

TIINA MÄÄTTÄ

**Migrant Identity
Orientations and
Sense of Place
and Belonging
Reimagined via
Transitions Through
Liminal Spaces**

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Liminal Spaces

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Sosiaalityön kentälle paikantuvassa tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan identiteetin, paikan ja kuulumisen välisiä kytköksiä fokuoimalla henkilöihin, joiden identiteettiä on muokannut muutto maasta toiseen. Tutkimuskysymyksenä on minkälaisia merkityksiä muuton läpikäyneet henkilöt antavat kuulumisen ja kuulumattomuuden kokemuksilleen. Tutkimus lisää ymmärrystä myöhäismoderneihin ajan ja paikan tiivistymiin paikantuvista yksilöiden monimutkaisista liittymis- ja irtaantumisprosesseista. Lisäksi tutkimus tuottaa tietoa siitä, ovatko keskeiset sosiaalityön tutkimuksen diskurssit hidastaneet kuulumisen ja kuulumattomuuden kokemusten moninäkökulmaista tarkastelua. Tutkimus on artikkelikokoelma.

Tutkimuksen käsitteellisenä kehyksenä Paul Ricoeurin ‘autonomisuuden ja haavoittuvaisuuden paradoksi’ yhdistyy Stuart Hallin näkemykseen ihmisten jokapäiväisistä kamppailuista raivata itselleen merkityksellisiä tiloja. Tutkimuksessa hyödynnetään kahta laadullisin menetelmin tuotettua aineistoa. Ensimmäinen aineisto on kolmen maahanmuuttajataustaisen henkilön syvähaastattelu. Toinen aineisto on kuuden henkilön kanssa toteutettu kuvakollaasimenetelmä ja tähän prosessiin perustuvat haastattelut. Haastattelut analysoitiin temaattisesti tarkastellen sitä, millaisia arvoja, tunteita ja tekoja haastateltavat yhdistivät identiteetin, paikan ja kuulumisen teemoihin.

Tutkimuksen tulokset esitetään kolmessa erillisartikkelissa ja väitöskirjan yhteenvedossa. Artikkelien yhteenluenta kertoo, kuinka toimijuus *kollektiivisella kuulumisen alueella* neuvotellaan välitilassa tutun ja tuntemattoman välillä. Onnistunut siirtymä mahdollistaa henkilön liittymisen uuteen yhteisöön. Neuvottelut itseymmärryksestä käydään *henkilökohtaisella kuulumisen alueella* oman itsen ja toisen ihmisen välillä, jossa onnistunut siirtymä vahvistaa yksilön omakuvaa. Arkisen ja kohotetun todellisuuden välisessä tilassa yksilö neuvottelee syvistä kuulumisen merkityksistä punnitsemalla sitä, mikä on tärkeää *transsendentaalisen kuulumisen alueella*. Kuulumisen

ymmärtäminen näiden toisistaan riippuvaisten välitilojen kautta haastaa sosiaalityön tutkimuksessa vakiintuneet tavat hahmottaa kuuluminen kulttuurin, etnisen alkuperän, kansakunnan tai valtion näkökulmasta.

Avaamalla yksilön toimijuutta suhteessa historiallisesti kontekstoituviin yhteiskunnallisiin ja institutionaalisiin rakenteisiin, tutkimus tuottaa uudenlaista ymmärrystä kuulumisen kokemuksista ja niiden rakentumisesta. Lisäksi se auttaa havaitsemaan itseymmärryksen, toimijuuden ja merkitysten rajapinnoilla tapahtuvia siirtymiä. Nämä havainnot auttavat tunnistamaan, kuinka vakiintuneet puhetavat saattavat lisätä ihmisten haavoittuvuutta, ja kuvittelemaan sellaisia tapoja nähdä maailma, joissa haavoittuvuutta ei lisätä tarpeettomilla kategorisoinneilla. Tutkimus rohkaisee myös sosiaalityöntekijöitä pohtimaan omia pelkojaan ja toiveitaan. Niiden universaaliuden tunnistaminen voi yhdistää ihmisiä ja auttaa näkemään tärkeitä välitiloja asiakkaiden elämässä.

Avainsanat: sosiaalityö, myöhäismoderni, kuuluminen, muuttoliike, paikka

ABSTRACT

The premise of this study is that to understand humanity it is important to understand individual world visions, as these visions reflect an aesthetic understanding of one's place in the world. Drawing on this premise, this dissertation pursues an insight into the relationship between identity, place, and belonging by focusing on individuals whose identities have been shaped by migration. To be concise, the study asks what meanings individuals whose lives have been intersected with experiences of migration give to experiences of belonging and not belonging. This perspective was chosen to promote a better understanding of the ambiguities and paradoxes that accompany late modern attachments and detachments in condensed time and space. Additionally, the purpose of this project is to evaluate whether dominant frameworks in social work research have hindered the exploration of multiple avenues in addressing the complex dynamic between belonging and not belonging.

The knowledge interest in this study combines Paul Ricoeur's 'paradox of autonomy and vulnerability' with Stuart Hall's outlook on human struggles that emphasizes an innate human need to carve out meaningful spaces. Accessing this type of knowledge required a collaborative approach to data collection, since the research participants needed enough space for their current world visions to unfold. The dissertation used qualitative methods and two sets of data. The first data set consists of in-depth interviews with three participants with a migrant background. The second set of data consists of interviews based on picture collages made by six additional participants. The interviews were analyzed thematically using research questions informed by the concepts of identity, place, and belonging, and in the analysis the key concepts were categorized considering the values, feelings, and actions that the participants attached to them.

The results illustrate how agency in *the realm of collective belonging* is negotiated on the threshold between the known and the unknown, where a successful transition opens new possibilities for the individual to join in. Negotiations about self-perception take place on the threshold between the self and the other in *the personal realm of belonging*, where a successful transition affirms self-image. On the threshold between the mundane and the sacred, the individual negotiates deeper meanings around belonging by weighing out what is truly important in *the transcendental realm of belonging*. With the idea of valuable thresholds, belonging that has hitherto been seen in social work research primarily as an outcome of attachment to culture, ethnic origin, nation, or state, can be seen in a new light: as understood through endless transitions through crucial liminal spaces interfacing co-dependent realms of belonging.

This research introduces a multilevel perspective on belonging by addressing individual agency in relation to societal and institutional structures by highlighting their historical conditions. In addition, it lays the groundwork for future research by inviting further explorations into the dynamic between self-perception, agency, and meaning. The findings indicate the need to acknowledge that discourses can unintentionally strengthen harmful categories, and thereby researchers must be encouraged to imagine alternative social realities where nonessential vulnerabilities are not strengthened. As a tool for social work professionals, engaging in analytical self-reflection about one's own fears and hopes is proposed, since these underlying currents in the human psyche are omnipresent, and once acknowledged they help to identify valuable liminal spaces.

Keywords: social work, late modernity, belonging, migration, place

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ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

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- Publication III Määttä, Tiina (2020) Engaging individuals vulnerable to stereotyping in self-reflection through image work: Valuing hidden experiences and creating new meanings. *Journal of Social Work Practice* 34(2), 163–176.

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, researchers in social sciences have shown an increased interest in the complexity and messiness of individuals' late modern attachments, which have been made visible particularly through the phenomena of migration. This trend has brought forward new theoretical frameworks that try to understand belonging and identity outside of fixed categories to grasp the nuanced sensibilities in the late modern condensed time and space. Still, most studies in the field of social work, where this study is located, have focused on fixed categories with regard to belonging. They have done this by looking at individuals between cultures, nations, and countries and have thereby unintentionally highlighted migrants' marginal position in the given society.

This dissertation reflects on whether the dominance of frameworks that use fixed categories has slowed down the exploration of alternative avenues in addressing the complex dynamic of belonging. Hence, the goal here is to formulate a broader perspective on belonging that starts from theories that question the usefulness of fixed categories. By employing qualitative modes of enquiry that strategically sidestep the ethnicity paradigm, this study aims to contribute to theoretical frameworks on belonging by producing nuanced information about human experiences that is driven by ambiguities and paradoxes. Even though this dynamic is approached through the lens of re-settlement in a new country, the dissertation proposes that these dynamics are universal.

My interest in the topic was sparked by Stuart Hall's reflections on contemporary identities. He believes that the concept of culture requires redefining as contemporary cultures are in constant change, since although languages, histories, and traditions remain present in late modern identity constructions, these aspects of identity are no longer fixed (Hall 2003a). The premise of this thesis is the above acknowledgement that, in the late modern society, individuals negotiate attachments in a highly complex

manner, partly inside ethnic communities, but also outside of them. I aim to answer the following question: *what meanings do individuals whose lives have been intersected with experiences of migration give to experiences of belonging and not belonging?*

During the past decades, the understanding of the connections between identity, place, and belonging have undergone a shift that has opened new intellectual avenues in social sciences. It can be argued that this dramatic change in perception is largely due to Doreen Massey's (e.g., 2008) persistent efforts to make space as relevant as time. Through the formulation of new frameworks, she has encouraged researchers to consider identities, places, and belongings not as fixed but as porous, multiple, and essentially paradoxical. For instance, Massey's take on multiple identities from the individual's point of view is that having multiple identities can enrich one's life or lead to conflicts, or do both simultaneously (Massey 2008, 27). Hence, her body of work has not only shed light on space as the dimension of multiplicity; she also inspires one to think of space as a dimension that is re-created daily through dynamic relations.

This dissertation concurs with Pat Cox and Thomas Geisen (2014) who suggest that in social work there is a need to explore how connections between individuals and communities are disrupted and remade, as understanding ruptures and continuities is at the heart of social work practice. Through such efforts to understand the broader mechanisms in the phenomenon of migration, social work research can contribute to more complex interpretations of individuals' everyday experiences of belonging, since overreliance on fixed categories without a deeper understanding of late modern mixing and matching of influences may only strengthen stereotypes and narrow the perspective (see Hall 2003b, 250).

Hence, the dissertation suggests that we need to broaden our thinking to include questions such as what it is to be a human with regard to belonging and what is it that makes us tick. Globalization increases interdependency around the world, so it is highly important to address belonging beyond the ethnic perimeter even in the context of re-settlement. This study proposes that we can cultivate our understanding of human identity to encourage inclusive, rather than exclusive, practices. The next two points summarize the attachments and detachments with regard to previous research:

- 1) Shifting focus on sociospatial belonging in social work

Social work has become a powerful player in multicultural discourses through the development of concepts such as ethnic or cultural sensitivity (Park 2005), but it has so far failed to address the spatialized politics of belonging from the point of view of ethnically categorized subjects (Crath 2012). Yoosun Park (2008) claims that social work research has not aimed to capture and understand the discourses in which, for example, 'refugees' are made. I hold the viewpoint that within social work research,

and also within social work practice, there is a need to recognize and discuss the ways in which ethnic pluralism is socially engineered and how national spaces are actively produced (Yngvesson 2015).

2) A late modern rather than a postmodern approach to identity

I wish to highlight an alternative to postmodern understanding of identity which, when lacking a critical stance, is happy to bypass issues of socialization, context, and history (Benwell & Stokoe 2006, 24; Taylor 2010, 26). The nihilist tendencies in the postmodern framework emphasize fragmentation with regard to identity, instead of continuity. I hold the viewpoint that individuals who change geographical location actively engage in identity work through the act of remembering. Therefore, there is a need to give space to unique individual narratives in social work research. Inappropriate terminology encourages misconceptions. Without a deeper understanding of continuities, paradoxes and ambiguities get bypassed.

The study takes as a starting point the idea that to challenge harmful categories, getting a sense of mundane experiences holds the greatest potential, as it provides a window to stereotyping that may inhibit the individual's freedom to move through social spaces. The thesis draws from Amy Shuman (2005, 7–8), who argues that some stories become tellable only if the teller is willing to live with existing categories. Hence, by exploring national discourses, agendas, loyalties, and histories, the study aims to introduce new analytical tools and concepts that are “not coloured by the self-evidence of a world ordered into nation-states” (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002, 325). The adopted strategy allows a multi-perspective lens on individual experiences.

The unmasking of dominant discourses requires the questioning of taken for granted knowledge and understanding of social hierarchies (Suurpää 2002). This means understanding that categories that are used are historically and culturally specific (Burr 2003, 3–4). As a critical researcher, I am interested in how oppressive structures have emerged over time and consider the degree that current arrangements uphold these oppressive structures (Harvey 1990, 20).

The dissertation uses qualitative methods and two sets of data. The first data set consists of in-depth interviews with three participants with a migrant background using an interview technique refined by Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein (2003). The technique acknowledges that the interviewees monitor the person who is asking the questions, and thereby participants choose what information they wish to give based on their judgement of the balance of the power relation between the participant and the researcher. The second data set includes an art-based method, which entailed two workshops where the participants made picture collages. In essence, collage work means sticking found materials (photographs and cuttings from magazines) on a flat

surface, in this case A3 paper. Six individuals participated in the workshops and then took part in one-to-one interviews with the researcher. Those invited to participate had to have been living in Finland at least 2 years. This requirement was made so that Finnish society and the social environment were familiar to the participants.

The dissertation consists of three articles. In each, I used the concepts belonging, identity, and place in the analysis of the relationship between migrant individuals and their receiving society.

In the first article (Määttä & Laitinen 2014) we consider social construction of ethnic identity through migrant individuals' counter narratives against majority discourses on belonging. The paper highlights that the space in which migrant individuals negotiate attachments and detachments with regard to identity and belonging is often claustrophobic. This is due to the majority discourses' obsession with ethnic boundaries. The paper discusses what kind of strategies migrants utilize when encountering outside limitations.

In the second article (Määttä 2018) visual narrative analysis was applied to make sense of the experiences of belonging. The findings challenge methodological nationalism and the multicultural framework that understands culture as a fixed entity. The paper highlights a need to build more supportive relationships in social work with migrant clients by acknowledging that they are active shapers of societal practices. Ideas and visions that an individual wants to share translates into a collective sense of belonging.

In the third article (Määttä 2020) I discuss the type of reflexive knowledge produced by the picture collage method. The paper maps out migrant individuals' life theories and worldviews. This knowledge entails existential dimensions. The paper highlights the possibilities of self-reflecting image work becoming a valuable resource in research with the aim to empower individuals vulnerable to stereotyping and to increase researchers' awareness of stereotypes that, in the case of migrant clients, may be based on ethnicity or country entry status.

Together the article results, which highlight the complex attachments and detachments and the mixing of influences, concur with Charles Taylor's (1994, 73) suggestion that "we must displace our horizons in the resulting fusions". This dissertation takes up this challenge. I will start by discussing the crucial role of mobility in in-between spaces, with regard to belonging, and then I will reflect on the need in social work to broaden the perspective. This is followed by a section on the methodology used in this study. In chapter four I will introduce a new conceptual framework that reimagines identity orientations and sense of place via transitions through liminal spaces that interface three realms of belonging. To conclude, the relevance of the study is discussed in more detail.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: THE SPACE IN-BETWEEN

Moving geographically from place to place initiates the process of *finding one's place*. This process requires the individual to re-orientate between places and people and hence to navigate belonging in novel ways. My initial focus in this research was to increase the understanding of individual narratives of belonging and not belonging. However, the focus on the individual stories eventually made me realize that it was the space in-between the individual and belonging that was crucial, not the individual per se, as this space carried the possibilities of joining in and becoming a part of the surrounding environment.

The shift in focus described above occurred because the data illustrated the critical role of symbolic borders that at times hinder an individual's possibilities of joining in. From an individual's perspective, belonging depends on how permeable these borders are. Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2020, 150) has suggested that instead of considering identities in terms of sedentary categories, it may be more fruitful, and less stigmatizing, to think of identity in terms of mobility since mobility is what truly defines us as species. In this chapter I will discuss how the understanding of identity through mobility encourages us to see society and global connections as a whole, whereas an essentialist approach, which focuses on an individual migrant's imagined background, can make symbolic borders impermeable and thereby may hinder an individual's sense of belonging.

2.1 Beyond essentialist and sedentary boundaries

As Hall (2003b, 253) explains, emphasizing difference creates the illusion that we can tell who people are, and what they want to identify with, simply by reading signs of

ethnicity on the surface of the body. References to nature may appear subtle in the ethnic discourses compared with discourses about race, but according to Hall this does not indicate that they are less significant. Hall holds the viewpoint that when ethnicity takes the center place in multicultural discourse, the discourse inevitably shares commonality with discourses about race and racism. Hall points out that to understand identities, the concept of culture needs to be redefined, since cultures have become hybrids that constantly renew themselves (Hall 2003a, 89). To illustrate this process, he makes a reference to a young Muslim who is devoted to hip-hop but does not miss his Friday prayers (Hall 2003b, 261). Still, multicultural discourses continue to imagine ethnic communities with fixed boundaries (see Hall 1999, 16).

Even though cultures have become hybrids it can be misleading to think of identities as hybrids. Firstly, the term hybrid can reinforce racial categories when attached to the idea of racial mixing (Young 1995, 6). Secondly, the concept creates the connotation that mixing and matching from multiple sources of identity contains the same possibilities for everyone, and therefore inequalities in group formations are not sufficiently acknowledged in research. The concept of cosmopolitan identity has been considered equally elitist on the same grounds (Friedman 2015, 88). Nederveen Pieterse (2020, 107) uses the term critical hybridity in an effort to highlight the inequalities that group formations entail, for instance in terms of class and gender.

This dissertation considers in-between spaces in hybrid cultures as critical to belonging when talking about experiences of migration. Certainly, these spaces are also important to those individuals who have never migrated, as everybody must navigate spaces in order to find one's place. However, in the case of migrants it may be argued that these experiences are fundamental. As Roland Robertson (1995, 25–44) points out, people who never migrate may underestimate the inevitable processes that migrants go through, as they have no choice but to make new combinations and create new meanings. Robertson claims that the way questions are framed by the dominant culture, by putting the emphasis on sedentary identities, can lead to an overall refusal to recognize the social significance of people in-between.

Massey (2008, 140) also opposes a sedentary understanding of identity and place and considers it a colonial product. She draws attention to the way in which Europe has a tradition of facing the Other through space and time. In other words, people in the colonies were dealt with from a safe distance. The colonized, on the other hand, did not have the luxury of putting distance between them and the outside world, i.e., the global forces. Hence, the colonized lacked this idea of safety within set borders. In this sense, argues Massey, sedentary identities with regard to place were, and still are, particularly meaningful to Europeans. In addition, Massey continues, the ideology of sedentary

home has been used by powerful groups to freeze place identities and to create a false sense of security, i.e., ‘within this borderline *we* are safe’.

A new take on modernity also emphasizes crossflow, instead of one sedentary center, i.e., Europe and the West. In the past modernity was expected to spread equally across the world in given time, but now there is a realization that the process of modernity is not symmetrical. As Nederveen Pieterse (2011, 88) explains:

The templates remain—civilizations, languages, religions, nations, subcultures and ethnicities—but they are being radically transformed and cross-fertilized by influences that straddle boundaries. Eventually, then, there is more marbling than there are strata and more cross flow than there are distinct, separate units.

In this section I have discussed the reasons why it is important to take into consideration movement that happens in the space in-between. I have illustrated how sedentary and essentialist approaches fail to capture this flow. Using movement as a starting point allows a more accurate picture of migrant experiences to develop, as opposed to an approach that draws from essentialism and a sedentary understanding of place and identity. Thus far, I have discussed the tensions between these flows and boundaries. Next, I will move onto discussing symbolic boundaries in relation to a sense of belonging.

2.2 Belonging as a process that depends on permeable borders

A sense of belonging essentially entails a voluntary aspect, and thereby the concept offers a fertile ground to explore the relationship between identity dynamics and migration as opposed to framing such themes merely through the concept of integration [in Finnish: *kotoutuminen*]. Since belonging is a subjective experience, the concept puts a different spin on social integration by exposing the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that the individual migrant cannot control.

Now I will return to the critique of the essentialist approach, but from the perspective of belonging. Stephanie Taylor (2010, 11–12) discusses the concept of belonging through the born and bred narrative. This narrative is needed to make distinctions between those who belong and those who do not, since the narrative is based on permanent inclusion and exclusion. People who locate belonging outside national culture, on the other hand, do not perceive ethnicity as clean and absolute (Hall 1999, 71). All the same, nation states wish to cling to the idea that national landscapes can be kept clean and organized as Nederveen Pieterse (2011, 94) describes:

The conventional discussions of ethnicity and multiculturalism from national viewpoints are incomplete and unreal if they don't take into account overall global changes. It is as if nation states want to have globalization on their terms, domesticated and custom fit, picturesque like theme park multiculturalism, but don't concede the many ways, including backdoor ways, in which they shape and interact with globalization and the agency this involves and evokes.

In my dissertation, belonging is considered through mobility and action. The above quotation from Nederveen Pieterse is interesting because it refers to backdoor ways as a place where agency is formed, in a sense hidden from the eyes of the majority population. Even though nation states may not wish to acknowledge the complexity and 'messiness' of global connections and attachments, these connections still exist, but because of nation states' unwillingness to concede them, these agencies have a restricted space in which to act. Ian Hacking (1985) discusses how inventing people, for instance through rigid classifications, in the terms of the dominant population, limits individuals' possibilities for movement.

Therefore, society needs new concepts to address liminal stages of belonging. According to Hall (2003b, 269), those who locate belonging outside national culture or ethnicity inevitably realize that ethnic communities are socially constructed. Rogers Brubaker (2004, 53–54) suggests that researchers would get further in their analysis of group formations if they looked at how ethnicity *functions* in a contested space, rather than considering ethnicity as a real entity or as a mere social construction. When Brubaker's understanding of ethnicity is combined with Nederveen Pieterse's understanding of identity in terms of mobility, this offers a fresh view on belonging.

Focus on ethnicity highlights exoticism, and thereby it creates a contrast between us and them (see Juhila 2012a). But if migrant identities are approached through mobile categories, the contrast between exotic and normal dissolves and this opens new avenues to understand belonging. Christina Higgins (2011, 12) also perceives realistic terminology as an essential facilitator when people acquire and use new spaces. She explains that frozen and out of date language labels concretely hinder individuals' possibilities to move, and these labels effectually may *keep individuals in place* and hence diminish the opportunities for finding places that evoke a sense of belonging.

Throughout this section I have discussed why it is important to acknowledge cultures as fluid and individual differences as infinite. I have discussed how the maintenance of national identity limits spaces for belonging. Multicultural discourses operate through national identity and through an exclusive notion of belonging. Emphases on authentic ethnic identity thereby may undermine political and personal choices that individuals

make, when it would be more fitting to perceive individuals as subjects who actively renew culture (Hall 2003b, 277).

In chapter four of this synopsis, I will explore the ways in which individuals navigate the in-between spaces and at times encounter symbolic borders that are not permeable. Permeable borders, on the other hand, allow mobility and a sense of belonging. In the next section I will discuss the role of social work and the need to re-frame the discipline's approach to ethnicity and start pulling different crucial threads together including inclusion and equality. These threads simply cannot be separated, and the discipline needs to gain a solid understanding of the multilayered connection with regard to migration and re-settlement.

2.3 Re-settlement in social work research

The goal of this subchapter is not to give an extensive overview of social work research in relation to migration. Rather the aim is to introduce research from a perspective that relates specifically to re-settlement and the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion. After discussing each development in the Finnish context from the perspective of inclusion/exclusion, I will look at the themes from an international perspective to deepen the discussion. I will discuss social work's role in developing concepts such as cultural competency and the crucial role of the state. Toward the end of this chapter, I will discuss new openings and potential future orientations in social work research.

The scope of this dissertation leaves out research done with asylum seekers and irregular migrants (individuals who do not intend to stay) since the focus in this thesis is on those individuals who have made the choice to re-settle in Finland and hence possess a distinctive outlook on belonging in comparison, for instance, to asylum seekers, who, in a sense, are required to put their future on hold. This division does not suggest that sense of belonging is any less meaningful from the perspective of asylum seekers or irregular migrants. In fact, it may be argued that the significance is monumental (see, e.g., Björngren Cuadra 2015) from the standpoint of entitlement to services.

The first significant research area in re-settlement relates to cultural competency, an approach that draws from the multicultural framework (see, e.g., Jack & Gill 2013; Jackson & Samuels 2011; Harrison & Turner 2011). In the Finnish context Merja Anis (2005; 2006; 2008; 2012) has made a significant contribution to the understanding of the practical challenges faced by social workers who try to accommodate the ideological demands of a multicultural framework. She has raised concerns about over-culturalization of migrants by drawing attention to an inner paradox in social work: through defining what is normal the profession may produce practices of exclusion. For

instance, Anis (2008, 50) is concerned that there is a real danger that parenting issues may be explained by cultural factors in social work. She points out that, for example, a mother's tiredness or depression may go unnoticed if the professional believes that challenges in parenting can be explained by a different culture of parenting.

Yoosun Park (2005) claims that multicultural discourses actively re-create the Other, since they emphasize concepts such as cultural competence or cultural sensitivity. According to her, within social work discourses culture acts as a signifier for those who are not normative. Social workers, who appear culturally free, set the norm. Park maintains that those perceived without culture can subordinate those perceived with culture. Adital Ben-Ari and Roni Stier (2010, 2163) concur by pointing out that believing that cultural sensitivity can be taught to social workers totalizes difference by implying that cultural differences can be known. Instead, social workers should be open to the understanding that differences between individuals are infinite. In addition, mutually exclusive categories create a rigid system where the mixing and matching of influences fail to be recognized. To date, social work research on forced migration continues to rely on a one-dimensional conceptualization of migrants (Gonzalez Benson et al. 2020).

To challenge this one-dimensional conceptualization, Kati Turtiainen (2012) approaches interaction between quota refugees and social workers through the concepts of trust and recognition. By doing this, Turtiainen has broadened the theoretical understanding of integration from an ethical standpoint. Her work offers an alternative approach to the multicultural framework, which by definition is focused on ethnic differences and cultural mediation. Turtiainen maintains that social workers need to recognize the role of an individual's own agency in the context of the challenges and opportunities that arise in the new social environment. In other words, Turtiainen emphasizes transitions as opposed to stable categories.

In accordance with Turtiainen, Jessica Jönsson (2014) highlights that inadequate knowledge about global conditions of local social challenges is an ethical dilemma for the profession. Without a deeper understanding of globalization social work practices cannot develop in such a way that can truly help people. Melanie Ploesser and Paul Mecheril (2012) claim that while social work discourses demand equality for migrants, a non-reflective approach may in fact reproduce inequality through binary opposites. This brings me to the third and final significant area of research in relation to inclusion/exclusion, which is the critical role of the state (see, e.g., Keskinen 2017; Mulinari et al. 2009; Clarke 2011).

This is the area of research that has been particularly susceptible to a critical intellectual framework. Social workers operate within a state context, which can cause tensions (Turtiainen & Kokkonen 2020; Turtiainen et al. 2020). Suvi Keskinen

(2011, 163) highlights the problematic nature of the universalist speech. She explains that when welfare practitioners in Finland define what is important or irrelevant to the client, the professionals fail to acknowledge that practices are not in fact universal but based on the habits and perceptions of the majority. Universalism in this sense gives a justification for creating the Other as non-western immigrants are perceived by practitioners as essentially lacking universalist values.

As Vasilios Ioakimidis (2015) reminds us, social work is a profession that is dependent on state policies and that the state is never a neutral political agent. This can put social workers in a position that jeopardizes the ethical goals of the profession. Magdalena Mostowska (2014) discusses how local restrictions and categorizations of immigrants leave an inflexible space for both immigrants and social workers to work from. Explaining through categories is therefore a powerful act (see Juhila 2012b; Osvaldsson 2004). Marleen Van Der Haar (2015) illuminates how government actors may purposefully problematize Otherness:

... they [migrants] are one-dimensionally addressed as cultural others, which enables government actors to legitimate interventions that are explained to reach social cohesion but in effect may be doing the reverse (see also Williams & Graham, 2014). The point is, therefore, not so much that social workers may or may not reproduce or be affected in their everyday practices by dominant political discourses, but that these discourses facilitate the highlighting of a particular identity (and push other identities to the background), which in turn fixates the directions of social work interventions. (278)

In the above extract Van Der Haar neatly pulls together the three threads (state, social work, and Otherization) discussed in this subchapter. The role of the social worker in the past was not only to alleviate suffering, but also to keep the clients socially and culturally in check to create a homogeneous nation. Modernity held the assumption that we should all aspire to be the same. In the Finnish context, because of the way the Nordic welfare state is based on universalist rhetoric, production of a homogeneous culture has been particularly central to social work. These tendencies linger because they are at the foundation of social work's traditional role in this type of welfare state.

As discussed above, when putting the emphasis on cross-cultural encounters social work runs the risk of recreating the Other where migrants are seen as 'with culture' and social workers 'without culture' (Park 2005). A broader framework is needed to recognize and deconstruct the paradoxes within the profession. Charlotte Williams and Mekada Graham (2014) argue that the effects of migration must be understood in their wider context and explorations into belonging and identity need to be included. Cox and Geisen (2014) emphasize the need to develop a domain specific vantage point

on migration. Sister disciplines, such as political science, have taken greater interest in aspects of migration that are extremely relevant to social work (see, e.g., Carens 2013).

Erica Righard and Paolo Boccagni (2015) call for acknowledgement that even though social work was developed in the context of a nation-state, clients have unarguably become increasingly mobile. Current services are out of date when ruled by the idea that migrant clients are essentially uprooted. Righard and Boccagni are concerned that an alternative framework 'transnational optic' has not received the attention it deserves. They give credit to international social work for attempting to move beyond sedentary categories, but they consider these efforts inadequate since a clear shift is needed from sedentary categories to mobile categories to develop truly innovative and up to date approaches to a client's life circumstances.

The goal of this dissertation is to approach belonging without pre-determined categories and instead to put the focus on the interplay between place, identity, and belonging. Kirsi Juhila (2018) refers to places as focal points that carry paradoxes, as human beings come together, negotiate meanings, and try to make sense out of the world. To gain access to these complexities that places contain, the study explores how belonging and identity transform through space and time. This approach answers to the call made by Mieke Schrooten (2021) that social work research needs to grasp both physical *and* metaphorical borders that occupy places. This is important, since social work as a profession must gain an understanding of how individuals discover meaningful ways to participate in Finnish society (see Sotkasiira 2018; Hiitola & Peltola 2018; Turttiainen et al. 2018).

3 METHODOLOGY

The ontology in this study draws from critical hermeneutics, but, as Jonathan Roberge (2011) points out, the task of pinning down critical hermeneutics is not an easy one since to date it lacks systematic definitions. According to Roberge, the purpose of critical hermeneutics can be found in the attempt to radicalize the task of comprehension by revealing shortcomings in understanding. Hence, when a researcher positions oneself with critical hermeneutics the world consists of “tensions and gaps in order to ensure that disturbances and adjustments remain always possible, inside meaning, at the heart of action, and within experience” (Roberge 2011, 17). From this standpoint, as Roberge explains, the world appears ambiguous, and researchers’ attention is directed toward the complexities and contradictions that define human experiences and struggles.

To further narrow down the rationale behind this study, I draw from David Kaplan’s (2003; 2010) reading of Paul Ricoeur. Kaplan identifies the fragmented texts by Ricoeur as a superior framework in its approach to critical theory and hermeneutics. The knowledge interest in this study is to access what Ricoeur calls ‘the paradox of autonomy and vulnerability’, which according to him are both present in every person depending on the point of view. What makes Ricoeur meaningful in the context of this study is that he insists that autonomy belongs to fragile beings. In other words, we are all flawed, and from this follows that interpretations of reality are always open to misinterpretations, and thereby we need to be able and allowed to imagine alternatives simply because our human co-existence depends on our capacity to imagine. (Kaplan 2010, 123.)

My interest in the paradox of autonomy and vulnerability is threefold and can be clarified through the rationale behind the methodological aims: 1) my attempt to imagine an alternative way to understand belonging stems from the assumption that dominant discourses are vulnerable to unintentional flaws in their interpretations of

reality; 2) my attempt to understand belonging deprives from the acknowledgement that human beings are vulnerable by nature, which fundamentally shapes agency and hence experiences of belonging and not belonging; and 3) from an ethical point I concur with Ricoeur in that human beings' vulnerabilities should not be added by discourses and practices, rather scientific discourses should aim to eliminate non-essential vulnerabilities (see Kaplan 2010, 124).

To put the described strategy in a societal and historical context, I can use a quote by Lawrence Grossberg (1986/1996) where he describes Stuart Hall's intellectual position in the middle ground as he approaches human struggles:

By identifying the possibilities of struggle within any field, Hall occupies the middle ground between those who emphasize the determination of human life by social structures and processes, and those who, emphasizing the freedom and creativity of human activity, fail to recognize its historical limits and conditions: a middle ground in which people constantly try to bend what they are given to their own needs and desires, to win a bit of space for themselves, a bit of power over their own lives and society's future. (154)

In other words, whilst human resourcefulness plays an important role in emancipatory efforts, at the same time it is equally important to identify social structures shaped by historical conditions that hinder individuals' innate, and creative, need to carve out meaningful spaces for themselves. Inspired by Hall, the methodology in this study was developed to gain access to the reproduction processes of migrants' past experiences and the creation of new associations and meanings, since those who emigrate have no choice but to re-negotiate important attachments (Hall 2003b, 271). At the same time, though, migrants have the least space for these negotiations because of cultural and ethnic stereotyping (Parekh 2008; Määttä & Laitinen 2014).

The methodological choices in this dissertation were made to ensure enough space for the participants' personal histories to unfold within the wider societal context and structures. This study's aim thereby coincides with critical theory, and its late modern heir Jürgen Habermas (1978, 53), in that researchers need to provide insights into individuals' strategies of emancipation. It also draws from Thomas Osbourne (1998, 232), who insists that it is not interesting to research merely the production of diverse forms of subjectivity; the focus should be on how these subjects are controlled by different kinds of authority. In this chapter, I will introduce the data, the narrative approach adopted, data collection, and analysis. Lastly, some ethical considerations are discussed.

3.1 Interviews and images as data

The first set of data consists of in-depth interviews with three migrants, two women and one man, living in peripheral Finland. One participant was in her early adulthood, and two of the participants were middle aged. To avoid identification of the interviewees, detailed background information of the interviewees will not be provided. Two of the interviewees, a couple, were interviewed together at their request. The number of participants remained small because it was deemed necessary that participants were willing and ready to engage with their past experiences. Addressing difficult, personal topics in interview situations has been noted to provoke fear and anxiety in participants in the context of Finnish research done with immigrants (e.g., Harinen & Niemelä 2005, 162). In addition, discussing experiences of belonging and not belonging can be difficult, unless the individual has processed these experiences and is ready to reflect on them.

The second set of data consists of six interviews based on picture collages made by each participant (four men and two women). The participants were adult clients in third sector integration services. Due to the biographical nature of the narratives, I will not provide more information on the participants. Those adult clients who had been living in Finland a minimum of 2 years were invited to come to information meetings. In the information meetings the data gathering process and the aims of the study were explained to the participants (for more detailed description see Määttä 2020). Six individuals participated in information meetings, and they all completed the whole process. The organization had no influence over whether the individuals participated or not. Participants varied in terms of ethnicity, education, and age.

3.2 Studying thick stories

During this study the researcher and the participants were both understood as cultural beings who equally attempt to make sense out of the world. This study maintains that human experience tends to escape rigid categorizations, and therefore it is important to give voice to situated events and perspectives (see Szto et al. 2005). This is because if experience is constructed as self-explanatory in research, no genuine curiosity nor exploration is evoked, which can inhibit new information from forming (Ben-Ari & Enosh 2011). The approach adopted in this study acknowledges a wide and unmapped domain of human experience (see Enosh & Buchbinder 2005).

The starting point is a need to become more aware of how stories are retold not only in practice, but also in research. In this context, Yasmin Gunaratnam (2013, 106) refers

to the poet Keats (1958), who coined the term 'negative capability'. This means the capacity to tolerate incomplete understanding and mystery. Gunaratnam highlights this term because according to her doctrine and formula need to be critically looked at in research. Otherwise, Gunaratnam maintains, it can become difficult for the researcher to embrace discontinuities and surprises that challenge expectations. This may result in dimensions of human experience remaining unnamed and hidden (see Didkowsky et al. 2010).

Accessing hidden knowledge required a collaborative approach to data collection. The collaborative approach in this setting meant that the research participants were given enough space for their narratives to unfold. The aim was to give enough room for thick stories to develop. In alliance with Ricoeur's emphasis on the importance of imagining alternative social realities, the aim of thick description is to explore a range of possibilities in order to identify patterns that offer a different reading. This interpretive aspect is central to the relevance of thick stories (Geertz 1973). Giving the participants the space to produce their own vocabularies gave access to different kinds of information. In addition, the visual element explored the participants' unique ways of seeing and feeling the world within the context of space and time in a receptive and dialogical setting.

To understand the importance of thick stories in migration experiences, a study by Ravi Kohli (2006) is a good example. Kohli identified two types of stories in asylum seeking minors' narratives about their lives. Kohli found that thick stories withheld an ordinary wish to succeed, whereas thin stories were stories of extraordinary suffering. According to Kohli social work research has not attempted to access the thick stories, and instead thin stories have been accepted as the dominant research frame. I concur with Kohli. In addition, emphasis in social work research is largely on stories about authentic ethnic origin (see Park 2005; Gruber 2016).

3.3 Data collection and analysis

The first set of data was obtained in two interview sessions during summer/autumn of 2012. To begin the process, potential participants were informed that the research was interested in everyday experiences, both negative and positive, with regard to re-settlement. It was emphasized that the interviews would resemble conversation where participants initiate the themes since the interview was going to be modeled on a technique that allows the participants to collaborate on what is significant to them (Gubrium & Holstein 2003). The participants were found through personal social networks. Using these networks undoubtedly contributed to the participants'

experience that the researcher could be trusted with sensitive information, and this enabled the participants to be critical and reflective.

The information was gathered in two interview sessions that were taped with the participants' permission. Each interview lasted approximately 2 hours. The goal of the conversational model was to allow the participants to become active subjects rather than a passive object (see Pohjola 2003). The participants were asked to reflect on their re-settlement experiences in Finland at different times in their lives, in different situations. During the interviews the participants reflected on mundane everyday situations. Abstract hopes and dreams were present in the sense that the participants discussed what had worked out since they arrived in Finland, and what aspirations had fell short. The researcher's primary role was to support the participant's narrative and ask questions when elaboration was needed. On their request, the couple were interviewed together.

The second set of data was collected in 2015/2016. Recruitment took place through the organization's grass-roots level workers. The workers informed their clients about the research and circulated study ads that gave details about an information meeting to be held for potential participants. The individuals who chose to take part created individual picture collages that address tensions between belonging and not belonging throughout the participants' personal history. The purpose of the visual element in this research was to explore the participants' unique ways of seeing and feeling the world within the context of space and time in a receptive and dialogical setting. The article that outlines the reflexive use of the picture collage method (Määttä 2020) addresses the steps that need to be taken to separate the expectations of the method from naïve realism that solely relies on authenticity as the indicator of accurate knowledge (Clark & Morriss 2017).

Remembering about the past, present, and future was done in workshops. In essence, collage means sticking found materials on a flat surface. These materials can be photographs or cuttings from magazines or papers. Through the collage work participants can visually depict events, places, people, etc. that are significant to them. The participants could also write and draw next to the images or on the images. After the collage work, participants gave a spoken narrative account on their collage work. Returning to the visual exercise helped the participants to find the words for the spoken narrative. In addition, the collage work provided links between memories and experiences (Butler-Kisber 2010, 116). Participants were not compensated with money, but third sector organizations provided light snacks for the workshops. Sharing food created a relaxed atmosphere.

Kathryn Roulston (2010) highlights that to produce high quality results using qualitative methods, the data needs to be able to address the research questions. She

continues that this is possible only if the interviewer and the interviewed understand each other's intended meanings. In this study three specific strategies were employed to make sure that meanings were understood. First, as the participants were asked to identify what is meaningful to them, the interviewer was able to focus on asking elaborate questions. Second, the wish to share one's story was taken up as an indicator of an individual's cognitive readiness to reflect on experiences.

Third, special attention was placed on the language used in the interviews. In the first set of data the language used was English, since the participants who volunteered to participate were skilled in this language. In the second set of data, the participants could choose whether they wanted to use Finnish or English. The possibility of interpreters was abandoned because of the ethical dilemmas that using interpreters can bring, i.e., mutual understanding cannot be verified. In addition, when interpreters are used the interviewees cannot choose their own wording and informative details can be lost.

The interviews were analyzed thematically using research questions informed by the concepts of identity, place, and belonging (for elaborative definitions see Määttä 2018). In each article, these concepts were considered through a specific theoretical perspective. Making the theoretical positions transparent and letting the research questions drive the analysis is crucial in the thematic approach. Thematic analysis was chosen for the following reasons (Braun & Clarke 2006): 1) it fits well into collaborative research; 2) it allows thick descriptions and an element of surprise; and 3) it gives space for social and psychological interpretations.

The following table summarizes the theoretical and conceptual bases in relation to the questions and analysis unit in each article. It may be easier to approach it from left to right. The last column highlights the two different data sets and two different analysis units which are narratives and narratives based on images. Closer inspection of the table shows how the research questions guided the analysis. The research questions in a sense narrow down as knowledge accumulates, starting from the social construction of ethnicity and ending with a specific question about hidden knowledge.

Table 1. Theoretical/conceptual bases, questions, and analysis unit in each article

Article	Concepts/theory	Question	Analysis unit
1. Tracing counterclaims against dominant discourses on ethnicity: A Finnish example	Social construction of ethnicity Belonging Place Identity	How do people with an immigrant background represent their own identities with regard to claims of the dominant culture?	Narratives
2. Broadening social work's framework on place and belonging: an investigation into identity processes intersected by experiences of migration	Agency Belonging Place Identity	1) What is the connection between place and a sense of belonging or not belonging? 2) What kind of experiences produce a sense of belonging? 3) What kind of experiences challenge a sense of belonging?	Narratives based on images
3. Engaging individuals vulnerable to stereotyping in self-reflection through image work: Valuing hidden experiences and creating new meanings	Existential hidden knowledge Belonging Place Identity	What kind of hidden knowledge can be produced when images are utilized as a tool for self-reflection?	Narratives based on images

In the analysis, the key concepts were categorized considering the values, feelings, and actions that the participants attached to them. The analysis drew from the suggested approach by David Silverman (2005, 119), which maintains identity as constructed in situ. The research question drove the analysis and based on the questions, the material was organized thematically. In the narratives, an individual's understanding of belonging to a place appears as an interplay between the inner and the outer world.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was given to the research by the regional ethical committees on human research. The voluntary nature of the participation was highlighted at every stage of the process. Since the topics discussed were sensitive, steps were taken throughout the research to ensure trust. Trust between the researcher and participants was understood as a sequence of actions where the role of emotions is acknowledged (Kaukko et al. 2019). The absence of a traditional interview method ensured that individuals could evaluate what they wished to share. Importantly, this unpredictability challenged the

researcher's initial understanding and created a space where the researcher was pushed to deconstruct her own understanding in situ (see also Mikkonen et al. 2020).

From an ethical point of view, it is important to make transparent to the reader the critical role of the researcher as the teller of another person's story. Together with the principle of 'do no harm' (see, e.g., Hugman et al. 2011; Mackenzie et al. 2007) the research strategy in this study was guided by Shuman's (2005, 162) recommendations to those who wish to tell another person's story. She highlights the following questions: (1) the question of entitlement, (2) what the retold story is being used for, (3) what the retelling promises, and (4) at whose expense. When research is art-inspired, Shuman's message is particularly poignant since information can become a commodity (Hugman et al. 2011) and at worst this can make participants vulnerable to voyeurism and even exploitation.

Bamford (cited in Butler-Kisber 2010) stresses the importance of understanding the difference between worth and merit in art-based research methods. If the researcher has merit-related ambitions, for instance, the artwork will be displayed, this must be made clear to the participants before they volunteer. When ownership of the visual material is given to the participants, as is the case here, the researcher will most likely still be asked to display the material. This pressure to expose the material can be alleviated if the researcher can explain why the focus is on worth instead of merit. For example, in this case, the collages' purpose was to act as a leverage to gain access to experiences of belonging.

In accordance with enhancing participants' autonomy as described above, it is important that the participants are given enough space to weigh up the benefits and risks in each phase of the process, so they can assert their agency through decision making (see Määttä 2020). This minimizes the risk of harm that may be brought about by subconscious elements omnipresent in creative approaches. Due to these concerns, this study did not aim to have a set number of participants, since the method can only be used with volunteers who feel a need to reflect on their lives, i.e., they are cognitively ready to engage with events that are potentially painful. This goes back to Shuman's question of entitlement. Importantly, from an ethical point of view, small-scale qualitative approaches are needed because they give voice to individuals whose multiple and contradictory experiences are not heard through conventional methods (see also Rodgers 2004).

The analysis process drew from Riitta Granfelt's (2002, 135) point that becoming aware and acknowledging emotions is crucial to a researcher. The stirring of an emotion, for instance an urge to overlook something in the transcript, can be a useful research tool. In addition, ethically sound research demands that the researcher puts in place safeguards that prevent one voice from dominating over other voices in the data

analysis. This concern was taken into account throughout the research process. The research question needed to be broad enough to give space to each narrative. Despite the diversity in narratives, comparing them was a feasible task because the research had a clear focus.

The picture collage method required special ethical considerations since the art-based method can bring forth issues that arise from the subconscious level, and the participants needed to be able to oversee what is revealed. In addition, it had been agreed with the third sector organization that counseling would be available afterwards for the participants if they would have the need to talk further about their experiences. The collages have neither been put on display nor included in research articles since the participants did not give their consent. The collages may be misinterpreted if the collaborative reading of the images is absent. The individual images displayed in one article remain true to the originals because their outline was simply drawn through a transparent sheet. This was done to ensure that copyright laws were not breached.

4 MAIN FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter reimagines identity orientations and sense of place via transitions through liminal spaces interfacing three realms of belonging. Below is a table that contains a short overview of the main results in each article to clarify the starting position. The table shows how the results from the first article focus on self-perception, those from the second article on agency, and those from the last article on the interpretations that the participants gave to their experiences. The table makes it explicit that the data was rich enough to address the research questions.

Question	Results
First article: How do people with an immigrant background represent their own identities with regard to claims of the dominant culture?	To deal with disparities between self-perception and stereotypes, the participants develop individual ways of coping. These improvised strategies include explaining, playing with categories, engaging in conflict, withdrawal, and acceptance.
Second article: What is the connection between place and a sense of belonging or not belonging? 2) What kind of experiences produce a sense of belonging? 3) What kind of experiences challenge a sense of belonging?	Places appear as arenas for a delicate interplay between a sense of being free and a sense of being restricted. This article discusses six freedoms: freedom to reach one's individual potential; freedom to choose; freedom to form significant relationships; freedom to talkback; freedom to define oneself; and freedom to act and make an impact.

Third article:

What kind of hidden knowledge can be produced when images are utilized as a tool for self-reflection?

The paper highlights that storytelling with images allows a greater space for interpretations of individuals' experiences to grow and develop. Four lenses of perception are identified from the results: the lens of social structure, the lens of mental processes, the lens of experiences, and the lens of individual world vision.

In this chapter, I refer to the articles as first, second, and third in accordance with the timeline in which they were published. The structure of the chapter is outlined as follows. First, I introduce the three realms of belonging that were identified after I reassessed the published texts in relation to one another. Second, the chapter introduces the idea of liminal spaces in relation to the realms. Third, the chapter reflects on invisible landscapes to pull together the new conceptual framework discussed in the chapter. Together these added elements take the results to a new conceptual level. This reimagined conceptual framework is the main result of this study.

4.1 Three realms of belonging

4.1.1 Personal realm

In the first article I discuss the strategies that the individuals develop to cope with stereotypes. After returning to this article, I recognized that the interviewees throughout the extracts refer to a very specific dimension of belonging that cannot be fully contained nor explained. I now name this dimension a personal realm of belonging since it is far too complex to be socially shared. Essentially, the personal realm of belonging is ambivalent in character, hence it escapes a single rationale. One interviewee from the first article (Määttä & Laitinen 2014, 28) describes a re-occurring situation from her everyday life where people demand to know why she is in Finland: “You are forcing the person to give an answer that the person does not even know; there are people who do not know why they are here. I could tell you reasons why I am here and thousands of reasons why I shouldn’t be here”. Joel Migdal (2004, 23) discusses the manner in which humans often operate multiple social logics simultaneously with regard to belonging, but at the same time perceived social status effects how one-sidedly people are expected to explain themselves.

Migdal (2004) explains how one-sided explanations are demanded in order to check whether the individual is loyal to a group. Belonging to a group is thereby judged by isolated actions as shown in the following extract from the first article (Määttä & Laitinen 2014):

Many people say ok now you are going to sauna! But I go because it is cold. They think I can get used to it (sauna). Sometimes I like but not as a daily thing. The same if I am in a group, everyone is drinking, and I take a beer in my hand and people are like aaah she is drinking! (29)

The individual is frustrated that having a beer here and there or going to the sauna becomes an indicator for belonging or not belonging to a group rather than a personal thing she likes to do occasionally.

Not only is the personal realm difficult to convey to others, but the interviewees also express a reluctance to share it, since this realm is deeply personal. In the following extracts from the first article (Määttä & Laitinen 2014) an interviewee describes this need for privacy:

“One of things I have been thinking is that each person has a back bag and whatever you are living you put in there. My experience as an immigrant is not just in Finland. Integration plan is more like you have to have that back bag empty, like you need to put in new stuff.” “Everything you have to feel secure and survive in a mental way is in your bag. Then you are not going to let them know and touch it because it is sacred for you.” (31)

The interviewee describes how personal experiences of belonging create a complex underlying matrix, and partly because of this complexity the private part needs protection.

4.1.2 Collective realm

Whereas the personal realm is essentially private, in the collective realm the individual operates from a place of sharing. The second article concludes that participants saw themselves as cultural subjects who actively produce a culture of place. I am now translating this idea into a collective realm of belonging. When joining groups successfully (i.e., the individual is welcomed), ideas and visions that need sharing create a collective sense of belonging. The following extract from the second article (Määttä 2018) shows the speaker's need to share:

How many hours should we sit in front of the TV or the tablet? It's boring! We should talk to each other, laugh and enjoy each other.... Now I'm retired and I cannot work in the office. But I get energy if I make something for my brothers and my sisters. All of humans are [my brothers and sisters]. If I make good things for another human I become happy. (1605)

In other words, belonging in this realm is about making meaningful things happen for others, hence changing one's own social environment.

The collective realm of belonging, where the individual actively seeks places of belonging by aiming to transform the social environment, draws from a personal drive. In other words, the realm of collective belonging is driven by the personal realm of belonging. The following extract from the second article (Määttä 2018) illustrates this innate mechanism:

I am a doer and I want to do many things. I demand a lot, and I have succeeded in making things happen. Last year two friends of mine and myself tried to bring all the women together [from the same country of origin]. Now we're trying to establish our own community. I'm active on the behalf of our community. (1605)

In the extract the interviewee describes the social drive which forces her to act. The underlying motivation is in line with bell hooks (1994, 33), who maintains that a sense of community accompanies a responsibility to the human collective.

4.1.3 Transcendental realm

The third article discusses the methodology used in the visual part of this research and the hidden knowledge accessed through the method. The results from the third article are now translated into a transcendental realm of belonging. The realm of transcendence draws from the personal and collective realms, through the need to share something deeply meaningful, as in sacred, with others. One speaker discusses the personal impact of war, which I use here to illuminate the transcendental realm (Määttä 2020, 171): "They were murdered. People, animals and the pets. [Before war] I went everywhere to see people and the country. I liked it. I liked the people and sat with them because we are human. One should talk and sit with one another." The strong belief in dialogue, gives the individual a strong meaning in life which helps to deal with tragic life events.

To realize the full potential in this realm I will be using Pamela Reed's (2008) definition of self-transcendence. Reed describes self-transcendence as an expansion of boundaries, which includes one's personal limits and simultaneously expectations of

others and the world. The transcendental realm in a sense lifts everyday experiences to a new level. It lights up the social environment, hence the individual sees clearer and further. In the interviewees the transcendental realm acts in a sense as a redeeming feature by offering a deeper understanding of the way an individual locates oneself in the world.

4.2 The space between spaces

In the previous chapter, I have introduced the three realms of belonging. To truly grasp the dynamics of belonging within these realms I will now drop an extra dimension on them. This new dimension considers the space between spaces, i.e., the liminal thresholds within the realms. The word 'liminal' is derived from the Latin word 'limen', which means threshold. When one occupies a liminal space, one is quite literally standing on the threshold between two realities. I began to identify these thresholds in the three published articles after reading Kimberly Carfore's (2016) reflections on the paradox of home, where she focuses on liminal spaces when discussing a ghostly presence of the past.

This chapter has two sections. First, I will consider personal and collective realms of belonging and explain what type of thresholds they produce between the self and the other and between the known and the unknown. Second, I will consider the transcendental realm and the liminal space between the sacred and the mundane. Interestingly, the transcendental realm of belonging allows the individual to expand one's own boundaries, which can enhance a sense of belonging despite initial setbacks.

4.2.1 Once apart one becomes a part

As Stuart Hall explains (2003b, 250), as an individual changes geographical location, new connections are inevitably made. I will now consider this search for new attachments by imagining liminal spaces in-between the self and the other in the personal realm of belonging and in-between the known and the unknown in the collective realm of belonging. Here borders are understood as locations which can produce the experiences of exclusion or participation (see also Sotkasiira 2016, 1). On the borders one takes risks since the outcome is unpredictable. This type of risk taking is illustrated in the second article (Määttä 2018) by the following extract:

I say emotional things to people, women or men. I say something is beautiful such as, 'I like your voice'. It does not mean anything. Even at work I might say

‘you have a nice voice’. I’m opening up and sometimes it’s not good to say it. Then I say sorry I didn’t mean anything. In two or three days she or he will understand that I did not mean anything bad, and they will come to speak with me. (1603)

The participant describes a process where other people accept that he has good intentions despite the initial reaction. He is able to convey something authentic from himself to others and hence make the transition between the self and the other in the realm of personal belonging.

On the verge of a potential new beginning, anticipation and hope can translate into intense bodily experiences. The interviewees in the first and second article use expressions such as: “I felt extremely anxious”, “I get sweaty and start to get warm on my face.” Some symbolic borders completely inhibit the transition, and the following extract from the second article (Määttä 2018) highlights this dynamic:

They want to know if I’m from Greece, Spain or Portugal, but when they know I come from this country, and that yes, I’m a Muslim, ok.... This is the point I mean. Interviewer: So people really just ask you and then walk away. M1: Yes, they say oh you are from [a country]. (1603)

The individual is pushed back from liminal thresholds in two realms of belonging. He is unable to make the transition between the self and the other in the personal realm of belonging, as others do not want to get to know him. Simultaneously, in the collective realm of belonging, the transition between the known and the unknown fails, because he is not welcomed to join in and hence broaden his social network.

In addition, symbolic borders may at times have gatekeepers inhibiting a transition through a liminal space. A gatekeeper can be for instance a colleague at work or a social worker. In the following extract from the second article (Määttä 2018) a colleague at work acts as a gatekeeper as the interviewee explains a situation where she needed help:

I went to the teachers’ lounge and I asked for glue and scissors. We were celebrating New Year, and I wanted to do something with the children. The teacher asked, ‘What would you do with scissors and glue?’ I said, we have a celebration. He said ‘you won’t be getting a thing from us, go to the Department of Education. We don’t give you these things.’ I returned to the classroom and I felt extremely anxious. (1605)

The speaker is pushed back from the threshold between the known and the unknown in the collective realm of belonging as she is not acknowledged as a member of the wider community. This denies her new possibilities. In addition, she is unable to make

the transition between the self and the other in the personal realm of belonging as the colleague refuses to acknowledge her as an individual.

In the following extract from the first article (Määttä & Laitinen 2014) the gatekeeper is a social worker who prevents the transition between the known and the unknown. The interviewee describes how she feels after she expresses her own wishes to officials, as she wants to explore future possibilities, and is turned down:

What you do here doesn't depend on what you want, how your feelings are, or what are your projects. It depends on the official, the social worker, what she is thinking about you, what they think you can do. You have a lot of projects and you come here like you want to work. You want to study. You really want to be integrated. You want to make life here. (30)

The individual expresses frustration over not getting the support she needs to follow her own path to gain a sense of belonging. The transition between the known and the unknown fails in the collective realm of belonging, as the speaker's own understanding of participation is not acknowledged by the gatekeeper. As such, new opportunities are denied.

4.2.2 Moving beyond the mundane

The previous section illustrates how symbolic borders may inhibit experiences of belonging. I will now explore Reed's definition of self-transcendence to illustrate the transitions between the mundane and the sacred to demonstrate how these transitions enhance one's sense of place. The interviewees' experiences follow Reed's understanding of self-transcendence where expansion of boundaries transpires within four dimensions. Importantly, this enables deeper transitions than those initially inhibited by symbolic borders.

Firstly, the expansion of intrapersonal boundaries involves a greater awareness of one's own philosophy, values, and dreams (Reed 2008, 111). One speaker in the third article (Määttä 2020, 170) describes this moment in the following words, whilst pointing at an image of a child on the collage he made: "I started to see life differently. I was full of life and love and wanted to keep alive. I didn't want to die anymore. This was part of my life 3 years ago. This child had a dream, and it was this dream that I needed to process". The extract shows a successful transition between the mundane and the sacred, as the speaker realizes what is truly meaningful to him. Secondly, interpersonal boundaries expand (Reed 2008, 111). In the third article (Määttä 2020) an interviewee describes his experiences in the Finnish integration education system as follows:

It was really that they were preparing us for menial work. The emphasis was on talk about doing a course on cleaning or care work. I'm very much opposed to that. Even in the secondary course one of the teachers said that cleaning is a good career...but it is not if you are an engineer (169)

The extract shows how the individual moves smoothly between 'I' and 'other' in the narrative account, which illustrates an expansion of interpersonal boundaries.

Thirdly, temporal boundaries expand to allow integration of one's past and future to make sense of the present (Reed 2008, 111) as illustrated in the following extract from the third article (Määttä 2020):

Even though I was a girl, my father and brothers did not consider me weak. They considered me strong, and this has given me courage along the way. You've got to defend yourself and be brave, really. I always wanted to make my father proud, and I tried really hard to set an example. (171)

The extract demonstrates how the speaker has successfully integrated the past into insights about what remains important. And fourthly, expansion of transpersonal boundaries relates to a connection with dimensions of human experience that exist beyond ordinary perceptions of reality (Reed 2008, 111), as demonstrated in the third article (Määttä 2020, 171) in an extract presented earlier: "They were murdered. People, animals and the pets. [Before war] I went everywhere to see people and the country. I liked it. I liked the people and sat with them because we are human. One should talk and sit with one another". In the extract the interviewee takes belonging beyond the personal realm into a transpersonal dimension as he makes the transition between ordinary perception of reality and his perception of sacred.

4.3 Belonging as transitions in invisible landscapes

In the previous sections I have introduced the three realms of belonging and looked at the realms in relation to one another and in relation to liminal spaces that intersect the realms. The following table summarizes these results. Whilst the first column identifies the realm of belonging, the second column highlights the negotiations that the individual engages in while attempting to find new attachments within the specific realm. The third column shows the liminal space where the negotiations in each realm of the belonging take place. For instance, in the realm of collective belonging, agency is negotiated in the liminal space between the known and the unknown when the individual identifies an opportunity to do something new with others. Negotiations

about self-perception take place in the liminal space between the self and the other, where others either accept or do not accept how the individual perceives oneself and conveys this self-image to others. In the liminal space between the sacred and the mundane, the individual negotiates deeper meanings around belonging by weighing out what is sacred. A sense of belonging is manifested in successful transitions in the three realms.

Table 3. The logic in each realm of belonging

Realm of belonging	Negotiations on	Liminal space
Personal	Self-perception	self/other
Collective	Agency	known/unknown
Transcendental	Meaning	mundane/sacred

In order to bring all the different threads displayed in the table together in this final section, I will now play with Kent Ryden’s (1993, 262) idea of invisible landscapes, which he envisions in the following way:

As people change and mature, they form attachments to new places; conversely, becoming attached to new places enables and encourages them to grow. The lifelong construction of new invisible landscapes seems vital to a continued sense of well-being, to a feeling of belonging in the world.

The results in this research reflect such landscapes. Even though these landscapes cannot be fully seen by others, and they even remain partly invisible to the eye of the beholder, the dissertation gives glimpses of the individual’s journey. The endless cycle identified by Ryden is evident in the results.

Essentially, as the results illustrate, experiences in the transcendental realm withhold an awareness of one’s own vulnerability or mortality (see also Reed 2008). Self-transcendence, as a space between spaces, connects two alternative realities, allowing the individual to depart from the initial understanding of a painful experience of not belonging. What follows from this abrupt departure is in line with Ryden’s idea, as the findings display pivotal moments when a new landscape consisting of new meanings reveals itself to the individual, bringing to light a deeper understanding of one’s place in the world. Importantly, the study highlights how such experiences are crucial to a sense of belonging, but their elusive character makes them difficult to capture through conventional methods.

Previously I have illustrated how nonporous symbolic borders can be crossed through the liminal space between the mundane and the sacred through the expansion of one's own boundaries. It is important to note here that the process of self-transcendence illustrated in this dissertation is dramatically different from the concept of resilience, since transcendence in this study is understood as an innate part of human experience as opposed to a skill or capacity that is connected to available resources. As Ryden explains, invisible landscape changes as the gazer matures and gains insights, which is an evitable part of life. To sum up, the goal in social work is to *increase* resilience, whereas self-transcendence in this study is perceived as a *constant* in human existence.

Similarly, to Ryden, Yi-Fu Tuan (1975) holds the viewpoint that place is not sustained by sedentary boundaries that keep people safe, but instead by the quality of human awareness, and this awareness enhances a sense of place. The participants in this study engaged in deep reflection on what is meaningful to them as individuals and what is sacred to them as humans. Daniel Boscaljon (2016, 4) highlights that without rifts and fissures, as described by the participants, insights about meaningful places and hence a sense of belonging cannot develop. As the individual becomes familiar with the social environment, new liminal thresholds open and multiple possibilities offer a shifting subjectivity (see Guirat 2018, 1). But at the same time, impermeable symbolic borders can inhibit belonging which may lead to involuntary isolation (see Griffith 2018, 14).

This dissertation has shifted the focus away from sedentary concepts such as roots and home and has put it on the dynamic process that the individual looking for attachments aims to control. The study concludes that belonging is an infinite process where, once the individual becomes familiar with the environment, the sense of belonging reflects an individual's ability to have control over aspects of one's own life. It is through this control that the individual can create new meanings that over time become integrated into identity. A sense of belonging is hence developed and nurtured (Allen 2021, 96) rather than given and is enhanced through experiences where the individual can integrate the inner world with the outer world through meaningful insight.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

This research was undertaken with three specific aims. The first aim was to design a framework that would allow the exploration of shared human experiences in condensed time and space, where migrants occupy the center stage. The second aim of this study was to produce a new conceptual framework that attains a metaphorical conceptualization of porous and closed symbolic boundaries to unravel some of the oversimplifications, ambivalences, and paradoxes surrounding the concept of belonging. The third aim was to evaluate whether dominant frameworks in social work research have hindered the exploration of multiple avenues in addressing the complex dynamic between inclusion and exclusion.

It can be argued that the decision to omit the participants' background information to protect anonymity separates the narratives from their societal and cultural context, decreasing the stories' general explanatory power. This argument can be called into question if instead of framing the world through nation-states, we use Massey's idea of space as a dimension that allows us to perceive the world through multiplicity. From this perspective, the study challenges methodological nationalism, which traditionally has restricted researchers to either/or logic in terms of society, culture, and identity. Quite often, as Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002, 304) point out, nationally bounded societies are seen as somehow naturally given entities to study. This narrow approach has undoubtedly prevented researchers from accessing plurality in meaning making, which is essential when individuals locate themselves in more than one culture and society (see also Amelina 2010). Hence, it can be argued, the thick stories discussed in this thesis have a general explanatory power because they make visible the fundamental processes of *plural* meaning making that is needed to uphold *multiple-located* strategies of belonging.

This study has shown that strategically sidestepping multicultural and transnational focus can make valuable information about shared human experience visible. The study has captured the hidden knowledge within three realms of belonging and introduced the idea of liminal spaces interfacing the realms. This reimagined conceptual framework is the main result of this study. The results illustrate how successful navigation in the liminal spaces relies not only on permeable symbolic borders but also on experiences of self-transcendence. Self-transcendence in the context of this study has been used to describe the moment when the individual expands one's own limits, which can result in an experience of belonging despite a simultaneous experience of exclusion.

The study has acknowledged migrant experiences in the center of late modern condensed space and time as opposed to the margins. The findings provide insights about the dynamic of inclusion and exclusion. Drawing from a critical research stance, it has made visible how sedentary and essentialist approaches fail to capture movement. The usage of movement as a starting point allowed a more accurate picture of migrant experiences to develop, as opposed to an approach that would draw from essentialism and sedentary understanding of place, belonging, and identity. The results of this research support the idea that society needs new concepts to address liminal stages. Otherwise, migrant clients may never escape their position as essentially uprooted and in the margins. The principal theoretical implication of this study is the reframing of identity orientations and sense of place via transitions through liminal spaces interfacing three realms of belonging.

This study adds to the growing body of research that indicates that it is crucial to draw attention to an individual's own agency in the context of the challenges and opportunities that arise when seeking attachments. The present study lays the groundwork for future research by inviting further explorations into the dynamic between self-perception, agency, and meaning. Discourses in research either strengthen or weaken harmful categories, and the study maintains, as Ricoeur suggests, that we should imagine a social reality where non-essential vulnerabilities are not strengthened. Combining Brubaker's understanding of functional ethnicity with Nederveen Pieterse's understanding of mobile identity in relation to critical hybridity has enabled a fresh view on belonging. In addition, the research has introduced a multilevel perspective on belonging by addressing individual agency in relation to societal and institutional levels shaped by historical conditions.

Despite the strengths there are limitations as well. The most crucial limitation of the study lies in the fact that to achieve a stance of openness between the researcher and the participants and to make sure that participants were cognitively ready to engage in the act of remembering, the sample size was small. In addition, to establish trust, the ownership of the collages and thus the stories were maintained with the

participants throughout the process, which restricted the displaying of the collages. On the other hand, the participants' ownership of their stories encouraged the openness and trust. Still, undoubtedly, these decisions put restrictions on the study. In addition, it can be argued that a single case could have produced more nuanced insights into the conversation. For instance, the narratives did not address the backgrounds of the individuals in any systematic detail. Such an approach could have broadened the stories, but the collage method came with a strategic decision that the participants were able to choose what they wished to reveal.

Future researchers are encouraged to develop alternative study designs. With regard to social work research, since social workers work primarily with individual clients, it is suggested here that an alternative research strategy, a case study, can provide important additional knowledge about the processes generated by the method used in this study. Bearing in mind the limitations, the method is not suitable for large groups. Giving space and respect for each story is important. Thus, the method is not suitable for taking random samples. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study suggests that alternative methods are needed to give access to hidden knowledge, since it is important to make relations visible. The connections made visible in the dissertation suggests a need for alternative methodologies that broaden the understanding of belonging from a human perspective.

This research has thrown up many questions in need of further investigation, since the study merely gives an indication of the processes that individuals go through. These experiences contain infinite nuances and are open to alternative conceptual and theoretical readings. The study emphasizes the need in research to rethink language that creates certain concrete outcomes. It is crucial to examine the discourses and representations that maintain inequalities (see Burr 2003, 62). In addition, the study draws attention to the importance of liminal spaces by highlighting that they are not always undesirable. The focus in social work research has so far been on migrant individuals who are between states, nations, or cultures. Even though it is important to study the negative effects of liminality, this study suggests that meaningful liminal spaces are inevitably linked to finding one's place. This area requires further research.

The findings of this study have several important implications for future practice. Taken together, the results have confirmed the findings of Mostowska (2014), which found that overreliance on categorizations in social work practice can leave an inflexible space for both clients and professionals to work from, i.e., doctrines and formulas strengthen stereotypes. The new vocabulary to address belonging introduced in this study can help professionals to map out clients' daily journeys in liminal spaces when working with individuals who wish to reflect on their lives, bearing in mind that a finite resolution can never be reached, since seeking belonging is a continuous

journey. In addition, the three realms of belonging can be used as a point of reference by professionals who wish to pay attention to what is meaningful to the individual client with regard to belonging, since acknowledging the links between the individual's inner world and the outer world can help to support the client's self-determination. Simultaneously, validating the client's self-understanding gives an opportunity to the worker to engage in self-reflection, since, in any respect, intuitive hopes and fears guide all human actions and inactions. As migration appears to remain on the increase, the need to understand what constitutes a sense of place and belonging is perhaps more pressing than ever.

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I

Tracing counterclaims against dominant discourses on ethnicity: A Finnish example

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TRACING COUNTERCLAIMS AGAINST DOMINANT DISCOURSES ON ETHNICITY – A FINNISH EXAMPLE

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To challenge ethnic stereotyping, it is important to give space to unique individual narratives, both in social work research and practice. Individually and locally specific narratives relate to the wider discussions about globalization. Focusing on individuals' everyday experiences promotes the finding of commonalities between people, which in turn promotes an inclusive approach to growing diversity.

INTRODUCTION

In this article we consider the construction of ethnic identity, from the standpoint of a relatively homogeneous society, Nordic Finland. The focus is on how identities are negotiated in daily interactions in a community setting. The Finnish example contributes one perspective to the academic discussions on relationship between subjectivity, ethnicity and professional interaction (see Park, 2005; Masocha, 2014; Young and Zubrzycki, 2011). This article, based on qualitative analysis, considers the complex identity demands that are displayed in the experiences of non-native residents. The research considered the conflict between how individuals perceive and understand themselves and the external expectations they face to exhibit signs of identification with pre-determined ethnic categories.

We are detaching the research from the rhetoric of multicultural discourse, which makes ethnic divisions appear somehow natural. When categories are pre-determined, this can erase individual differences. The unmasking of dominant discourses is central to the social constructionist approach adopted here. This approach requires the questioning of taken

for granted knowledge and understanding that categories are historically and culturally specific. (Burr, 1995). This dynamic has implications for social work. For instance Ploesser and Mecheril (2012) make the point that social work discourses demand equality for immigrants, but when the discourses lack self-criticism they in fact reproduce inequality and binary opposites, such as us/them. Through understanding the everyday experiences of immigrants, social work can develop a genuine sensitivity to individual needs. This correlates with the wider discussions within social work about the development of user-led services and utilising experiential expertise in planning of practices (e.g. Beresford and Croft, 2001; McLaughlin, 2009; Vennik et al., 2014).

This paper focuses on the under researched implications of the construction of ethnic identity in the Finnish context. It is based on qualitative analysis that gives voice to immigrants' subjective experiences. We analyse *what kind of strategies do immigrants utilise when they are encountering the onset of limitations to their identities*. Narrated strategies make visible the power structures in people's everyday lives and pose questions for social work and social workers about the prejudices that lie beneath the conscious level and make an impact on the worker's own identity. The aim is to deepen knowledge about identity negotiations from a subjective viewpoint. The study contributes to the academic discourses concerning the unacknowledged privileges that representatives of majority, in particular social workers, need to be aware of (e.g. Park, 2005; Curry-Stevens, 2011; de Montigny, 2013; Masocha, 2014; Young and Zubrzycki, 2011). This article seeks to contribute to the knowledge base on the understanding of everyday mundane experiences of individuals (e.g. de Montigny, 2013; Tigervall and Hübinette, 2010).

The framework of this article lies in the discussions that relate to the social construction of cultural categories within social work as regards to identity. Understanding how non-native residents negotiate their identities in relation to the stereotypes that the majority population produces about the Other, is the focus of the analysis. We see identity categories as important markers of divisions between inclusion and exclusion and as such they are important also for social work. Social work research needs to understand resistance in order to see the construction of alternative identities as a resource, not as a threat (Juhila and Abrams, 2011).

In this article the social construction of ethnic categories is bound to the Finnish socio-cultural context, which represents the cultural power of the

majority (Hall, 1999: 53). There are approximately 5.4 million inhabitants in Finland, with the majority located in the southern regions. It is the most sparsely populated country in the European Union. Immigrants make up only around 3 per cent of the population, with Estonians and Russians forming the vast majority of foreign citizens. Swedish, Somali, Chinese, Thai, and Iraqi are the next largest nationalities. (Statistics Finland, 2013.) Because the overwhelming majority in Finland are native born residents, the country provides an interesting context for exploring the dynamics of power around the construction of ethnic identity.

The Universalist speech, located at the core of the Nordic welfare state ideology, can prevent workers from reflecting on the idea that practises are not in fact universal but based on the habits and perceptions of the majority. For example this can be seen in the tendency to perceive non-western women from a victim perspective. Clarke (2011b: 16) describes how framing of gendered violence in the Finnish context has xenophobic elements. These kinds of prejudices have many consequences for how people's needs are met in welfare services and social work practices. Stereotypes based on ethnicity become visible in the research that focuses on the interactions between Finnish official authorities and immigrants (Anis, 2008; Egharevba, 2011; Keskinen, 2011). Universalism can give, in a sense, a justification in creating the Other, as immigrants can be seen as essentially different from Finns as humans. As long as Finnish social workers rely on top-down expertise as regards to immigrants, they embrace wider political aspirations that aim to exclude immigrants from the processes of knowledge production. (See Keskinen, 2011; Clarke, 2011a). Suurpää (2002: 45) points out how immigrants in Finnish discourses are mainly put into a victim category, which focuses on lack. She identifies four lacks that frame immigrants in dominant discourses: lack of societal skills, lack of social skills, lack of cultural skills, and lack of moral codes. Suokonautio (2008: 20–21) discusses how the Finnish mainstream society constantly evaluates how new comers compare with what it viewed as Finnish. Those furthest from the imagined norm receive the least amount of trust and power when they raise their own concerns in their own words.

On the other hand, highlighting *cultural sensitivity* in the encounters can lead to re-creation of Otherness (Park, 2005). Cultural sensitivity can create the illusion, that cultural differences can be known whereas differences are infinite. (Ben-Ari and Strier, 2010: 2163.) Ethnicity plays

a disproportionate role in the everyday lives of individuals. For example, over representation of immigrant children in child protection services has been identified and needs further exploration (e.g. Johansson, 2011; Walker, 2005). Anis (2008: 29) draws attention to an inner paradox in Finnish social work among immigrants which is that through defining what is normal it produces practises of exclusion. There is a real danger that parenting issues are explained by cultural factors (Anis, 2008: 89–90). For example, a mother's tiredness or depression may not get noticed if the social worker believes that challenges in parenting can be explained by a different culture of parenting. An interested study conducted in Sweden (Tigervall and Hübinette, 2010) illustrates how ethnic categorisation can make life difficult for adoptive parents and their children. The non-white bodies of the adoptees are consistently highlighted in the everyday interaction with the representatives of the Swedish majority.

This article is attached to the idea that local theories and practices illustrate the silent voices and experiences of vulnerable individuals and groups (e.g. Dominelli, 2012). We highlight the need for seeking and hearing different subjective voices in social work research (e.g. Juhila, 2006; Keddell, 2009). The aim of the article is to share mundane experiences that hold the greatest potential to shatter ethnic stereotypes (see Curry-Stevens, 2011).

RESEARCH

The purpose of the research was to find out how individuals that are not native residents define themselves and belonging through narratives. The incentive was to understand everyday experiences effects on individual identity construction. The informants were found using snowball sampling. It was important that participation would be entirely voluntary. If the people had been approached through an organization it might have created feelings of pressure to take part. Addressing difficult, personal topics in interview situations has been noted to provoke fear and anxiety in participants in the context of Finnish research done with immigrants (e.g. Harinen and Niemelä, 2005).

Three non-native residents participated in the research during the summer/autumn of 2012; two women and one man. One of them was in her early adulthood and two were middle-aged. Two of them were European of Western origin, one was of non-European origin.

Finnish research ethics guidelines were adhered throughout the research and informed consent was obtained from the people involved. The information was gathered in two interview sessions that were taped with participants' permission and each interview lasted approximately two hours each. At their request, two of the participants were interviewed together: they were in a long-term relationship and had come to Finland together.

The possibility of interpreters was abandoned because of the ethical dilemmas that using interpreters can bring, it is impossible to verify that mutual understanding is reached. Therefore the language used in the interviews was English. Using Finnish could have emphasized the researcher's position as a representative of the majority, particularly if all the participants did not yet speak Finnish fluently. The two European participants were native English speakers.

The interviews were modelled on a conversation between partners whose relationship was as equal as possible. The interview method followed the principles set by Gubrium and Holstein (2003). The participants organized the telling of their stories through how they understood the notion of belonging and how they located belonging at different times in their lives, in different locations. This was an in-depth process. Analysis started by reading the taped and transcribed material as a whole, and searching for individual themes. This was done through identifying themes which appeared essential to the understanding of the narratives. We were interested in what themes were reoccurring and how strong or weak they appeared in relation to one another. The participants reflected on mundane everyday situations. Abstract hopes and dreams were also present in the sense that the participants discussed what had worked out since they arrived to Finland, and what aspirations had fell short.

In the findings, the space in which immigrants define their own identities appeared claustrophobic because of the obsession in majority discourses to point out ethnic differences, from which followed that participants' individual political opinions and choices were ignored in everyday interactions. To deal with this, the participants had developed individual ways of coping. These improvised strategies included *explaining, playing with categories, engaging in conflict, withdrawal* and *acceptance of the role of the Other*. Meanings related to Finnish culture were constantly deconstructed and re-negotiated by the research participants. It appeared

that the strategies can only go so far. In order to succeed members of the majority have to recognize the individual. Identities cannot become complete in a vacuum because they require involvement from others.

RESULTS: THE IMPROVISED EVERYDAY STRATEGIES

Explaining takes place especially after moving to Finland but at some point one grows tired of explaining. The urgency to create categories around immigrant identities denies the individual his or her right to ambivalence. Immigrants face reoccurring situations where one is expected to justify oneself to complete strangers.

'Curiosity is about not who you are but why you are here. Are you living off the state, do you have a rich husband? Or what is your purpose, what do you want to do here and why? You are forcing the person to give an answer that the person does not even know; there are people who do not know why they are here. I could tell you reasons why I am here and thousands of reasons why I shouldn't be here. This is why this is very abstract. When people notice you are an immigrant, they say where are you from, why are you here, what is your purpose. If you say you want to study the language there is a feeling that this one just wants to live off the state. If you say you are working the person thinks, oh, she is an immigrant and she works, I am Finnish and I don't have work.'

'That is one thing people try to come to terms with, why would you want to come here? It's a struggle because we always have to explain, why we are not somewhere warm. We can explain what our motives were but it seems hard for a Finnish person to understand because they cannot see it through our eyes.'

The answers to the questions are always inevitably undesirable because of the logic of stereotyping. What makes stereotyping challenging, according to Hall (1997: 229), is that immigrants are expected to represent both binary extremes at the same time! A single individual faces accusations in the above situation of being too passive and at the same time too active. Another interesting binary representation in the above material is the request to show that one appreciates Finland but at the same time, the appreciation of Finland appears somehow implausible. Therefore showing appreciation deems the individual unreliable. The logic of stereotyping ensures that explaining is futile and only accumulates frustration. There is no possibility for a dialogue between persons, as the findings illustrate.

Hall notes (1999: 124) that stereotypes also expose ideologies that are prevalent in the dominant culture that produces the stereotype of the Other, for example, about attitudes towards gender. The two women interviewed said they regularly were asked intimate questions, such as 'Do you have a rich husband?' Hall (1999: 83) talks about the way Europe does not always need a non-western Other. Women are still to a certain extent the Other within Europe.

Playing with categories is a light-hearted way to respond to stereotypes. The individual is aware of her position on the outside so uses it as an opportunity to express herself freely without cultural restrictions. The more you look like the majority, the less you are defined by strict binary opposites and therefore you can make your own categories.

'We are not necessarily your average English couple but get labelled as the average English couple. It is not a negative for us but it is a bonus because we are slightly eccentric and we like doing things that Finnish people don't do so with that eccentric label it enables you to have freedom actually and not be restricted by Finnish or English culture.'

The more one's looks differ from the majority, the more severe expectations become and the less room there is to manoeuvre. In the above extract the individual attaches certain freedom to being non-native. Non-westerners, on the other hand, are expected to work harder to become accepted. Horsti (2009: 80) discusses the way in which immigrants in Finland are viewed as having certain signs of Otherness, which are crucial to the dominant population so they can participate in removing these signs. Signs that signify Finnishness replace undressed signs signifying the Other.

'Many people say ok now you are going to sauna! But I go because it is cold. They think I can get used to it (sauna). Sometimes I like but not as a daily thing. The same if I am in a group, everyone is drinking, and I take a beer in my hand and people are like aaah she is drinking! This prejudice is the worst.'

Engaging in direct conflict is stressful. Huttunen (2004: 142) notes that immigrants in Finland often emphasise characteristics like hard working and quiet when they address their own identity. To challenge the system means stepping out from the submissive role that immigrants are supposed to adopt, as an unwritten rule. The demands are calmly stated, not to cause offend.

'If I go to unemployment office, I know I need to be sitting there but when I think how I need to act; I get sweaty and start to get warm on my face. Now she is going to say something I don't agree with, how should I answer. For example in the unemployment office there is a course and they say this is what I have to have and I don't agree with that. I am very mad but I need to explain in a quiet way that I don't agree and you have to think what kind of words you are going to say, so that the other person is not going to feel offended.'

In a way, immigrants are expected to file their personal identity and accept what is given. It means placing one's own moral and intellectual compass on the shelf and succumbing to other people defining who you are and what you are capable of doing and achieving. Individuals can feel like they are becoming institutionalised.

'The problem is that you don't choose what you want to do, the unemployment office chooses for you. There are different kinds of immigrants here like refugees. And some come because of a relationship, or to work. There are a lot of people who just want to be here. What you do here doesn't depend on what you want, how your feelings are, or what are your projects. It depends on the official, the social worker, what she is thinking about you, what they think you can do. You have a lot of projects and you come here like you want to work. You want to study. You really want to be integrated. You want to make life here. But then you have to go through the unemployment office and the system. They make your life. You go to Rovala then you go to some work practice. What happens to your personal projects? It causes big frustration.'

The wellbeing of individuals depends on their self-perception, how much one believes in oneself. Identities are personal and political projects, in which one can participate to a greater or lesser extent depending on resources (Calhoun, 1994: 28). Unfortunately, there appears to be a lack of dialogue in the formulation of individual integration plans. These plans are drawn up by the municipality officers, such as social workers. In addition, it causes anxiety in the individual to see others repeating the same courses over again because nothing else is on offer. This gives the sensation of a dead end, a life that repeats itself.

'Why a person who has been in Finland for three or four years has been going through the same course in Rovala many times? This person can speak very well Finnish. When I came to Finland, I started on second level in Rovala because I had basic Finnish and there were people who had been on that course for six years. I had been in Finland for two weeks and I was in the same room with people who had been here for six years.'

Withdrawal is a quiet way of challenging identity categories. Talking back does not always mean speaking out (Juhila, 2004: 29). Talking back can also be non-verbal, such as withdrawn body language and reserved behaviour. If the society is not open to an immigrant's own identity definitions, solitude becomes attractive. It is something that can backfire in society as a whole because it can lead to complete withdrawal and insularity.

'One of things I have been thinking is that each person has a back bag and whatever you are living you put in there. My experience as an immigrant is not just in Finland. Integration plan is more like you have to have that back bag empty, like you need to put in new stuff. It really does not matter what you have had there, have been thinking, or what you know about.'

'When we (immigrants) arrive to a new place where people want to put stuff into your bag! Everything you have to feel secure and survive in a mental way is in your bag. Then you are not going to let them know and touch it because it is sacred for you. I have noticed that people get very closed about their own culture.'

Technology has made it possible to keep in touch with old friends rather than making new ones. If one cannot find ways in which to relate to Finnish society, this option secures a social life.

'This is where the internet and technology steps in. Without that, I would be forced into a situation where I would have to socialise more. It is a bit of a distortion, a bubble. You don't have to go out, you don't need to. It is because fifteen per cent of my requirement to socialise is met by the internet. If I didn't have that I would gradually become more isolated and I would have to try to find something in a Finnish context. That holds you in a position of not doing anything about it. How are we going to develop as species when we have all technology, and what is going happen to immigration, if people can move to a different country and still stay in touch with people thousands of miles away? Then there is no requirement to integrate. You are just going to keep the relationships with people back home with Skype or whatever. Why bother to go out and make contact?'

Acceptance is the most tragic outcome of stereotyping because the views that other people have about the immigrant infiltrate who she or he is. The person accepts the position on the outside as permanent in nature. In the interview material, the different strategies were in a way played against each other. One day one can feel like withdrawal, and another day one feels confident enough to engage in conflict.

'There has been becoming this kind of wall there what I am and what you are. This can be also be coming from the system because all immigrants are the same, like making this plan of integration to everyone in the same way. In addition, you feel like you are the same, even though you don't wanna or you don't feel like. From the start, you feel like you are at the back with the immigrants. You don't even get a break with the Finnish people. Only the teacher is Finnish.'

'You are an immigrant but you know that you are different, everybody is different, then you are in this point that you feel completely alone, Finnish people think you are from this pack of immigrants. You are not a part of a big group, you are in a minority. I have been thinking about a lot of things but I feel like that the system does not want to listen. Immigrants can feel like I am not like them, I am from the other side. I am against them if I want to do something different.'

In this above extract, the multicultural mechanisms of exclusion are well illustrated. The individual lacks the choice to locate belonging. She is afloat between different categories, unable to attach herself to the wider society, which leaves her with the sensation of loneliness, of total exclusion.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the small sample, our findings raise important issues. There results indicate that Finnish majority can dominate interactions with non-native residents and these interactions can confine those who are not native. What emerged from the research was how national identities are constructed and the defence mechanisms that lay hidden in these processes. These mechanisms are central to the construction of the ethnic categorisation of the Other. Our findings add to the understanding of how cultural power operates from the immigrant's perspective. *'Where there is power, one can always find resistance'* (Foucault, 1990). Foucault's claim is actualised in the findings. Emphases on authentic ethnic identity, undermines political and personal choices that individuals make. The findings illustrate how the participants are left in a social vacuum. Language creates certain concrete living conditions and it is crucial to examine the discourses and representations that maintain inequalities (Burr, 1995: 62–63).

The strategies discussed in this article take their toll on the individual; the only strategy that is truly rewarding to the user, is playing with categories. This strategy is reserved for those who do not physically deviate

from the Finnish norm. The space where the negotiation of identities takes place is claustrophobic. There is some room for maneuvering, but society erects barriers that are constantly squeezed and the immigrant individual has to keep pushing to create space. Multicultural rhetoric serves to maintain national identity when modern truths about fixed identity are being eroded.

Despite the strengths of the data there are limitations as well. The narratives did not explore the backgrounds of the individuals in any great detail, which could have broadened the stories. Backgrounds are not exposed in order to protect the participants' anonymity. The number of non-native residents is small and we want to take every precaution to make sure participants cannot be identified.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

In this article we aimed to shed light on how cultural power is present in everyday interactions between native and non-native residents. In Finland the cultural power of the majority is overwhelming and this poses questions also for social work. Finnish social work has potential for developing narrative approaches in the profession, since the services are at a developmental stage. The acknowledgement of subjective knowledge can motivate social workers to become advocates for immigrants' rights. At their worst, stereotypes have a dehumanising effect on identities. Those who have been dehumanized cannot be liberated by those who have dehumanized them but instead, only the oppressed can free the oppressors (Freire, 1988). Social workers need to recognize their involvement in the dehumanizing processes by practicing continuous critical reflections about their own values and understanding of the world.

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SANTRAUKA

METANT IŠŠŪKŲ DOMINUOJANČIAM ETNIŠKUMO DISKURSUI. SUOMIJOS ATVEJIS

Straipsnyje aptariami kokybinio tyrimo, kurį atliekant analizuoti ne etninių suomių, gyvenančių Suomijoje, naratyvai, rezultatai. Dauguma šalies gyventojų yra gimę Suomijoje, tad šalis sudaro įdomų kontekstą, kuriame tyrinėjama galios dinamika, konstruojanti etninę identitetą. Tyrimo tikslas buvo suprasti imigrantų kasdienio gyvenimo patirtis. Identiteto kategorijos yra svarbūs žymenys, atskiriantys įtrauktį ir atskirtį, o tai svarbu ir socialiniam darbui. Iš kokybinės stereotipų analizės matyti imigrantų subjektyvi patirtis. Rezultatai rodo socialinės atskirties etniškumo pagrindų elementus. Tam tikros imigrantų charakteristikos ir su jais susiję lūkesčiai įtvirtina jų identitetą. Kuo labiau žmogus yra vertinamas kaip nukrypstantis nuo Suomijoje priimtų normų, tuo didesni jo atžvilgiu lūkesčiai. Tyrimo dalyvių naratyvai parodo improvizuotas strategijas siekiant susitvarkyti (ang. *cope*) su iš anksto nustatytomis etninėmis kategorijomis. Šios strategijos yra paaiškinimas, žaidimas su kategorijomis, įsitraukimas į konfliktą, atsisakymas ir priėmimas *Kitokio* vaidmens. Naratyvų dinamika pabrėžė naratyvinio požiūrio pritaikymo socialinio darbo praktikoje svarbą ir tai, kaip svarbu tyrinėti ne etninių suomių kasdienio gyvenimo patirtis. Etniniai suomiai gali dominuoti sąveikoje su ne suomiais gyventojais, ir tai svarbu socialinio darbo praktikai. Socialiniai darbuotojai, atstovaudami daugumai, turi būti sąmoningi ir jautrūs klientų individualios situacijos supratimui.

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III

**Engaging individuals vulnerable to stereotyping in self-reflection through
image work: Valuing hidden experiences and creating new meanings**

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