

INVISIBILISED VISIONS: *Migrant mothers and the reordering of citizenship in a Nordic welfare state context*

Abstract

In a time of welfare state restructuring, migrant background 'stay-at-home' mothers have become a politicised social category, constructed as unproductive and socially disengaged. The article examines the ways newly arrived women, who take care of children at home, enact and negotiate their own and their families' early citizenship process, with a particular focus on institutional encounters. Drawing on two case stories from the capital region of Finland, I discuss the dynamics of mothers' claims-making for a transitional citizenship, from the sphere of the home via social rights based public daycare to language training and education. I conclude that the constrained agency migrant mothers are subjected to, risks shaping a new gendered and racialised order of parenthood and ultimately of citizenship in the transforming welfare states.

Keywords

migration • motherhood • citizenship • institutional practice • neo-liberalism

Received 5 June 2014; Accepted 2 April 2015

Camilla Nordberg*

Swedish School of Social Science, University of Helsinki, Finland

Introduction

This article draws on an ethnographic study of the relationship between newly-migrated mothers and the local Finnish welfare state in a time of recent integration policy change. The site of research is Vantaa, a city of approximately 200,000 inhabitants, located in the capital region of southern Finland. The restructuring of welfare services was initiated later in the Finnish context than, for example, in the UK. Notwithstanding, the last decade has seen a rapid change of policy and practice featured by a language of competitiveness, flexibility and efficiency, conceptualised as neoliberalism (Ahlqvist & Moisio 2014; Dahl 2012; Wrede *et al.* 2013) or competition stateism (Cerny 2005). In institutional settings, this transition has implied a demand for decentralised, personalised services on the one hand and increasing control and managerialism on the other hand (Matthies 2013; Meeuwisse, Scaramuzzino & Swärd 2011). Citizens face various forms of workfare and other activation measures with a strong emphasis on individual responsibility and self-sufficiency (Ong 2006; Rose 1999). This new political landscape may be particularly challenging for those precarious citizens, whose agency is constrained by institutional racism and discrimination (Koikkalainen *et al.* 2011; Munck, Schierup & Delgado Wise 2011; Standing 2011).

In Finland, with the launching of a new Act on the Promotion of Integration in 2010 (1386/2010), the aim was to adhere to the call for efficiency and targeted services through new models of education, counselling and guidance. Different categories of migrants were to be more efficiently ushered to the labour market along different

bureaucratic paths. Within the framework of preparing the amended Integration Act, mothers outside paid work, caring for children at home, constituted a politicised social category. 'Stay-at-home-mothers' were singled out as requiring specific integration measures. This category of migrants constitutes the critical case of the study.

From the perspective of motherhood as a site of subjectivation, I explore the ways in which new modes of gendered and racialised citizenship is emerging in the wake of the above mentioned transitions. Drawing on two case stories that I have constructed on the basis of ethnographic data, I examine the ways in which mothers enact and negotiate their early paths to citizenship, conceptualised as a process of citizenship (Nordberg & Wrede 2015). This process is featured by extensive encounters with the local welfare system: compulsory integration plans, language training and citizenship training (Intke-Hernandez & Holm 2015; Keskinen, Vuori & Hirsiho 2012; Tuori 2013).

Previous research has typically, and importantly, approached subject-making in street-level bureaucracies from the perspective of governance – how particular subjects are constructed, located and empowered in specific ways from a top-down perspective (e.g. Engebretsen 2007; Keskinen 2012). While this attention to the workings of bureaucratic power offers a vital perspective to the implementation of integration policies, research also needs to pay attention to whether or not people identify themselves in these terms and enact their positions in intended ways. The article intends to show

* E-mail: camilla.nordberg@helsinki.fi

how migrant mothers position themselves outside the predefined imagery of the passive and socially disengaged migrant woman (see also Nordberg & Wrede 2015).

Migrant motherhood as a site of subjectivation

Citizen subjects are in this contribution understood as activated and given meaning to in immediate interaction with the 'outer world'. Thus, the notion of the subject transgresses an individual psychological element related to the 'free will' and the construction of the self (Mansfield 2000). Scholarly work on subjectivation or subject-making has importantly shed light on the ways in which neoliberal policy rationales shape and reorder the position of different citizen subjects according to social divisions of gender, race, sexuality and social class (Ong 2006; Näre & Nordberg forthcoming; Salazar-Parrenas 2001). Less specific attention has been paid to the social category of civic status and family form, how the notion of the individual as part of a 'family' is managed in neoliberal migration policy making and institutional practice (see, however, Lippert & Pyykkönen 2012; Martin 2012).

From the perspective of the citizen subject, previous research has pointed out how motherhood, on the one hand, has been conceptualised as a political duty of citizenship, and, on the other hand, as denoted to the private rather than public sphere, non-recognised as a practice of citizenship (Erel 2011). Such feminist critique relates to the denial of motherhood as fundamental to reproducing the state and as 'subsidizing the welfare state through unpaid reproduction and care work in the home' (Pateman 1992, cited in Erel 2011: 696). Furthermore, whereas motherhood not only reproduces the state, but also the ethnic nation, migrant motherhood has become a contradictory symbol of the tensions between multicultural tolerance and nationalist anxiety in global modernity (Lewis 2005; Vuori 2012; Yuval-Davis 1997). The feminist scholarly debate has shed light on the ways in which racialisation adds to the gendered nature of parenthood through discourses of the oppressed, backward, non-participatory migrant mother on the one hand and the 'exotic other' on the other hand, obscuring the heterogeneity of parenthood (De Souza 2004).

Following from the understanding of the 'self' as an embedded subject, it becomes analytically meaningful to explore notions of locality, of places and spaces of formal and informal interaction. While space can be global and abstract, 'place' is best understood as 'the experience of a particular location with some measure of groundedness (however, unstable), sense of boundaries (however, permeable), and connection to everyday life' (Escobar 2001, 140). Institutionally situated everyday life experience has largely been overlooked in migration studies. Alongside identifying universal hierarchies of migrant subordination, an exploration of everyday life interaction is essential for unfolding the materialisation of potentially oppressive discourse and practice. Importantly, a focus on the 'local' both defines the object of analysis and points to possibly changing scales and forms of governing whereby the local has become a particular site of governing practices (i.e. Stenson 2008). In the Finnish integration context, decentralisation of state governance has implied increased responsibility and freedom for municipalities to develop services for newly arrived migrants, with a stronger emphasis on project-based practices and local NGO collaboration (Tuori 2013; Vuori 2012).

Subsequently, this contribution sees migrant motherhood as defined by a situated subject relationship to a specific, although

transforming, institutional-political location. Moreover, I understand newly-arrived mothers as citizens in the making. In the study, the notion of citizenship is approached through practices of *citizenisation*, the interplay between migrants' negotiations and acts of citizenship and the normative practices of welfare state incorporation played out in local street-level encounters (Nordberg & Wrede 2015). This interplay is defined by the negotiation and contestation of ideas and images of the 'decent' or 'ideal' citizen (Nordberg 2007). For example, as Scuzzarello (2008) has noted in the case of Sweden, the wish to 'help' immigrants to integrate into Swedish society is related to conceptions of what is held to be morally right and normal to do. However, despite potentially good intentions, the normative boundaries of the majority are often reproduced in relation to representations of the other as a socially less efficient subject who needs to undergo a process of socialisation. Policies of integration or assimilation thus tend to reflect historical, cultural, and structural relationships of the receiving society, often in relation to former colonial and mediated imaginaries (Keskinen 2012; Mulinari *et al.* 2009; Lewis 2005).

The location of research and its political institutional framework

In Finnish integration policy discourse, the neoliberal turn has brought about political consensus on the need to integrate migrants 'more efficiently', in line with the general rationale of welfare policy change. Previous integration policy measures were more *ad hoc*, reacting to the slow increase of immigration in the 1990s, initially through return and marriage migration, and reflecting the comparatively low share of refugees and asylum seekers. During the last decade, demographic transformations and a shortage of labour in certain sectors of the labour market, alongside the managerialist restructuring of working life, has brought labour recruitment issues to the political agenda (Lillie 2012; Näre & Nordberg forthcoming). While the annual average number of asylum seekers has been as low as 2000–5000, the number of temporary short-term migrants arriving in Finland has been estimated to around 50,000 (Ministry of the Interior 2013). The number of foreign-born residents is still comparatively low, only 5.3% of the Finnish population is born outside the country (Statistics Finland 2014).

With the new Act on the Promotion of Integration (1386/2010), the aim was to broaden the target group to apply to all migrants with a residence permit, not only to refugees and people outside the labour market. It includes the trial programme *Participative Integration in Finland*, through which municipalities and third sector organisations were provided funding for developing project based, creative and new modes of early societal incorporation. Many of the projects were established for 'special needs' groups, such as the elderly, stay-at-home parents, 'illiterate' migrants, all categorised as residents *not aiming to access the labour market* at this stage (sic!) (Tarnanen *et al.* 2013; also Vuori 2012). Formally, thus stay-at-home parents constituted one target category. However, in the preparatory documents, concerns were explicitly raised for stay-at-home-mothers (rather than parents):

It is necessary to assure that all family members, also for example mothers from families with many children, get access to integration training. [...] The aim is to support the family's, particularly the mother's, stronger societal involvement (Ministry of the Interior 33/2009).

Alongside language learning projects, different ‘mother-and-child activity groups’ constituted the core terrain of the personalised welfare services emerging in the wake of the amended Act (Hirsiäho & Vuori 2012; Intke-Hernandez & Holm 2015). My research kicked off in liaison with a project at the Department of Adult Social Work in the city of Vantaa, *Capable Parent* (fi: Osaava vanhempi), targeted at stay-at-home-mothers. The project organises Finnish language training for parents who take care of small children at home and who, consequently, cannot participate in regular full-day language or integration training courses. A childminder is contracted to care for the children during the classes. Furthermore, parents can participate in children’s and parents’ activity groups. Alongside language training, these get-togethers are intended to offer societal and cultural information and everyday know-how (see Intke-Hernandez & Holm 2015). The trial project started in April 2011 and continued until June 2013. Generally, these project based measures are paralleled with a stronger emphasis on counselling staff, typically temporarily employed native speaking workers, to assist with paperwork and other tasks that make for a smoother interaction.

In year 2013, 11.6% of the 205,300 inhabitants of Vantaa were foreign born. The proportion of foreign born has been rising rapidly: Still, in 2005, the share of foreign-born was only 5.8%. Currently, more than 100 different native languages are registered in Vantaa. Russian speakers constitute 22% of non-national native-language speakers, Estonian speakers 19% and Somali speakers 8%. They are followed by Albanian, Vietnamese and Arabic mother tongue speakers (City of Vantaa 2014).

Researching migrant background mothers’ early citizenisation practices

The ethnographic stories that I have constructed for this article draw on the first phase of an ongoing 5-year study. Interviews and observation sessions are regularly carried out in different neighbourhoods in Vantaa with women who meet the sampling criteria of not being involved in paid work or full-time education, but taking care of their children at home. By the time of the first interview, the study participants should have moved to Vantaa within the last 12 months. For some of the women, Vantaa is the first place of residence, while others have moved from reception centres in other parts of Finland. Many have a refugee or asylum-seeker background, but some of the women are so-called return migrants of Finnish decent, labour migrants, or migrants who have moved to Finland because of family ties or studies. The women come from Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Spain, Moldova, Syria, Morocco, Angola, Congo, Thailand, Romania, Kosovo, Nigeria and Russia.

I have found the women through the local welfare authorities, which means that all participants at least once have been in touch with the local welfare services. In practice, the street-level workers ask women who meet the sampling criteria above whether they agree to be contacted by a researcher conducting a study on migrant motherhood in Finland. The workers then provide me with contact details. Depending on the linguistic situation, I either call them myself or with an interpreter to ask permission for an interview, preferably in their home but optionally in a public place, a library or a café.

Following the research design, I interview all new participants once or twice, if needed with an interpreter present. The interviews touch upon themes related to everyday life, visions for the future and the role of integration and welfare services for that future. After the

initial interviews we, continuously but irregularly, meet for observation sessions related to institutional encounters. Ideally, we meet up in the morning in the participant’s home. We walk together to the appointment, I observe the meeting and then we walk back home together discussing the event. In practice, the observation sessions might be very different. I sometimes receive spontaneous phone calls from women asking me to join them to the unemployment office or to a daycare centre to ask for an opening for their child.

Drawing on interviews and field notes from observation sessions with two of these women, this article illustrates some of the constraints the women face, when trying to establish their early paths to citizenship, or more precisely, what in the eyes of the society is defined as the early path to citizenship. All personal details are changed when considered irrelevant for the analysis (the women’s age, the number of children, sometimes also nationality and education). Ethical issues related to anonymity and informed consent are hyphenated due to the position as new settlers with limited social networks and a lack of common language with the majority society, including the researcher. The notion of informed consent is particularly challenging in relation to participants whose educational background makes it difficult to grasp the meaning of being objects or subjects of academic research. Notwithstanding, the securing of participant integrity has continuously been reflected upon with participants, something which is possible due to the repeated encounters.

Access to ‘hard-to-reach’ populations typically depends on *expert choice sampling*, such as also the initial sampling of this study. The benefits of community–academic collaboration include access to the target group and the possibility to sustain research over time and thereby strengthen the validity and reliability of research (Benoit *et al.* 2005). Simultaneously, such collaboration can be problematic from the point of view of researcher integrity. Sensitive discussions are never reported as part of longer narratives that could identify the participant. Local authority representatives in Vantaa have assisted with the research permit and with establishing initial contacts to the target group, but will not be partners in research. The risk of biased sampling has to be acknowledged when welfare workers are selecting candidates for the study, but most of the time I am contacted by my key contacts at the welfare office after their very first meeting with a woman, at a point when they have not had a chance to establish their own relationship.

Two stories on motherhood, agency and invisibility

In order to illustrate the contemporary contradictions between top-down welfare policy restructuring, local institutional citizenisation practices and the agency by the individual mothers, I use two case stories – two mothers’ attempts to navigate the welfare system in their early negotiations for post-parental-leave citizenship. Thus, both mothers were in a period of transition, looking for child and elder care solutions that would facilitate their access to full-time language training. They were eligible for, and had also attended, the more limited project-based language classes targeted at stay-at-home mothers. They saw these activities as stimulating and as facilitating networking with other mothers, although they questioned whether the courses, the way they were organised, benefitted their language learning. But both of the women were frustrated and wanted to move forward from their situation. They had both worked before coming to Finland and did not identify themselves as voluntarily stay-at-home moms.

I chose the cases of these two women partly due to their similar background as highly educated and speaking fluent English.¹ I could communicate with both of them without an interpreter. The extracts below draw on observation sessions related to visits at their local child health clinic when I met these women for the second time. During observation sessions, I tape recorded part of our discussions, but, for the most part, I draw on written field notes or transcribed oral notes recorded on my way back from the meeting.

Amina, mother of two

Amina is a 29-year-old nurse and human rights activist who was forced to leave Caucasia with her husband in 2010. They were assisted by a human trader. After two years in Finland in different reception centres, they got permanent residency in 2012 and settled in Vantaa with their son, who was born in 2011. A second son was born at the end of 2012. They have no relatives in Finland.

When we met in February 2013, Amina cared for the children at home and her husband attended language classes during the day. They were satisfied with their nice two bedroom apartment in one of the central Vantaa suburbs. They sometimes met up with other families from their home country, although they found little spare time with the two small children. Both Amina and her husband suffered from different kinds of health problems. During our first meeting Amina told me that her older son, Halim, would turn 2 the following month and she thought he would be ready to join the local kindergarten. Amina planned to stay home with the baby, Imad, until he turned 1 later in autumn. As soon as possible after that she would prefer to join a full-time Finnish language class. When we met 2 months later in April, she was very frustrated about her everyday life, about her difficulties to get by without a functioning language.

A: I think, I think about the future, I don't know why I always think about the future. I am the first who look for the future, when the future will come. It is good now, our situation is very good for us here but we still wait for the future./.../

C: Yes yes.

A: Every time we receive some mail for example I have to translate them on computer. It's good that people know English and we can solve the problem...but I think that I am like a child here because I cannot read and I cannot write. So and in our country there were some TV advertisements about the illiteracy and they were saying that illiterates are like the blind people. I feel like the blind people.

I initiated a discussion about the possibility for the children to start kindergarten the following winter. One of the benefits officers at the social welfare office had told Amina that the children can get a daycare placement only after they turn 3 years old, but Amina wanted them to start earlier so that she could join the language classes:

C: And what about... you will be home for a while now with the children and it's difficult for you to attend language courses.

A: Yeah, that's the reason why I haven't joined any classes yet. I am really interested to go to class but I have to wait at least one year, and then after a year when the little boy turns one there should be someone who takes care of my children because the kindergarten is from three years old.

C: The one here, down the road?

A: Yeah. But I think from 1 year old they would accept, but social office said that not for full day.

C: Not for a full day?

A: No, and part of the day is problematic if I am taking courses, how will I manage?

C: Who said that, that you can only get a part-time placement?

A: It was in the social office.

C: Okay.

A: The financial responsible (benefits officer).

Amina was eager to learn Finnish and prepared to consider other care options if her children were not offered public daycare. Indeed, she indicated that she was aware that according to the law she, or actually the child, has so-called subjective right to public daycare. Despite this, she did not really object to or intervene with the point of view expressed by the benefits officer. Articulations of gratitude and approval of available (subordinate) circumstances are commonly identified in accounts of migrants on their encounters with receiving society (Varjonen 2013), Migrants' readiness to adapt conditions a potentially transformative citizenisation process that could generate change in a more profound way at the individual as well as the structural-institutional level.

The interviews and observations brought to light current welfare state challenges, where welfare work has been marked by a fragmentation of the professional landscape. Not only migrants, but service users in general have limited access to qualified social workers, located as part of an increasingly niched space. It seems that a major constraint to equal access to universal public daycare and, subsequently, to language courses is inaccurate or insufficient guidance concerning available options. Traditionally, professional social workers were working holistically with individuals and families and more time was reserved for personal encounters and counselling. However, as Aila-Leena Matthies concludes (2013: 153) 'Social work as a profession currently underlies a process of Othering in its own fields, particularly by a strong influence of managerialism, medicalisation, entrepreneurship and pedagogisation.' The managerialist reframing of social work practice has implied a stronger emphasis on the economic implications of social work practice alongside different forms of control and increased top-down steering, reflecting a transition of focus from the needs of citizens to the needs of the organisations (Meeuwisse, Scaramuzzino & Swärd 2011; cf Bredström & Gruber 2015). Given this shift in professional practice, it is not surprising that participants highly value the more readily accessible welfare workers at the child health clinic, at the welfare office, and in the different classes targeted at stay-at-home mothers for their encouraging peer support. As such, these encounters can compensate for the limited access to qualified social workers. Furthermore, they potentially decrease the power asymmetries featuring welfare work encounters.

When we met on this particular instance, we walked together to the child health clinic where Amina had an appointment. It was a short walk, 15 minutes. I initiated a discussion on her different encounters with social welfare authorities. Amina explained that Merja, a project worker, was the one who provided information about different activities, like the language courses for stay-at-home-mothers, but the family had no contact with their social worker other than once when they needed to get a bank card.

C: But if you need more information about things, who can you ask, practical things that you need help with?

A: Merja (project worker) was the one I asked.

C: Do you also see a social worker or is it only the woman who handles money issues?

A: Yes there is another lady, Nina.

C: Nina, okay.

A: Yeah we have, when getting the bank card.

C: Okay yes, but this Nina woman, do you meet her regularly or just when you have some specific issues?

A: No no just one time because of that bank card.

C: Okay so otherwise, outside Merja that you had contact with earlier in the spring, the only one you see regularly is the lady who handles your money, but she's just dealing with the monthly payments?

A: Yeah. With money my husband deals and he goes to Nina.

The empirical data indicated that professional social work for newly arrived migrant families occasionally reaches fathers to a larger extent than mothers. This setup is arguably not due to an active sidestepping of mothers from the social welfare office. Rather, when less time is reserved for other social work than financial support assistance, and any adult family member can handle the related monthly routines, the less mobile adult seldom gets to meet a qualified social worker. This structural condition may jeopardise the women's right to continuous professional guidance and a more long term plan of action.

Amina told me that it was difficult for her to join the language courses for stay-at-home mothers. She went there with her first child but did not continue after her baby was born. At that time she also underwent a surgical operation and experienced practical difficulties, making it difficult for her to join the course.

We arrived at the maternity and child health clinic. Leena, the nurse, was enthusiastic and driven, discussing the children's health issues with Amina in English. She left no real space for Amina to bring up issues she had been concerned about. The discussion was friendly in an asymmetric way. Leena explained in dramatic terms what happens to children's teeth if not properly cleaned, that children might have to be put into narcosis to have them removed. She was concerned about the older boy, Halim, who still woke up to have milk at night. Leena told Amina to think about her own coping and well-being. Amina did not say much.

Later Leena asked whether Amina had visited the open daycare centre in the same building. She had not and Leena offered to take us there. Before we left, I decided to mention Amina's thoughts about daycare next winter. Leena suggested that Amina fill in an application form at the daycare centre.

We were shown around by one of the staff who asked Amina if she spoke Finnish and then repeatedly during our stay told her that it is important to learn Finnish and that she can do that here. The lady informed us about the language course and the mother-and-child activity groups where mothers do things together and learn Finnish at the same time. She showed us the wall boards and concluded, laughing, that most of the information was in Finnish except one text about threadworms and one about lice. We talked about daycare and Amina received an English language form to fill in.

We walked together to the train station. Amina told me that when she was pregnant Leena offered her a family worker who would come to their house every morning after the baby was born. Amina did not think she needed any help. She could also not explain why she was offered this help. Amina's story turned out to be one of a mother who had an active public health nurse and was offered quite substantial support for her motherhood yet less support for her autonomous citizenisation process. Hence, the different front-line workers' lacking recognition of Amina's selfhood, of her desires and

ambitions, diminishes the potential to a dynamic, personalised path to citizenship.

Farrah, mother of three

Farrah is a 25-year-old biology teacher. In 2009 she came to Finland from Iraq with her husband, grandmother and a baby boy. After first having stayed in a reception centre, they got permanent residency and settled in Vantaa in 2012. By the time of the first interview, in spring 2013, the family had three children. Malik was 5 years, Hakim 2 years and Sanaa 6 months old. Farrah's grandmother lived in the same apartment and suffered from dementia. Her condition had deteriorated and she needed constant surveillance and care. The family had no other relatives in Finland. They lived in a rather small apartment in a Vantaa suburb, a bit aside of the main public transport hubs.

It was April 2013 and our second meeting with Farrah. We met at the child health clinic where she had an appointment for the baby. It was a short and efficient visit. The public health nurse explained in English that everything is normal with the baby, everything looks good. We walked back to the house together and I stayed with her while she prepared dinner. The two younger children fell asleep and Malik played games on the computer. Farrah told me she felt rather discouraged. Earlier in the winter her husband had not yet been offered a language class. He then helped Farrah with the children, took Malik to a 4-hour children's club activity and run some errands. Now her husband was attending a full-time language class, coming home late in the afternoon. Farrah thus could not leave the house during the day. She stayed indoors with the three children and her grandmother until her husband arrived. She told me about the week before, how she could not go to a dentist's appointment with her younger girl.

She told me she really wanted to learn Finnish and to go back to university. She would like to arrange daycare for all the children when her baby is around 1 year old, but she had found it difficult to negotiate public care arrangements:

F: Children's daycare, some kindergartens are from 6 months, or from 9 months.

C: Yeah, until 9 months you have the parental leave, but after 9 months it's not unusual.

R: Okay... But the social workers say me, now stay at home with your baby until 2 years. Look after your grandmother. It's not necessary, it's not necessary to start learning the language.

C: Yeah who told you that?

R: No no, they didn't tell, but I think that they will be saying to me, they didn't.

C: They didn't tell you but you think that they will tell you to stay at home for a longer time?

R: Yeah.

C: /.../ It's very common here to go to work when children are small but you can of course choose, it's very different between different Finnish women. Some women stay at home until children are 3 and some go to work.

R: I said to them I want to go, on Friday (to the mother-and-child activity group), I don't know what to do with the grandmother, but they say it's not necessary.

Farrah told me about a friend whose maternity clinic worker contacted the manager of a daycare centre and could arrange daycare for the

older children so she could attend language classes with the baby. That must have been a very good nurse, Farrah concluded. Later, during our discussion, it turned out that Farrah actually had been in touch with her native speaking contact at the local welfare office to apply for a part time kindergarten placement for the older children, but with no success:

T: My, this Arabic speaking woman, she talked to kindergarten's boss and she said that mother still at home, the children will be only in kerho (4-hour children's club activity).

C: Yes but it's actually against the law. It is. I think that they sometimes give this advice but it's her personal opinion, it's not really legal.

R: I know a lot of women here from my country, they are at home with the babies but they, the older children go to kindergarten.

I asked Farrah about her other contacts to the welfare office, about what kind of help she had asked for. It turned out that she had actively tried to find a solution to their situation. She was rather familiar with the different care and support schemes available. She had discussed the informal carer allowance with a benefits officer at the welfare office, but learned that it might reduce the social welfare support. If so, the family would end up with the same monthly allowance anyway and it would make no sense to apply. Farrah did not think the benefits officer sorted out this issue since she had the discussion already a while ago. I told her what I knew about the informal care scheme, that it not only is about the symbolic financial compensation, but also entails the right to other forms of support, like days off for informal care providers.²

Farrah had then been in touch with her social worker, benefits officer, the native speaking contact, as well as the home care manager. According to the latter, the home care team could have assisted with bathing but not with looking after the grandmother if Farrah wanted to go out with the boys. Farrah told me she did not need help with bathing. On the contrary to Amina's story, Farrah's case highlights a remote relationship to the local welfare state with lacking external support for both her motherhood and her citizenship process. While the institutional encounters accounted for in these stories should not be understood as representative of a unified practice, they do illustrate an emerging contradiction between policy objectives of activation and self-sufficiency and street-level bureaucratic interactions, drawing on their very own rationales. This gap is arguably enforced by the current misrecognition of professional, qualified social work as a holistic practice.

Reflections on the reordering of motherhood and citizenship

In the context of welfare state change, migrant mothers have come to be thought of as particularly vulnerable, unproductive and socially disengaged individuals (e.g. Ministry of the Interior 2009). Such discourse on the backward, isolated migrant mother can arguably be conceptualised as a moral panic, as public anxiety about a perceived lack of integration, or wrong kind of integration, as representing values not at tune with the ideals of the dominant liberal society, particularly with regard to gender equality. Such concern about migrant background women 'out of place' being responsible for the upbringing of future citizens is, at policy level, managed by 'empowering' measures to involve stay-at-home mothers in activities 'outside home'. At a rhetoric level, the aim is to get these women as

soon as possible into language training, education and work, along individually adapted paths.

While the new service structures in many ways were well received by the participating mothers, the challenge from the point of view of equality is that these targeted measures proved not to efficiently communicate with the broader, universal public service provision. The local welfare state was accessible and available, but it was difficult for the mothers to be listened to (cf. Engebretsen 2007).

Following the marketisation and fragmentation of services, newly arrived families do not have a regular contact with a professional social worker, but are actively 'managed' by numerous institutional contacts. Participants do not account for situations in which professionals, health care or social workers would encourage them to apply for public daycare and full-time language training when the youngest child is under 2 years of age. Subsequently, the 'efficient' transition to a post-parental-leave citizenship becomes challenging.

The case analyses show how institutional encounters (rather) are dominated by a gendered and racialised streamlining of migrant background mothers' early paths to citizenship, reflected in the disparate understandings of the state of a 'spatial limbo'. While migrant background mothers articulate their subjectivities through a sense of active frustration, that frustration is not necessarily recognised by welfare institutions, generally denoting migrant mothers as passive, less transformative subjectivity. Subsequently, the desire to self-sufficiency (cf. Ong 2006; Rose 1999) – the desire to take advantage of the 'women-friendly' social policy schemes at equal terms with any Finnish woman – appears to be left un-noted. Becoming a citizen is about constructing oneself as an agent, but arguably also about how one is normatively constituted by the larger society (Cederberg 2014; Nordberg 2006). In this study, the normative and educative role welfare workers take on is not objected by the women, but they try to be creative and find alternative strategies, claiming moral space as future citizens through discourses of the active migrant family, familiar from previous research on experiences of negotiated resettlement (Erel 2011). The two women narrated themselves as defined by their own capacities and resources to counteract the vulnerabilities emerging in the wake of the migration process. The data shows how being a stay-at-home parent is not always a choice, as implicitly suggested in the policy-framework but may be the only option offered to migrant women and men with little knowledge about the local welfare system.

Also the feminist scholarly debate in Northern Europe has been engaged with the strong emphasis on paid work in the Nordic gender model, suggesting that it may be biased, particularly subordinating migrant background women through a non-recognition of diversifying family norms (Borchorst & Siim 2008; Lister 2009). While gender equality certainly has been used to 'construct dichotomous divisions between the 'nation' and its 'others' (Mulinari *et al.* 2009: 13), the empirical data rather brings to bear the ways in which culturalised and racialised stereotypes of migrant women as different, constrain their access to the dominant institutions of society, to equal participation in education and working life.

While project-based and targeted incorporation measures successfully encounter stay-at-home mothers, they simultaneously risk 'cementing' these women in the category of stay-at-home mothers rather than supporting the more dynamic mobility voiced not only in the policy documents but also by these women themselves. Moreover, as Amina's and Farrah's stories accentuate, these projects have not appeared parallel to more formalised, universal social work practice. Project based activities are increasingly replacing established, professional services. These structural obstacles are

related to the general reorganisation of welfare services – to the deprofessionalisation and fragmentation of welfare work familiar from other studies. Sirpa Wrede (2008) maintains that the ‘reframing of professionalism contributes to withdrawal of recognition from care as expertise (also welfare work in general) and, ultimately to a fragmentation of care as a professional activity’ (2008: 31). She concludes that such misrecognition of care (welfare work) is not only a marker of current transformations, but reflecting contemporary gender relations more broadly.

Amina’s and Farrah’s stories show how the local Finnish welfare state assigns migrant motherhood a specific and restricted place, perhaps unwittingly. Yet such circumscribed agency risks shaping a new gendered and racialised order of parenthood and ultimately of citizenship in the Nordic welfare state. Due to both a high human cost in terms of lost opportunities and a societal cost in lost potential, it would be important to evaluate policy change through the lens of these differentiating notions of motherhood and participation.

Conclusions

Drawing on the case of newly arrived ‘stay-at-home mothers’ in Finland, the starting point for this article was to consider the amended integration policy framework, calling for increasingly efficient, de-centralised and personalised integration measures. ‘Stay-at-home mothers’ were constructed as a special needs group requiring particularly active incorporation measures. However, the ethnographic work analysed for this study points to a substantial gap between policy objectives and street-level practice.

The local, street-level, welfare state misrecognises the agency and self-realisation of migrant background mothers themselves, subsequently treating them as passive and socially disengaged women, distinguished from a citizenisation process. Thus, the migrant motherhood, as constituted by the local welfare state, hampers migrant women’s citizenisation as equal members of society. Unlike in the past, when in a context of nation-building projects motherhood was fundamentally understood (Yuval-Davis 1997), in the current neo-liberal context when productivity of members of society is the

central logic of welfare policies, being identified with categories such as migrant motherhood may then exclude women such as Amina and Farrah from equal access to social rights.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful for valuable comments by the co-editor Sirpa Wrede and the co-authors of this special issue, by Grete Brochmann, Bolette Moldenhawer, Marta Padovan-Özdemir and Radoslaw Polkowski. Furthermore, I want to thank an anonymous referee and the editors-in-chief for a careful reading of the article. However, this contribution particularly owes to the women who volunteered to participate and to the staff at the City of Vantaa Social Services. The research was funded by Ella and Georg Ehrnrooth Foundation, Otto A. Malm Foundation and the Academy of Finland (project number: 1273392).

Dr. Camilla Nordberg is a Senior Lecturer in social work at the Swedish School of Social Science at the University of Helsinki. She currently holds a 5-year Academy of Finland Research Fellowship conducting an ethnographic longitudinal study on migrant background mothers’ citizenisation practices in restructuring urban settings. Her research interests and publications have broadly related to the migration-welfare state nexus, with a particular focus on micro-level analyses of citizenship and power, media and public discourse.

Notes

1. The strong drive to join a full-time language class (with the assistance of publically available day care), was, however, typical among the participants, regardless of class background.
2. According to The Act on support for informal care (937/2005), support for informal care ‘encompasses necessary services for the client, a compensation for the informal carer as well as leave and support services for the carer’ (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2006).

References

- Ahlqvist, T & Moiso, S 2014, ‘Neoliberalization in a Nordic state: from cartel polity towards a corporate polity in Finland’, *New Political Economy*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 21–55, DOI: 10.1080/13563467.2013.768608
- Benoit, C, Jansson, M, Millar, A & Philips, R 2005, ‘Community-academic research on hard-to-reach populations: benefits and challenges’, *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 263–282, DOI: 10.1177/1049732304267752
- Borchorst, A & Siim, B 2008, ‘Women-friendly policies and state feminism: theorizing Scandinavian gender equality’, *Feminist Theory*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 207–224, DOI: 10.1177/1464700108090411
- Bredström, A & Gruber, S 2015, ‘Language, culture and maternity care: ‘troubling’ interpretation in an institutional context’, *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 5, no. 2, DOI: 10.1515/njmr-2015-0010
- Cederberg, M 2014, ‘Public discourses and migrant stories of integration and inequality: language and power in biographical narratives’, *Sociology*, vol. 48, no. 1, pp. 133–149, DOI: 10.1177/0038038512470041
- Cerny, PG 2005, ‘Political globalization and the competition state’, in *Political economy and the changing global order*, eds. R Stubbs & GRD Underhill, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- City of Vantaa 2014, *Vantaan väestö 2012/1013 [Population, Vantaa 2012/2013]*, Tietopalveluyksikkö, Vantaan kaupunki [The City of Vantaa Information Bureau], Vantaa.
- Dahl, HM 2012, ‘Neo-liberalism meets the Nordic welfare state – gaps and silences’, *NORA –Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, vol. 20, no. 4, pp. 283–288, DOI: 10.1080/08038740.2012.747790
- De Souza, R 2004, ‘Motherhood, migration and methodology: giving voice to the “Other”’, *The Qualitative Report*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 463–482.
- Engebrigttsen, A 2007, ‘Ali’s disappearance: the tension of moving and dwelling in the Norwegian welfare society’ in *Migration, Family and the Welfare State*, eds. KF Olwig, BR Larsen & M Rytter, Routledge, Milton Park.
- Erel, U 2011, ‘Reframing migrant mothers as citizens’, *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 15, no. 6–7, pp. 695–709, DOI: 10.1080/13621025.2011.600076

- Escobar, A 2001, 'Culture sits in places: reflections on globalism and subaltern strategies of localization', *Political Geography*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 139–174, DOI:10.1016/S0962-6298(00)00064-0
- Hirsiaho, A & Vuori, J 2012, 'Stories of alphabetisation, stories of everyday citizenship', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 232–242, DOI: 10.2478/v10202-011-0042-9
- Intke-Hernandez, M & Holm, G 2015, 'Migrant stay-at-home mothers learning to eat and live the Finnish way', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 5, no. 2, DOI: 10.1515/njmr-2015-0012.
- Keskinen, S 2012, 'Troublesome differences – dealing with gendered violence, ethnicity, and 'race' in the Finnish welfare state', *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 153–172, DOI:10.1080/14043858.2011.622075
- Keskinen, S, Vuori, J & Hirsiaho, A (eds.) 2012, *Monikulttuurisuuden sukupuoli. Kansalaisuus ja erot hyvinvointiyhteiskunnassa*, Tampere University Press, Tampere.
- Koikkalainen, S, Tammilehto, T, Kangas, O, Katisko, M, Koskinen, S & Suikkanen, A 2011, 'Welfare or work: migrants' selective integration in Finland', in *Migration and welfare in the 'new' Europe*, eds. E Carmel, A Cerami & T Papadopoulos, Policy Press, Bristol.
- Lewis, G 2005, 'Welcome to the margins: diversity, tolerance and policies of exclusion', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 28, no.3, pp. 536–558, DOI: 10.1080/0141987042000337876
- Lillie, N 2012, 'Subcontracting, posted migrants and labour market segmentation in Finland', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 148–167.
- Lippert, R & Pyykkönen, M 2012, 'Contesting family in Finnish and Canadian immigration and refugee policy', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 110–111, DOI: 10.2478/v10202-011-0026-9
- Lister, R 2009, 'A Nordic nirvana? Gender, citizenship, and social justice in the Nordic welfare states', *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 242–278, DOI: 10.1093/sp/jxp007
- Mansfield, N 2000, *Subjectivity: theories of the self from Freud to Haraway*, New York University Press, New York.
- Martin LL, 2012, 'Governing through the family: struggles over US noncitizen family detention policy', *Environment and Planning*, vol. 44, no. 4, pp. 866–888, DOI:10.1068/a4477a.
- Matthies, AL 2013, 'The Otherness of social work under neoliberal governance', *Nordic Social Work Research*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 149–158, DOI: 10.1080/2156857X.2013.803495
- Meeuwisse, A, Scaramuzzino, R & Sward, H 2011, 'Everyday realities and visionary ideals among social workers in the Nordic countries: a matter of specialization and work tasks?' *Nordic Social Work Research*, vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 5–23, DOI: 10.1080/2156857X.2011.562030
- Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2006, *Omaishoidon tuki. Opas kuntien päättäjille*, Handbooks of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Helsinki.
- Ministry of the Interior 2013, *Maahanmuuton vuosikatsaus 2012*, Ministry of the Interior, Helsinki. Ministry of the Interior 33/2009, *Maahanmuuttajien tehokkaan kotouttamisen kolme polkua: kokeilulla toteutettava alkuvaiheen ohjauksen malli Osallisena Suomessa*, Ministry of the Interior, Helsinki.
- Mulinari, D, Keskinen, S, Irni, S & Tuori, S 2009, 'Introduction: postcolonialism and the Nordic models of welfare and gender', in *Complying with Colonialism. Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region*, eds. S Keskinen, S Tuori, S Irni & D Mulinari, Ashgate, Farnham, pp. 1–16.
- Munck, R, Schierup, CU & Delgado Wise, R 2011, 'Migration, work and citizenship in the new world order', *Globalizations*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 249–260, DOI: 10.1080/14747731.2011.576553
- Näre, L & Nordberg, C forthcoming 2015 [eprint], 'Neoliberal postcolonialism in the media – constructing Filipino nurse subjectivities in Finland', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. DOI: 10.1177/1367549415585557
- Nordberg, C & Wrede, S 2015, 'Street-level engagements: migrated families encountering the local welfare state', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 5, no.2, DOI: 10.2478/njmr-2015-0008.
- Nordberg, C 2007, *Boundaries of citizenship: the case of the Roma and the Finnish nation-state*, SSKH Skrifter 23, Swedish School of Social Science, Helsinki.
- Nordberg, C 2006, 'Claiming citizenship: marginalised voices on identity and belonging', *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 10, no. 5, pp. 523–539, DOI:10.1080/13621020600954952
- Ong, A 2006, 'Mutations in citizenship' *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 23, no. 2–3, pp. 499–505, DOI: 10.1177/0263276406064831.
- Rose, N 1999, *Powers of freedom: reframing political thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Salazar-Parrenas, R 2001, *Servants of globalization: women, migration, and domestic work*, Routledge, New York.
- Scuzzarello, S 2008, 'National security vs. moral responsibility: an analysis of integration programs in Malmö, Sweden', *Social Politics. International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 5–31, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxn002
- Standing, G 2011, *The Precariat: the new dangerous class*, Bloomsbury Academic, London.
- Statistics Finland 2014, *Foreigners and Migration*. Available from: <http://www.stat.fi/tup/julkaisut/tiedostot/julkaisuluettelo/yvrm_ulsu_201200_2013_9847_net.pdf >. [Last accessed 2.6.2014].
- Stenson, K 2008, 'Governing the local: sovereignty, social governance and community safety', *Social Work & Society*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 2–14.
- Tamanen, M, Pöyhönen, S, Lappalainen, M & Haavisto, S 2013, *Osallisena Suomessa: kokeiluhankkeiden satoa*, Suomen kulttuurirahasto, Svenska kulturfonden, Jyväskylän yliopisto, Jyväskylä & Helsinki.
- Tuori, S 2013, 'Enabling and disabling spaces within multicultural projects', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 36–39, DOI: 10.2478/v10202-012-0012-x
- Varjonen, S 2013, *Ulkopuolinen vai osallistuja?: Identiteetit, ryhmäsuhteet ja integraatio maahanmuuttajien elämäntarinoissa*, University of Helsinki Press, Helsinki.
- Vuori, J 2012, 'Äiti peiton alla. Arjen kansalaisuus ja kotouttamistyö' in *Monikulttuurisuuden sukupuoli. Kansalaisuus ja erot hyvinvointiyhteiskunnassa*, eds. S Keskinen, J Vuori & A Hirsiaho, Tampere University Press, Tampere.
- Wrede, S 2008, 'Unpacking gendered professional power in the welfare state', *Equal Opportunities International*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 19–33, DOI: 10.1108/02610150810844910
- Wrede, S, Näre, L, Olakivi, A & Nordberg, C 2013, 'Neoliberal metropolitanism and the Nordic welfare state: paradoxes of (in) equality in the care work regime', paper presented at the 2013 *American Sociological Association Annual Meeting*, 13 August 2013.
- Yuval-Davis, N 1997, *Gender and Nation*, Sage, Thousand Oaks.