

## CHAPTER 9

# Being Jewish in Contemporary Finland

## Reflections on Jewishness from Project Minhag Finland

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### Abstract

This chapter asks what being Jewish may mean in contemporary Finland by examining interviews of members of the Jewish congregations, collected in 2019 to 2020 in the research project *Minhag Finland*. The chapter first offers a brief assessment of the history of the Jewish community in Finland from its origins until present day, followed by a review of previous research on Nordic Jewish identities. Jewish identities in Finland are observed from three topical perspectives: how the informants negotiate their membership in an Orthodox Jewish congregation while living in a secularized society; how the elusive concept of “Finnishness” (national identity) interplays with just as elusive “Jewishness” (ethnic/religious identity); and, finally, the informants’ confrontations with antisemitism and racism in Finland. The chapter shows that during the

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last 30 years the Finnish Jewish community has evolved from a homogenous Ashkenazi (East European Jewish) community into a multicultural community. The community embraces many elements of “Finnishness” (national symbols and narratives), while the “difference” inherent to their Jewishness is not forgotten or suppressed. The chapter also shows how differently the mechanisms of antisemitism and racism in Finland influence the members of this diverse community.

**Keywords:** Finnish Jews, Finnish Jewish identity, Orthodox Judaism, Antisemitism

## Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss what Jewishness or being Jewish in Finland may mean today to some Jewish Finns/Finnish Jews. Through analyzing recent interviews of members of the Jewish community, I asked my sources how they see their Jewish identity in Finland and how these self-perceptions have changed. In addition, other identity traits such as gender, origin and “race”<sup>1</sup>—the interaction between such markers as whiteness and Jewishness—are of interest. I will use the terms “Jewish Finns” and “Finnish Jews” in no particular order, although the latter term is widely used in English articles and books dealing with Finnish Jewish history. This conscious choice reflects the multidimensionality of being both *Finnish* and *Jewish*. As Shaul Magid (2013: 1) has aptly noted, these are not arbitrary choices: “American Jews or Jewish Americans? American Judaism or Judaism in America? ... Is it simply a hierarchical question of identity: American or Jewish? ... One *is*; the other describes.” (Original emphasis.) In Finnish, the local community is most often referred to as *Suomen juutalaiset*, “the Jews of Finland.”

The main aim of the chapter is to bring out various existing possibilities and pluralities of Jewishness in Finland; this chapter therefore does not present an exhaustive analysis, but seeks out variability and change. The Finnish Jewish community is an established part of the secularized but predominantly Lutheran Finnish society: until the 1990s, the community was mostly “Cantonist” (originally Ashkenazi<sup>2</sup> descendants of Russian Jewish soldiers), but during the past 30 years, it has become increasingly more diverse and multicultural. Currently, there are approximately 1,200 registered members in the Jewish congregations of Helsinki and Turku, the majority of them in Helsinki.

The interviews were collected in 2019 and 2020 in the research project *Minhag Finland*.<sup>3</sup> The goal of this ongoing multidisciplinary project is to study Judaism as a vernacular religion in the Finland of today and the shifting identities of Jewish individuals (see e.g. Illman 2019; McGuire 2008). In the semi-structured interviews, the informants were asked about their family background, religious

and culinary traditions, local *minhagim* (authorized local customs) and about being Jewish in Finland.

All the informants interviewed in the project are members of a Jewish congregation. Due to the informal nature of the interviews, they treated many topics related to Jewish identity from conversion to experiences of antisemitism. Altogether 101 informants, all above the age of 18, were interviewed; 54 were female and 47 were male. A total of 25 percent of the informants were born abroad: interviews were conducted in Finnish, Swedish, English, Hungarian, German and Russian. An announcement looking for participants was published in the community newspaper *Hakehila* in fall 2018 as well as in other media outlets of the congregations. Participation in the interviews was voluntary, and informed consent of the informants was obtained at the beginning of the interview. To protect the anonymity of the informants, I refer to them either anonymously or with aliases and do not disclose any recognizable traits.

In addition to the interviews, I have also closely read two memoirs written by Finnish Jewish authors: Boris Grünstein's (1919–1992) *Juutalaisena Suomessa: hirtehišumoristisia tarkasteluja* (1989, “As a Jew in Finland: Observations in Gallows Humor”) and Eva Odrischinsky's (b. 1953) *Som alla andra: min judiska familj och jag* (2019, “Like Everyone Else: My Jewish Family and I”). Grünstein was a lawyer, led a fur company in Helsinki and served for decades in the administration of the Helsinki Jewish congregation. Odrischinsky is a theater director who currently lives in Israel. Born in 1919, Grünstein represents the generation of Finns who went through the war, while Odrischinsky (b. 1953) grew up during the cultural changes of the 1960s and 1970s. Gender plays a significant role in these memoirs: for example, Grünstein writes humorously on “macho” masculinity and his sexual conquests, whereas Odrischinsky describes the rigid frames the women of her mother's generation—the same generation as Grünstein—confronted. Both Helsinki-based authors record flowing moments of belongingness and alienation emphatically from a Finnish Jewish perspective. Grünstein's memoir is structurally more conventional and follows his life in a chronological order; by contrast, Odrischinsky focuses on certain key moments of her life, moving back and forth in time. Memoirs are typically works of selective memory; yet, both contain a wealth of information on the Finnish Jewish experience in the 20th century and thus act as an additional source of information besides the interviews.

I first briefly narrate the outlines of the history of the Finnish Jewish community, as this is meaningful for the ensuing analysis. I then discuss previous studies of Jewish identities in the Nordic Jewish context. This is followed by a three-part analysis of what being Jewish/Jewishness in Finland may entail: first, the enduring paradox of an Orthodox Jewish community in a highly secularized Finnish society; second, the approaches of the informants toward “Finnishness” and its definitions; and, third, estranging encounters with anti-semitism and racism in Finland.

## The Jewish Community of Finland: From “Cantonists” to a Multicultural Community

The Jewish community of Finland is one of the oldest ethnic and religious communities in the country alongside Muslim Tatars: both groups arrived in Finland from Russia in the 19th century. Forcibly recruited as young boys and educated in Cantonist military schools, Jewish soldiers of the Czar’s army were deployed in the Grand Duchy of Finland, an autonomous region belonging to Imperial Russia. After their discharge, some soldiers and their families were allowed to stay, founding the first Jewish congregation in Helsinki in 1858. This Russian military background is a frequently repeated trope in the history of the community. While not all Jewish soldiers stationed in Finland had attended a Cantonist school (and the system was abolished in 1856), all descendants of the pre-war Ashkenazi community are known as the “Cantonists” even today (Muir 2004: 20; Swanström 2016). Before 1917, Jews with no connection with the Russian army moved to Finland from Eastern Europe. In the 1920s and 1930s, Jewish refugees fleeing the Russian Revolution and Nazi Germany settled in the country. Until the Holocaust, Finnish Jews stayed in close contact with their families and networks in Eastern Europe (mainly Lithuania, Belarus and the Poland of today) (Muir and Tuori 2019).

From the late 19th century onward, Finnish historians began to construct a nationalist narrative of a culturally homogenous Finland. Minorities were not suitable for the needs of this narrative, but were labeled as culturally and linguistically different, or even pushed to the margins (Tervonen 2014: 138–41). According to Suvi Keskinen (2015: 178), this modern state- and nation-building process “created ‘Others’ of the Indigenous and minority populations, who were perceived as biologically and/or culturally inferior”; Finnish scholars of the time were worried about Finns being inferiorized in the racial hierarchy of the Nordic races (Keskinen 2015: 173–75). The small community of Jews was perceived as a “foreign element” in Finland, and debating their civil rights, the representatives of the Finnish Senate resorted to antisemitic imagery borrowed from German newspapers and literature (Jacobsson 1951; Torvinen 1989). Jews residing in the Grand Duchy of Finland lived in fear of deportation, and their income was restricted to trade of second-hand clothes and goods (Ekholm 2019; Ekholm and Muir 2011: 30).

Jews received rights to Finnish citizenship in January 1918, one month after the declaration of independence. Despite this step forward, Finnish society—the press, Lutheran Church, academics—continued to foster anti-Jewish attitudes, frequently with concrete consequences; a Jewish Finn could graduate from a university, but was barred from pursuing an academic career (Ekholm 2014: 167). As a reaction to their vilification, Finnish Jews faded some of the noticeably Jewish markers of the community, developing, like contemporaneous American Jews, “strategies of invisibility” (Levine-Rasky 2009: 141). Swedish

and Finnish were favored over Yiddish of the Ashkenazi Jews, and during the 1930s, some “foreign-sounding” (especially Slavic) names were changed (Ekholm and Muir 2011: 29, 47). Despite their insecure status and overt discrimination, upward mobility to middle class and what Laura Ekholm (2019: 73) has called the “proverbial ‘rags-to-riches’ story” were characteristic of the lives of the Finnish Jews, many of whom continued to work in the clothing trade and manufacture.

Finland fought against the Soviet Union as an ally of Nazi Germany during the Continuation War (1941–1944), forcing the Finnish Jews into an ambivalent position. Ekholm (2014: 170) has noted that the war created “an absolute crevasse between [the Finnish Jews] and the simultaneous destiny of the European Jews.” While the community is one of the few Ashkenazi communities that was not destroyed in the Holocaust, Finnish Jews lost family members in the Holocaust, lived in fear of deportation to extermination camps and had an emergency escape plan in case of a possible Nazi coup after peace negotiations with the Soviets. Although Jews with Finnish citizenship were not deported, several Jewish refugees and prisoners-of-war were turned over to the Nazis and murdered (Ekholm 2014: 171–72; Muir 2016a; Suolahti 2017). Fighting in the Finnish army and sharing the human losses of the war (23 fallen Jewish Finns), the community “redeemed their place in Finnish society” (Muir 2019: 228). This narrative of a minority fighting *pro patria* is repeated in Finnish academic studies<sup>4</sup> and has become a fundamental part of the self-understanding of the community itself (Ekholm 2014: 173–75). Finns in general take pride in not having deported any Finnish Jews despite Nazi demands; on the other hand, no one knows what would have happened if Germany had won the war.

After the war, as described by one of the informants in his mid-50s, Ron, the congregation in Helsinki was mostly “Cantonist” (Eastern European Ashkenazi) until the 1980s. The situation began to change when Jews from the Eastern Bloc and Israel moved to Finland for work or for a Finnish partner, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The demographics of the community have since significantly changed, and according to Ron (himself of Cantonist heritage), members who now actively attend the synagogue are not the Cantonists, but “newcomers” (e.g. Israelis often from Sephardic or Mizrahi background and converts). Nevertheless, both in the administration and in the religious associations the descendants of the Cantonists continue to be a dominant force, and according to some estimates, half of the community is still Cantonist (Larsson 2014: 30). Many Cantonist descendants interviewed in the project belong to the same extended families that had arrived in Finland in the 19th century. The communities of Helsinki and Turku form “a functioning civil society” (Dencik 2011: 135) by having democratically elected boards, the community runs a kindergarten and a Jewish coeducational school in Helsinki, and various clubs and religious associations serve the needs of both congregations. There are no statistics on how many Jewish Finns have

immigrated to Israel under its Law of Return, but many informants have family living in Israel.<sup>5</sup> During the first two decades of the 2000s, the community has rapidly transformed and become more diverse: it is going through the same developments that are presently taking place everywhere in Finnish society (Czimbalmos and Pataricza 2019).

### The Study of Jewish Identities in the Nordic Countries

In the following, I will offer a brief historiographical account of previous research on the identities of Jews in the Nordic countries. While Judaism is a religion (i.e. a belief system involving worship of a supernatural being), being Jewish has traditionally required a genetic association: according to Jewish law (*halakhah*), a Jew is born to a Jewish mother. Especially under the rapid societal changes of secularization and modernization, Jewishness is now often a *chosen* identity (Buckser 2003: 3). A person may also define herself or be defined by others as Jewish without embracing any religious beliefs. Jewish identity issues have been extensively discussed and problematized in the current global Jewish centers, Israel and the United States (see e.g. Cohen 2010; Gitelman 2009; Glenn and Sokoloff 2010; Popkin 2015). Many questions persist in these studies: Has modern Jewish identity “freed” itself from tenets of faith and become more contingent upon cultural values? If a genetic connection is usually prerequisite for being Jewish, how does this affect a person who converts to Judaism? These complex questions often came up in the interviews with the Jewish Finns.

In Sweden, Rita Bredefeldt (2008) has studied historical identity developments among the Jews in Stockholm, and Lars Dencik (e.g. 2005; 2009; 2011) has conducted several survey-based analyses on modern Swedish Jewish identities. In Denmark and in Norway, the impact of the Holocaust on the communities has been under scrutiny, whereas postwar developments have stirred less attention: Andrew Buckser (1999; 2000; 2003; 2005) has studied later developments of Jewish identity in Denmark, and there is an ongoing project focused on the Norwegian Jewish identity in Oslo (see Banik 2016; Døving 2016; Herberger 2018). Recently, Vibeke Kieding Banik and Laura Ekholm (2019: 120–21) have noted how the Nordic Jews have “remained Jews while at the same time becoming Swedes, Finns, Danes, and Norwegians.” Established in their respective societies, each Nordic community represents a case of its own in terms of history and demographics. The first Jews in Denmark (late 17th century) and Sweden (late 18th century) were immigrants from Western Europe (*Westjuden*). The communities of Finland and Norway developed slightly later, from the 1850s onward with the arrival of Jews mainly from Eastern Europe (*Ostjuden*). (Buckser 2000: 717; Banik and Ekholm 2019: 121; Hoffmann 2016; Døving 2016: 2.). Differences between the Nordic Jewish communities become particularly sharp when it comes to their fate during the Holocaust: Jews in

Denmark and in Norway faced Nazi occupation, and most of the latter were deported and murdered. Sweden remained neutral, but participated in the rescue operations of Danish and Norwegian Jews. After the war, Finland absorbed a relatively low number of Holocaust survivors; by contrast, many survivors settled in Sweden and in Denmark (Dencik 2005: 21; Muir 2016b). After the antisemitic purges in Poland in 1968 to 1970, many Polish Jews moved to Sweden or Denmark, and since the 1990s Jewish immigrants from the Middle East have settled in Scandinavia (see e.g. Buckser 2003: 8).

As a distinct object of study, Finnish Jewish identities have not drawn much academic attention, probably due to the small size of the community. A valuable summary on the most recent Finnish historical and linguistic research on the Jewish community is offered by Laura Ekholm, Simo Muir and Oula Silvennoinen (2016), and several MA theses have dealt with identity issues of the community (Kotel 2000; Larsson 2014). Both Bredefeldt (2008) and Dencik (e.g. 2009) briefly include Jewish Finns in their studies of Nordic Jewish identities. Muir (e.g. 2004; 2016a; 2016b) has studied the memory, cultural history and Yiddish of the Finnish Jews, and Ekholm (e.g. 2013; 2019) has studied Finnish Jewish economic life: these studies also address identity developments in the community. Svante Lundgren (2002) has conducted a survey on the beliefs, customs and attitudes of Finnish Jews: according to his results from nearly two decades ago, half of the Finnish Jews felt that they were just as much Finnish as Jewish and saw assimilation—losing Jewish identity—as a major threat for the community (Lundgren 2002: 40–41). Elina Vuola (2019) and Elina Vuola and Dóra Pataricza (2017) have recently interviewed Finnish Jewish women focusing on their religiosity in Finland. In what follows, I will refer to these earlier Nordic studies as a basis for comparison.

### Finnish Orthodoxy and Jewish Identity in Finland

Both congregations in Helsinki and in Turku are Modern Orthodox,<sup>6</sup> which is visible during the synagogue service, where men and women are separated, and in certain religious duties that are reserved only for men, such as the *minyan* (certain prayers requiring ten adult men). Unlike in the larger Jewish community of Sweden, liberal denominations have mostly not taken root in Finland. Yet, most members of the Finnish Jewish community rarely follow Orthodoxy in their daily lives, such as strictly keeping kosher kitchen or observing the Sabbath: kosher food is not readily available, and Jewish holidays are not nationally recognized in Finland. As kosher slaughter (*shehitah*) is forbidden in the Nordic countries, kosher meat must be ordered from abroad. Many informants said that they only eat vegetarian food; some for ethical reasons, some for the fact that it is otherwise impossible to follow *kashrut* in Finland (see more in Pataricza 2019). Vuola (2019) has named this combination of official religiosity and communal elasticity “Finnish Orthodoxy”: Jewish Finns follow Orthodoxy

in the synagogue, but rarely outside it. The situation is similar to other small Nordic Jewish communities, especially in Norway: the congregation in Oslo is Orthodox, while most of the members in practice are not (Herberger 2018; Stene 2012: 149).

All the informants interviewed in the project are members of a Jewish congregation and share a sense of self-identification as Jewish. However, the interviews of the project Minhag Finland show that the informants disagree over many elements of Finnish Jewish Orthodoxy: the level of observance, conversion and intermarriage, gender roles and segregation. Some maintain their membership although they are admittedly highly secularized, non-religious or indifferent. Others do not take any part in the activities but prefer the *status quo*; this is probably similar to the behavior of many Finnish members of the Lutheran Church (cf. also Lundgren 2002: 52). The nominally Orthodox nature of the community came up often in the interviews. One informant estimated that as many as 97 percent of the Jews in Helsinki are not Orthodox. This is close to Lundgren's (2002: 51) earlier survey, where 1 percent of the respondents identified as Orthodox. Some informants entertain the idea of the community becoming more liberal, especially in its views on the role of women (for more on this topic, see Vuola 2019). However, informants from a "Cantonist" background ascribe Finnish Orthodoxy to their nostalgic childhood memories, although as adults many of them only rarely visit the services. For them, "Finnish Orthodoxy" is mostly about keeping this historical connection alive. Others believe that Orthodoxy is the only way to keep the small community viable: as noted by Buckser (2003: 64) about the Orthodox/Conservative Jewish congregation in Copenhagen, if the congregations changed their policy, the active Orthodox members might leave, whereas liberal-oriented members will always compromise. On the other hand, there are no statistics on how many individuals have left the congregation due to disagreements with Orthodoxy.

Keeping Finnish Orthodoxy viable has required outside help, and the growing presence of international Jewish organizations demonstrates how relationships outside the borders of Finland are influential in the development of local Jewish identity and religious practice (cf. Buckser 2003: 12). Since the early 2000s, the Finnish Jewish community has hosted emissaries from global Orthodox organizations, the Hasidic *Chabad Lubavitch* and the religious Zionist youth organization, Israel-based *Bnei Akiva*. Chabad is a Hasidic outreach movement with roots in 18th-century Eastern Europe, now based in New York. It encourages secular Jews to embrace traditional (Orthodox) Judaism, and currently dozens of members of the Helsinki congregation take part in their activities. Chabad divides opinions both in Scandinavia and elsewhere because of the purportedly messianic claims of its late leader (Rebbe), Menachem Mendel Schneersohn (Fischer 2019: 49). Some of the informants said that they enjoy Chabad's get-togethers even more than the services in the synagogue, especially as these are offered in English instead of Finnish. Some of the informants were not pleased

with the strictly Orthodox stream that Chabad represents, including traditional gender roles and a rejection of intermarriages; others, however, saw these aspects of Chabad as more “authentically” Jewish. Until the end of 2019, Bnei Akiva’s Israeli emissaries were hired directly by the congregations to work with young people in Helsinki and in Turku. Both organizations, especially Chabad, have developed into important transmitters of Orthodox Judaism and, in Bnei Akiva’s case, religious Zionist values among the Finnish Jewish segment.

### What Is Jewishness?

All the informants are objectively Jewish: they are members of a Jewish congregation, whether born into a Jewish family or later converted. Still, even for them, the question of “who is Jewish” remains “one of the most vexed and contested issues of modern religious and ethnic group history” (Glenn and Sokoloff 2010: 3). When asked, some informants automatically followed the traditional Jewish law: a person born to a Jewish mother or converted to Judaism under the *bet din* (court of law with authorized rabbis) is Jewish. A few, however, put emphasis on genetic relations: a person can only be *essentially* Jewish if it runs in the family (in the “blood”)—be it either mother or father. Conversely, some informants would welcome anyone who feels Jewish or wants to be Jewish to be part of the community.<sup>7</sup>

Buckser (2000: 713) has noted on Danish Jews that “[t]hey include people with a variety of different understandings of what Jewishness is, what it implies, what obligations it imposes and what practices it requires.” In a similar vein to Buckser’s analysis, the Finnish Jewish informants differ on what Jewishness is, means or entails. Some see it as a constant part of their religious identity and their daily choices. In Finnish, the word *juutalaisuus* can refer both to Judaism (as a religion) and Jewishness (which can be understood more as a way of life): some informants strongly define themselves as non-religious and see Judaism/Jewishness as a culture and an intimate part of their family heritage, confirming Dencik’s (2009) general observation on the Nordic Jews: “a majority of Scandinavian Jews view their Jewishness as an ethnic identity rather than as a religion.” Being Jewish is for some non-verbal and emotional: several informants said Jewishness is something they just feel. It can also be something ethically binding: “A Jewish person is a good person,” concluded one of the informants. Some wished to define their own version(s) of Judaism, for example, by blending liberal humanism and egalitarian values with Jewish tradition, which may bring or has already brought them into a conflict with traditional Orthodoxy. Dencik (2009) has named this pluralism typical of the Nordic Jews “the ‘Swedish smorgasbord’ situation ... where both Jewish and non-Jewish customs are available to the population”: each person makes their own decisions what to choose from tradition(s) and what their level of religious commitment is.

## Gender Roles, Marriage and Conversion

Finland is known as a country where gender equality is an important value; yet, not only the rabbis but also major leading figures of the Jewish community have usually been male, although the boards of the congregations are democratically elected with both men and women. Inside Modern Orthodoxy, a new worldwide trend aims to alter some of the traditional views on gender: as noted by Adam S. Ferziger (2018: 493), ‘involvement of women in aspects of Orthodox religious life that were previously officially closed to them has increased dramatically’. The first female Orthodox rabbis were ordained in Israel in 2015, albeit with limited authority compared to male rabbis (Ferziger 2018, 497). Finnish Jewish women have always been active in the community and especially in its various associations, but some informants—including women who identify as traditional/Orthodox—see male hegemony in general as problematic, which, however, does not necessarily call for revoking all the policies of Orthodoxy. They simply wish to make gender more visible and female voices more heard; some of the informants cited positive examples of this happening abroad (see also Vuola 2019: 62–63).

Earlier, the Finnish Jewish community rejected marriages between Jews and non-Jews, but since the 1950s, the high rate of intermarriages has effectively blurred the boundaries between Finns and Jews (Lundgren 2002: 30; Czimbalmos 2021). Lundgren (2002: 20) ominously has noted that in Orthodox Judaism intermarriage is seen as “the death of Judaism” as they are not considered halakhically valid. In most global Jewish communities, their high numbers cause concern, the threat being the status of the potential children in these unions: will the children be raised as Jewish or not? In the interviews, roughly estimating, many informants born before the 1950s had Jewish spouses, while those under the age of 60 had mostly married non-Jews of whom some had at some point converted to Judaism. Older informants shared bitter family histories due to their choice of a partner, and René Nyberg (2016) in his biography of his Jewish family in Latvia describes how his Finnish-Jewish mother was forced out of the family after marrying a Finnish Christian man in the 1930s. For the memoirists Boris Grünstein and Eva Odrischinsky, “mixed” relationships and romantic involvements across religious boundaries are a norm. Nevertheless, Odrischinsky (2019: 83) writes that in her childhood in the 1950s intermarriage was still considered taboo or even a “crime.” Her father had dated a non-Jewish woman in his youth in the 1930s; after the war, he traveled to Sweden to find a Jewish wife. “As a member of a tiny Jewish congregation, Jascha [her father] and his generation sat in a screw vise. They ‘must’ marry among their own, but the selection of marriage candidates was so limited that it felt incestuous” (Odrischinsky 2019: 198). Herein lies the reason for the high number of intermarriages in Finland: the number of potential Jewish partners is limited.

Judaism is not a proselytizing religion—quite the contrary, conversion is often discouraged. In Orthodoxy, gatekeeping has traditionally been vigorous: conversion requires years of study and official endorsement. In Orthodox Judaism, children with Jewish fathers have to convert to Judaism; in Helsinki, this usually happens in the early teens (*bonei mitzvah* age). Informants shared many personal experiences of conversions, some of them conducted in Finland but quite a few in Sweden, the United Kingdom and Israel. In Lundgren's (2002: 33) survey, 18 percent of the respondents were converts, of whom 25 percent had a Jewish father; most of the rest were married to a Jewish person and converted. In 2002, only 13 percent of the converts did not have any previous Jewish family connections. Some had either personally gone through the process or had close family members who had converted; some had converted abroad first in the Reform/Conservative framework, and later on had had an Orthodox conversion (e.g. to have a halakhically valid Jewish wedding in Finland). Statistically, the person who converts to Judaism in the Nordic countries is typically a woman who is marrying a Jewish man (Czimbalmos 2021; Dencik 2009; Lundgren 2002: 20). According to Dencik (2009), “[t]he reasons for these differences have not been adequately analyzed, yet it seems justified to suppose that a patriarchal element persists in governing this pattern.”

During the 2000s, an increasing number of people in Finland with no previous Jewish family background or marital ties have converted to Judaism. Currently we do not know the reasons for this new development and, undoubtedly, it must be examined in depth in the future: this phenomenon may be unique to Finland. Approximately 25 percent of the informants were adult converts. Many informants noted that new converts from an ethnic Finnish background have become more visible in the synagogue services and in the administration of the congregations. According to Jewish law, converts are to be accepted as fully Jewish. In practice, the experiences of the informants who are converts sometimes resemble Dencik's (2011: 123) estimation of Swedish converts: “If someone has converted into Judaism, it is not appropriate to mention or discuss the topic; however, in actual practice they are not accepted as ‘real Jews’ like ‘born Jews.’” Lundgren (2002: 33) is perhaps overly optimistic writing that in Finland no difference is made between converts and non-converts: according to the informants' experiences, the transition into Judaism is not always smooth. Odrischinsky (2019: 88) describes how in her childhood in the 1950s and 1960s either-or ideology reigned: the children of non-Jewish mothers and Jewish fathers, for example, were not considered Jewish on her parents' “strict scale” even after conversion. Nevertheless, one of the Cantonist informants in his early 70s, Isak, believed that the new converts are in fact providing continuity for the community:

I have said, as a joke, that ... thanks to the converts our congregation still exists, in quotation marks. I think it is an important matter. Our

religion forbids proselytizing ... so we cannot take the first step ... but still I wonder why so many people want to convert to Judaism. Don't they have enough problems!

Some informants would keenly modernize the existing Finnish model of Orthodoxy toward the actual religiosity of most members and alter the community toward the style of the Swedish *Einheitsgemeinde* where all the denominations from the Orthodox to the liberals assemble under the same roof. Then again, some informants—including some new converts—strongly identify as Orthodox, albeit with varying levels of observance. It is also possible that those members who identify as “more” religious took part in the interviews in greater numbers than the 1 to 3 percent of the “actually” Orthodox members would guarantee. Many of these informants have obtained Jewish education abroad and/or sought for support from worldwide Orthodox Jewish organizations (e.g. Chabad). One of the informants, Dina, was herself non-religious, but cherished the old Cantonist/Ashkenazi traditions of her childhood. She remarked that while Finnish society has become more pluralistic and secular, *devoutness* (in Finnish, *uskovaisuus*, “being a believer”) has recently become more visible than it used to be: “In a way, this [visibility of new, devout members] is reflected in the Jewish community that has also become more pluralistic.”

### Different—Yet the Same? Approaches to “Finnishness”

Defining what being Finnish means is undoubtedly as convoluted as defining Jewishness. Finnishness is attached, for example, to certain things, objects, phenomena or people that have been defined as “Finnish” during a long historical process: national languages, foods, and shared symbols and heroes function as social representations of Finnishness (Anttila 1993: 108). In the interviews, many “Finnish” foods (salmon, whitefish, bilberries, lingonberries, etc.) appear in contexts that are distinctively Jewish, for example, Nordic salmon served on the celebrations of *bnei mitzvah* and funerals (Pataricza 2019: 88; informants). Sauna, as well, appears as a quintessential symbol of Finnishness, as shared family time, both in the interviews and in the memoirs: in Odrischinsky's (2019: 90–91) childhood, she would bathe in the sauna with her father and uncle.

One of the most vivid symbols of Finnishness is part of the “national story” of Finland: the collective memory of the wars against the Soviet Union in 1939 to 1944 upon which the modern Finnish national identity is constructed (Rantala 2011: 495). The wars are a crucial part of the Finnish Jewish culture of remembrance: one of the informants, in his early 70s, Yaakov, said, “What is a Finn, really? A Finnish Jew is also a Finn, who remembers all our fallen heroes.” Yaakov's words echoed Ekholm's (2014: 173–75) observation on how the war has become an integral part of the patriotic narrative of the Finnish Jewish community. The community memorializes this narrative during the national

memorial days and on the pages of the community newspaper, *Hakehila*. In a recent *Hakehila* (3/2019), for example, an article was published about the memorial plaques set on the gravestones of the Jewish members of the Lotta Svärd, women's paramilitary troops during the Second World War. Finnish historians have also contributed to the narrative as the *shared* national destiny. Taimi Torvinen (1989: 167) describes the Finnish and Jewish war veterans as indistinguishable: "When the [Jewish] veterans convene, their talk is *in no way different* from the talks of the Finnish veterans" (emphasis added). An overwhelming bulk of Boris Grünstein's memoirs is dedicated to the war. Using a lot of (gallows) humor to portray traumatic events, he describes his encounters with antisemitic Finnish officers and with the German troops stationed in Finland. As noted by Ekholm and Muir (2011: 47), the war as a national symbol for Jewish Finns may hide the fact that discrimination and antisemitic threats did exist before the war and during it. Problematic memories of the time, however, could set the community apart from the rest of the nation-state.

Counting those who have Swedish as their first language and those who are fluently bilingual, approximately half of the Finnish Jews were Swedish-speakers in 2002. The use of Finnish has been on the rise for several decades, especially because the Jewish School operates in Finnish (Lundgren 2002: 35; informants). Most Jewish Finns are bi- or trilingual: alongside Finnish and/or Swedish, many speak Hebrew, Russian and English. Yiddish and Russian were the original languages of the Cantonists, switched to the national languages (Swedish and Finnish) already before the Second World War (Ekholm and Muir 2011: 29). Some of the oldest informants had heard Yiddish at home from their parents. Most Cantonist descendants still recognize and use certain Yiddish words and phrases (see also Muir 2009). For several informants, the Swedish-Finnish culture, especially the language, was a central marker of identity. Both Grünstein and Odrischinsky wrote their memoirs originally in Swedish. Grünstein describes his identity as a Swedish-speaking Finn sarcastically: "I was Jewish, although I also saw myself as a Swedish-speaking Finn, and this combination became a double label of being a minority and not even in my case without its problems" (1989: 45–46). After a couple of drinks, Grünstein's Finnish-speaking friends once compared his status as a Jew to Swedish-speaking Finns, adding that he has "nothing to fear." While creating many positive feelings of belongingness, the language sets the Swedish-speaking Jews apart into yet another minority group. One of the informants said: "I am like minority two times one ... Swedish-speaking and Jewish." Another informant felt strengthened by the combination: "Being a Jew and also Swedish-speaking, being two minorities [at once]—[it] makes you hard-boiled."

Vuola (2019: 66) has noted about the Finnish Jewish women she has interviewed: "For my informants, Finnishness and Jewishness are inseparable—overlapping but not identical." "Finnishness" and "Jewishness" sometimes operate in a different way depending on the context. One of the informants, Ron, shared an intriguing joke: "If you place a group of Finnish Jews among

Finns, they are Jewish to the extreme; if you place a group of Finnish Jews among Jews of another country, they are Finnish to the extreme.” The joke is, perhaps deliberately, ambiguous: do Finnish Jews become more “Jewish” when they interact with Finns, or are the non-Jewish Finns treating them as “different,” as Jews rather than Finns? A person may become (more) aware of their minority identity precisely because *others* pay attention to it. The latter part of the joke reveals another contradiction; the “Finnishness” of a Finnish Jew becomes acutely visible/palpable among the *non-Finnish* Jews. One informant, Chana, who had moved to Finland as an adult, confirmed Ron’s joke: “[T]he Jews in Finland are very much like the Finns themselves.” Likewise, John, a young man who had also moved to Finland as an adult, described the Finnish Jews as “really, really Finnish”:

The Jews in Finland are really Finnish in many ways. I see them as Finnish, I cannot see them as a—now it sounds really, really bad, but I cannot see them as a—let’s say, I do not see something special culture in them. ... Let’s say that they are really well established in the society and many of them are really Finnish. ... And also because they were not so many. In Sweden, there are so many Jews and it is much easier to ... be with the other people.

John struggles to define what “being really Finnish” means and suggests that it manifests itself in an absence of (Jewish) qualities, adding an apologetic aside: “It sounds really, really bad.” John mentions two reasons for his overemphasis on “Finnishness”: the small size of the community—compared to Sweden—and its well-established status. John’s view supports the last part of Ron’s joke: when with non-Finnish Jews (John situates himself as an outsider-insider), the Jewish features ostensibly fade and the “Finnishness” of the Jewish Finns is somehow intensified.

Being a Jewish Finn is sometimes playful balancing between stereotypical characterizations of both the “Finn” and the “Jew”: occasionally, the Finns (or “Finnishness”) represent the “Other” against which the Finnish Jews mirror their own distinctive characteristics (cf. Ollila 1998: 128). Some informants talk about feeling and acting different from other Finns. They are lively and more loquacious; sometimes they must hold back in order to fit in with the more guarded, “Finnish” way of being; the “Finn” is stereotypically quiet and reserved. Such negotiations on being *similar* yet somehow *different* appears in Odrischinsky’s memoir, beginning from its equivocal title (*Som alla andra: “Like Everyone Else”*). Following a long absence from her (non-Jewish) school during Jewish festivals, Odrischinsky (2019: 104) writes how she had learned to be proud to be Jewish, to be *different*: “I myself take advantage of the misfortune [of absences] to *make myself remarkable, to show me special, because that’s what I am*” (emphasis added). As a child, she is mistaken for a Roma girl, and she

enjoys the confusion: "... we like that *you cannot place us*, and we also sympathize with them [the Roma], they are also dark, not pale like ordinary Finns" (Odrischinsky 2019: 116).

In contrast, it is not the difference but the *sameness* of the older, established minorities—especially Jews and Tatars—that is preferably highlighted in the Finnish media. In 1991, for example, the Finnish weekly *Suomen Kuvalehti* published a feature article with the opening line: "The Jews of Finland are a small minority, mostly living their daily life and working *just like the majority of the Finns*" (Carlson 1991, emphasis added). A minority that is conducting their lives "just like us" is not that different from the majority ("us"). Characteristically for the Finnish "mentality," *work* creates useful members of society (Ollila 1998: 135). As pointed out by Ekholm (2014: 163), descriptions of "successful" minorities are common when older Finnish minorities are in focus in the Finnish media: for example, the Muslim Tatar community is referred to as "model" Muslims who have assimilated in a "successful" way into Finnish society. Lundgren (2002: 10), for example, has written that "the Jews have managed to integrate successfully in our society while maintaining their special features. Another old minority that has succeeded in this are the Tatars." The implicit idea seems to be that not all minorities have been as successful and that the recipe for "success" can be found in the integration of Jews and Tatars.

Historically, the Finnish Jewish stance to "Finnishness" could perhaps be compared to early 20th-century American Jewish identity negotiations: "[American] Jews concerned themselves primarily with marking themselves off as being different from the perceived mainstream, but not so different as to cause alarm" (Alexander 2007: 96). As a small minority, Finnish Jews often "creatively straddle both worlds" (Kupari and Vuola 2020: 8). However, as will be discussed next, being considered *too* different can sometimes be precarious.

### **Antisemitism and Racism in Finland: Finnish Jewish Experiences**

According to Cynthia Levine-Rasky (2013: 6), racism is not an aberration, but typical of all social relations and normalized within North American society.<sup>8</sup> Finland, too, has a long history of legislation that has discriminated against minorities, especially the Roma, and recent studies made in Finland confirm that "racism runs deep also in our society" (Report of the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman 2020). Antisemitism is a modern form of hatred that targets one ethno-religious group, Jews, and has deep roots in Christian anti-Judaism and 19th-century race theories. As noted by Ekholm and Muir (2011: 30–31), in Finland antisemitism tends to be noticed when it manifests itself in physical attacks against Jewish facilities, typically coming from the far right. Latent

antisemitism—structural discrimination or offhand “jokes”—has been less scrutinized as a phenomenon.<sup>9</sup> An international survey on antisemitism discovered that 15 percent of Finns foster openly antisemitic attitudes (Sharma 2018).<sup>10</sup> These attitudes surface in surprising contexts. In English (as well as in many other languages), the word “Jew” has negative historical resonances as an ethnic slur—the mythical *Jew* as a symbol of the “Other” in Christianity and the subsequent Nazi dehumanization of the Jews—and the adjective “Jewish” is preferred (Baker 2017: 11). While the Finnish word *juutalainen* is used both a noun and an adjective (“Jew,” “Jewish”), it also holds negative connotations: in 2013, the Finnish Court of Appeal used the words Jew (*juutalainen*) in a derogatory way in their off-the-record discussions, along with gay (*homo*) and the N-word (Fredman 2015).

As succinctly noted by Ekholm, Muir and Silvennoinen (2016: 46), “[d]uring the past fifteen years the previously favored idea that there was never any notable antisemitism in Finland has been questioned.” The memoirists Grünstein and Odrischinsky show that Finnish Jews have a history of alienating experiences that are difficult to describe without them being minimized or dealt with humor. In the 1930s, law student Grünstein (1989: 43–44) encounters antisemitic descriptions of “disloyal” Jewish businessmen in his textbooks at the university. Pointing this out to his non-Jewish friends, he is called “overly-sensitive.” Odrischinsky describes the physically “Jewish” qualities of her family of *Ostjuden*, their shape of the nose and dark hair, comparing them to the pale and blond Finns. This perceived difference from the “whiteness” of the surrounding society brings out her first encounters with racism: on the playground of the Jewish school, children of the neighborhood throw racial slurs at her. This was a typical experience of her childhood in the 1950s and 1960s: “We are used to having our looks commented on” (Odrischinsky 2019: 115–16).

According to Dencik (2011: 144), half of the members of the Swedish Jewish communities had been exposed to antisemitism at some point in their lives, and for half of them the experiences were recent. When asked, many Finnish Jewish informants had at least one such episode to share (see also Vuola 2019: 67–69). One informant, John, said that he does not feel comfortable wearing a *kipah* on the street; a few other informants also said that they had recently stopped wearing any visibly Jewish markers on their bodies: *kipah*, *Magen David* (Star of David) or visible Hebrew letters—anything that could be related to the State of Israel and/or Judaism. One informant used to wear a *Magen David* in public but had stopped; not because something particular had happened, but because of “general talk,” probably referring to the fact that people also talk more about the threats. Another informant told that wearing any sort of Jewish paraphernalia may also attract “positive” (Philo-Semitic or pro-Israel) attention or Christian missionary aspirations (often at the same time).

The Finnish Jewish community has been exposed to several blatantly antisemitic attacks during recent years. Several murderous attacks against synagogues

and Jewish facilities in France, Belgium and Denmark since 2015 have left a mark on their sense of security. Recent cases of targeted harassment include antisemitic stickers and bomb threats in Helsinki, red paint thrown at the Turku synagogue and vandalism in the old Jewish military cemetery in Hamina. The attacks sometimes coincide with vandalism directed toward the Embassy of Israel in Helsinki; any escalation in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict stirs antisemitic attacks against the Finnish Jewish community. All public events organized by the Jewish congregations have heightened security measures; in 2019, the Finnish government granted financial aid to cover some of the security costs. In the Finnish media, antisemitism is often a cause for concern and both politicians and pundits pointedly condemn attacks. Nevertheless, stereotypes about the “Jews” and jokes about the Holocaust seem to persist beyond the public eye.

Some informants with an Ashkenazi/Cantonist background saw any antisemitism as isolated incidents. A Cantonist man in his mid-70s, Aaron, for example, had almost never experienced any antisemitism in Finland:

It is easy to live and be accepted in Finland, even though I know that people think it [antisemitism] exists but I believe it does not. I have never encountered [it]. Sometimes people make ugly jokes but as far as I understand it, they do not have bad intentions.

While Aaron questions the existence of antisemitism in Finland, he has noticed the *ordinariness* of “bad jokes.” Yaron Nadbornik, the chair of the Jewish community of Helsinki, in an interview published by *Suomen Kuvalehti* (Sharma 2018), doubted that the Finns “actually hate the Jewish people,” but believed that there are both positive and negative stereotypes that intermittently turn up, especially as “harmless” jokes about the Holocaust. Both Nadbornik and Aaron thought these were thoughtless acts without bad intentions; still, Nadbornik had grown tired of the ubiquity of the jokes.

For Hanna, a woman in her mid-30s from a Cantonist background, antisemitism had also never been an issue. Reactions to her Jewishness had been almost nonchalant:

People do know that Jews exist but I have never experienced antisemitism. If it turns out that “OK, you’re Jewish, well, that’s alright”: it is just nothing. Maybe somebody then asks a thing or two about it, but in general, Finns do not ask about things.

Hanna, however, thought that her “Finnish” looks plays a role in this:

I don’t have striking features. Being shouted at on the street [happens] when someone has darker skin. ... When people see something that looks strange, they will stare.

According to Levine-Rasky (2013: 6), whiteness is more than the physical looks of an individual: it is a social construct, a set of cultural practices and a location of structural advantage, and a standpoint from which white people understand themselves in relation to racialized others. Hanna was onto something: Finnish Jews who “pass” as white rarely face overt antisemitism, but for some Jewish Finns “race” is continuously made visible—by others. Thus, Jewish identity in Finland is not to be “conflated with a monolithic racialized whiteness” (Levine-Rasky 2013: 134).<sup>11</sup> Some informants reported how people had reacted to their “foreign” looks: John, for example, said that it was getting increasingly difficult to be Jewish in Scandinavia “especially [for] Jews that look like me [Middle Eastern].” John added that many Mizrahi Jews experience discrimination on many levels also in Ashkenazi-dominated Israel (see e.g. Levine-Rasky 2013: 134; Shadmi 2003). He was frustrated with the antisemitism and blatant racism he ran into frequently in Finland:

I experience so much racism. Daily racism that I never experience in other countries. ... It comes actually from Finnish people. ... And they actually do not—you know, they are not saying “we do not like you” but when they are saying: “Oh yeah, you are a Jew and you are rich and so on and you have money.” Or, you know these small things that “Ah, you are a Jew, you can pay for us.”

John’s experiences of antisemitism included old stereotypes of the “rich Jews” flung as innocuous jokes and sinister conspiracy theories probably spread online. John had also noticed that anyone—especially a young man—who looks Middle Eastern or African can become a target for Islamophobes and racists; according to a survey done by the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman (2020) in 2019, Africans coming from below Sahara rated Finland as the most racist country of Europe. In 2015, Koko Hubara, a Yemenite-Israeli-Finnish journalist, published a collection of essays, *Ruskeat tytöt* (“Brown girls”), writing about her experiences with racism and structural discrimination in Finland: the book soon developed into a popular media platform for racialized Finns. The interviews of the project *Minhag Finland* also confirm that experiences of racism are far from uncommon in Finland, and this may have far-reaching negative effects on the private and professional lives of individuals. John, for example, considered leaving Finland.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed what being Jewish/Jewishness may mean to Jewish Finns, based on the recent interviews of the members of the Finnish Jewish community. In addition to the interviews, two memoirs that focus on the 20th-century Jewish experience in Finland were included as part of the description.

After introducing the readers to the history of the community, I approached the material from three perspectives: the challenges of Jewish Orthodoxy in a secularized society, the Finnish Jewish approach toward “Finnishness,” and the informants’ experiences of antisemitism and racism.

At the beginning of the project *Minhag Finland* in 2018, one member of the community approached me and asked if the project was interested only in the views of the “Cantonists”—the Ashkenazi descendants of the 19th-century Russian soldiers—as the *authentic* Finnish Jewish experience. According to this member, such a view would alienate those members of the community who had roots elsewhere or who were converts. In Lundgren’s 2002 survey, for example, the Finnish Jews from Russia and Israel were not included because they would not have been able to answer the questionnaires in Finnish/Swedish (Lundgren 2002: 12). During the interviews, I realized that many of these “new” members have now been part of the community for decades or all their lives. The older stratum of the Cantonist Ashkenazi tradition is changing and becoming diversified by the various (Sephardic/Russian/Iraqi/Yemenite, etc.) traditions of the “newcomers.” Furthermore, global Jewish networks of the (both old and new) members exert influence on the religious practices of the community.

Finnish Jewish experiences offer previously unexplored views on whiteness, racism and racialization in Finnish society. In Finland, antisemitism is easily recognized when it comes from quarters that do not hide their hatred. One recent example is the antisemitic (nowadays online) newspaper *Magneettimedia*, whose editor-in-chief was convicted in 2013 of agitation against an ethnic group. Informants rarely confront such open antisemitic vitriol, and few believed that Finnish people in general actively harbor antisemitic ideas. One reason for this may be the fact that the Finnish-Jewish community is so small that it is often invisible to non-Jewish Finns. However, nearly all informants (and both memoirists) have experienced “casual” antisemitism and heard rude remarks. Disturbingly, a few informants from a non-European background told that they have been harassed, not necessarily for being Jewish, but for looking like a “foreigner.” The informants who “pass” as white notice less antisemitism/racism, whereas those who are racialized cannot avoid it. These varied experiences must be heard in future studies of antisemitism and racism in Finland.

In 2002, Lundgren (2002: 95) concluded that “[a]lthough there will always be those who find the stance of the congregation too Orthodox, there are no alternatives to the current policy. The congregation will obviously change, and various reforms may occur, but the congregation will remain Orthodox.” Almost 20 years later, Lundgren seems to be correct in his estimation. Nevertheless, Jewish Orthodoxy itself is globally changing and, for example, women are becoming more visible and vocal in domains traditionally reserved for men. Some may see assimilation and intermarriages as existential “threats”; nevertheless, the community is determined to continue the Finnish version(s) of Judaism. I believe that one key to the future of the community lies in demographics: will

the old “Cantonist” segment stay in power? Will the Sephardic/Israeli-hybrid traditions become more dominant in the synagogue? Will the Orthodoxy of the global Jewish movements, such as Chabad, become a more integral part of “being Jewish” in Finland? These questions will hopefully be answered by future generations of scholars.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> I am using the quotation marks deliberately: as noted by Greenberg (1998: 58), “race” has meaning in the United States (and most of the rest of the world) based on the widely divergent historical experiences of populations whose ancestors came from different continents and who enjoyed differential access to power based on that ancestry. In other words, “‘race’ has historical meaning *because people acted as if it had meaning*” (emphasis added).
- <sup>2</sup> The major historical Jewish division is between the East European, originally Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews and Sephardic (“Spanish”) Jews who since the late 15th century have lived along the Mediterranean (North Africa, the Levant). Jews from the Middle East (e.g. Iraq and Iran) are known in Israel as Mizrahi (“Oriental”) Jews.
- <sup>3</sup> All the sensitive data have been analyzed in accordance with the guidelines of the *Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity* and of the *ÅAU Board for Research Ethics*. All the interviews will be stored by *Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura* (the Finnish Literature Society).
- <sup>4</sup> Cf. Lundgren (2002: 20): “Jews anyways did what they were supposed to do [in the war] and the result was good” (“Juutalaiset tekivät kuitenkin mitä pitikin ja lopputulos oli hyvä”).
- <sup>5</sup> The history of the Finnish Zionist movements is a complicated topic that lies outside the scope of this chapter. Since the early 1900s, the community has in many ways embraced Zionism, including volunteering in the Israel/Arab wars (1948, 1967 and 1973) and establishing various Zionist fundraising societies. Lundgren (2002: 19–20) estimates that hundreds of Finnish Jews have moved to Israel. In the project *Minhag Finland*, the relationship to Israel was not explicitly asked about; however, the topic naturally came up several times. The relationship of individual Finnish Jews to Israel ranges from full support to criticism.
- <sup>6</sup> In the 19th century, traditional Judaism was split into three denominations. Reform and Conservative movements adopted a more liberal attitude toward modernity, for example, by promoting women’s participation in Jewish rituals. The Orthodox movement retained the traditional interpretation of *halakhah* and soon evolved into two directions, Modern Orthodoxy and Haredi Orthodox Judaism (also known as Ultra-Orthodoxy), the latter turning hostile to any reforms. It should be added that none of these modern and global Jewish movements/denominations is monolithic, and even inside Haredi Orthodoxy there is much diversity.

- <sup>7</sup> Compare this to the similar results in Lundgren's (2002: 73) data: 43 percent think that if you are born to Jewish mother or a convert, you can join the congregation; 35 percent would approve of those born to a Jewish father; 25 percent if marrying a Jew; 18 percent said anyone could join.
- <sup>8</sup> Levine-Rasky is a sociologist who has studied whiteness in the theoretical framework of critical race theory, focusing on race and racism especially in the North American context. In Finland, research on racism, racialization and whiteness is a relatively recent perspective; see Keskinen, Seikkula and Mkwesha 2021.
- <sup>9</sup> The study of antisemitism in Finland has tended to focus to pre-Second World War events. Paavo Ahonen has studied antisemitism in the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church in the 1930s; antisemitism before and during the Second World War is analyzed in *Finland's Holocaust: Silences of History*, edited by Simo Muir and Hana Worthen (2013). Ahonen, Muir and Silvennoinen (2019) have published a survey article on antisemitism in Finland, also focusing on the period before the Second World War.
- <sup>10</sup> The survey quoted by Sharma (2018) was conducted by the US-based non-governmental organization Anti-Defamation League (2014).
- <sup>11</sup> Levine-Rasky obviously refers in her quote to the North American Jewish communities. In the pre-Second World War United States, Jews were counted among the "non-white races" with the Irish, Polish and Italian (i.e. non-Anglo-Saxon) immigrant communities. White identity was "adopted" due to their rapid rise to the middle class and due to the existence of the racialized "Other," the Black community. Probably 20 percent of American Jews are racialized (Black, Mizrahi) Jews (Levine-Rasky 2013: 134–37). On various developments of the American Jewish identity and its negotiations with whiteness, see also Goldstein 2007.

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