13th century in connection with the ancient fight for freedom against German crusaders; 3) 1918 – the War of Independence and the beginning of an independent Estonian Republic.

Among emigrants, the War of Independence (7 times) was followed by the ancient fight for freedom (6) that, in turn, was the most often (8) mentioned starting-point of Estonian history among resident respondents. Six residents and three emigrants referred to the time-period of the first people coming to Estonia, and four residents to the year 1918 as the beginning of Estonian history. III generation's opinion in this respect differed clearly from that of the II and I generations. While older people preferred the beginning of an independent Estonian Republic (5 + 5 times), III generation proposed the ancient fight for freedom (9 times) as the starting point of Estonian history. The process of history was described according to the chosen starting point. Apart from that, no remarkable differences in choosing significant events or persons from Estonian history appeared either across the samples or across generations.

### 3.2.3.2. Traditions

Two questions concerning traditional holidays were asked: Do you usually celebrate traditional Estonian holidays at home? Which holidays do you observe? More than half of resident Estonians celebrated Christmas and Easter and/or Midsummer Day, often still hesitating to call these Estonian holidays. Only two respondents celebrated anniversaries of the Estonian Republic; some admitted to watching the parade or the presidential reception in TV. Seven people, four of them from the younger generation, did not celebrate any Estonian holidays. Emigrant respondents clearly observed Estonian traditions at Christmas or Easter. Altogether 12 emigrant respondents claimed to prepare Estonian food at these holidays. Even more remarkable was the relatively high proportion of those celebrating the anniversary of the Estonian Republic: 10 respondents prepared traditional food and/or visited a ceremony in the Estonian House in Lund or in Stockholm.

## **4. Discussion**

The results of the study showed that among people with equally strong ethnic identity, the meaning of identity may considerably vary. Although the strength of Estonian identity proved almost equal across different contexts, the Swedish Estonians had a notably more active and reflective attitude to their ethnic origin. The main reason for this is probably their bicultural identity and the fact that in the Swedish case keeping the ethnic identity needs a special effort, the identity is not “given” to emigrants as is the case of resident Estonians. Being Estonian is their conscious option and this identity is therefore more important to them than for the residents, most of whom have never had the need to make this ethnic choice. Due to the same reason, the emigrants were also more proud of their ethnic origin and were easily able to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages stemming from their background. This distinction is in line with former findings that among members of a minority group, the exploration of one’s ethnic background and salience of ethnic identity is typically higher than in a majority group (Laar 1996, Phinney 1992, Phinney and Alipura 1990).

In addition to the strength of identity and the way (active or passive) people felt attached to the group, the target of an attachment was clarified. First, the key components of identity varied a lot – some respondents felt attached to the land, others to the language or to the people. Secondly, the resident and emigrant respondents held different views of the ethnic group and fellow ethnic group members they felt attached to. A rather diverse image of a typical Estonian person may probably be based on different definitions of the ethnic group and the fellow ethnic group members. Although among both subsamples the proficiency in the Estonian language was considered the most important determinant of an Estonian person, the group of ethnic attachment varied from a small group of close friends

and relatives to Estonians living in Sweden, all Estonians living abroad, Estonians living in Estonia to even Estonians all over the world. While most of the residents could not name either pluses or minuses of their ethnicity, emigrant respondents easily reflected on the positive as well as the negative experiences in connection with their Estonian origin, mostly finding reasons to be proud of their ethnicity. Garcia (1982) has shown that a strong identification with an ethnic group can be independent of the positive opinion of this group. Likewise, it seems that Estonians living in Estonia feel very much Estonian, but are not extremely proud of their group, while among emigrants the situation is different – they express strong identification as well as positive attitudes toward their group of origin. In addition to differences on the level of ethnic consciousness, the key to this distinction may lie in the feeling of success associated with the group. For instance, the emigrants often stressed how well off and highly respected Estonians are in the Swedish society. At the same time, several participants from Estonia expressed their discontent with recent developments in Estonia.

A rather clear distinction in the importance and evaluation of one's ethnic belonging appeared between the older generation of emigrant Estonians, on the one hand, and II and III generations of emigrant Estonians, on the other. Most of I generation emigrants defined themselves as purely Estonian, being thus similar to the resident respondents. This result may refer to the major influence of early socialisation for the development of ethnic identity (Phinney 1989). Although fully adapted to the Swedish way of life, the majority of older emigrant Estonians has preserved their Estonian identity, acquired in childhood and/or early adolescence, and gave answers similar to their monocultural fellow ethnic group members in Estonia.

It can therefore be concluded that the meaning of ethnic identity within the same ethnic group may vary considerably: people from different generations living in different contexts form rather different ideas/understandings about their ethnic group and the role of ethnic identity in their lives. The strength of ethnic identity that is usually measured is not a good indicator of these differences.

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## APPENDIX 1

## Ethnic Identity Scale

This questionnaire consists of 20 statements that describe national identity. Please read each item carefully and then decide if you agree or do not agree with this item.

Write "4" if you **strongly agree** with the item.

Write "3" if you **agree** with the item.

Write "2" if you find it **hard to either agree or disagree** with the item.

Write "1" if you **disagree** with the item.

Write "0" if you **strongly disagree** with the item.

We are interested in **your particular opinion** about the following statements, thus there cannot be right or wrong answers. Please try to answer as precisely as possible. Read every item carefully and write your option-number on a line behind the statement. Answer all the items. If you want to make a change in your answer, make it clearly.

0	1	2	3	4
strongly disagree	disagree	hard to say	agree	strongly agree

My ethnicity is.....

2. I am proud of my ethnic group membership. ....
3. Being conscious of my ethnic background increases my feeling of confidence. ....
6. I respect the traditions of my ethnic group. ....
7. I am greatly interested in the history of my ethnic group. ....
9. I feel a strong inner connection with my ethnic group. ....
11. I enjoy taking part in events of my ethnic group. ....
12. I am conscious of my ethnic background and of what it means to me. ....
14. I feel good about my ethnic background. ....
16. Knowing the history of my ethnic group teaches me to value and understand my fellow ethnic group members and also myself better. ....
18. I take pride in achievements of my fellow ethnic group members. ....

## References

Note. only items of EP subscale are given in the Appendix. The scores are derived by summing across items, and obtaining the mean.

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**Interview questions**

- 1) When you think about the fact that you are an Estonian (of Estonian origin) – what first comes to your mind, what do you associate with being an Estonian?
- 2) How important is being an Estonian (of Estonian origin) for you personally? Why is it important?
- 3) Are you proud to be an Estonian?  
Yes: What are the things that you are or have been proud of?  
No: Have you ever felt proud of this? > In which connection?
- 4) Have you ever been ashamed of your nationality or tried to hide it?  
Yes: What were the reasons?
- 5) In short: which advantages and which disadvantages you see about the fact that you belong to Estonians (are of Estonian origin) rather than to some other nationality?
- 6) According to your experience – how would you describe typical Estonians? What characteristics have they got, what do they like?
- 7) Now, having described Estonians – did you actually mean Estonians in general, Estonians here, in Sweden, or Estonians in Estonia?
- 8) In your opinion - what determines an Estonian? Can a person be considered an Estonian if she/he cannot speak Estonian language?
- 9) Now, if you think about Estonian culture – what makes it? If you had to introduce the Estonian culture to a foreigner – what would you definitely talk about? What are the characteristic things that distinguish us from other nations?
- 10) Which particular time-period or an event might be regarded the beginning of the Estonian history? Why?
- 11) Please describe briefly the process of the Estonian history as you see it - which remarkable events and persons would you bring out? Which other nations or processes have influenced our history the most?
- 12) At your home – do/did you usually celebrate traditional Estonian holidays?  
Y: Which holidays do you observe?  
N: Have you ever celebrated any of them?