(De)skilled migrants in Finnish labour market:

The impact of racialized discrimination and immigration policies in the labour choices of Ethiopian skilled migrants in Finland

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Abstract

International students are thought to enhance campus diversity and augment skilled workforce globally. After completing their studies abroad, a considerable number of international students are likely to remain in the countries where they conducted their higher education. They seek to join the labour market using the skills they have acquired from the long academic years. Nevertheless, many—particularly from the global south—are seen to struggle finding jobs that match their skills and educational positions, thus ending up working in areas well below their qualifications. Many Ethiopian skilled migrants, who originally came as students, work in the lower echelons of the labour market in Finland.

The study aims to investigate why Ethiopian skilled migrants work in areas below their qualifications. It draws on the data by interviewing 10 Ethiopian skilled migrants who originally came to pursue their tertiary education in Finland. Using the theoretical discussions on Critical Race Theory, mobilities paradigm and immigration controls, the study demonstrates how the labour choices of Ethiopian skilled migrants are shaped by discriminatory and institutional constraints. It reveals skill is racialized and socially constructed, and is biased against Ethiopian skilled migrants. The study also shows that Finnish immigration policies contribute to the deskilling of Ethiopian migrants.
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1. Introduction

I have spent over 20 years in schools; I travelled across continents to study IT, supposedly one of the best fields to join the most lucrative and demanded position in the labour market. I specialised in software because believing it increases my chances in the labour market to no avail. All this to end up working in the cleaning industry. (Obang)

I took the above extract from my data to provide a background and communicate to the reader one of the most underlying themes in this master’s thesis. My goal is, to investigate how Ethiopian skilled migrants, who originally came to Finland as students, end up working in positions below their qualifications. In the process, I aim to provide a platform for the research participants to communicate their experiences to the reader, and also to demonstratively show the reader the institutional and other constraints the research participants/Ethiopian student migrants encounter when attempting to integrate in the Finnish labour markets.

International student recruitment has been understood as fundamental to the financial security of many higher education institutions in the world, and a crucial means of bringing skill and sustaining diversity in universities (Choudaha and Chang 2012: 6). This was only partially applicable to Finland where there was no tuition fee for international students until 2017; however the second part of the definition befits Finland’s higher institutions where there were 20,000 international students in 2014 of which 76% came from countries outside the EU/ETA area (CIMO 2016; cited in Maury 2017:225). International student mobility has increased globally over the past decades; in 2015, according to OECD report, international students account for 5.6% of the total enrolment in tertiary programmes. The figure is even higher for enrolments at doctoral level which amounts to a quarter of total enrolments (OECD 2017:286).

After completing their studies, international students may, for some time, continue to reside in the countries where they completed their tertiary education. The chances of

1 All names are pseudonyms.
return are influenced by a number of factors, such as variables in the rewards for education between the origin and destination country and other economic factors (OECD 2017). There are conflicting reports regarding job security of international students after completing their studies. Some depict the advantages of recruiting international students as skilled migrants as they are believed, among other things, to increase the recruiting country's pool of highly trained workers, who are increasingly important for economic development, among other things (Ziguras 2006). However, not all end up having attractive job positions in the receiving countries (see also Maury 2017).

International students are considered as highly skilled migrants of the future (Dervin 2011:1). The terms skilled migrants and student migrants/international students are often examined together in social science literature, with the acknowledgement that more emphasis is given to student migration in the realm of education (Maury 2017:225). In this study as well, the terms skilled migrants and student migrants/international students are used interchangeably, mainly because the research participants fall into both categories. In fact, the research participants’ *multiple subjectivities* are among the themes that emerged in this study.

Terminologies in migration literature carry their own meanings. Some have highlighted the obscure distinction in using migrant vs immigrant based on the duration of stay (Anderson 2010). Distinction in the use of mobility vis a vis migration to refer to the highly skilled is also noted based on similar grounds (Vertovec 2002). In this study, the term migrant is used instead of immigrant; and the term skilled migration is used to refer to transnational skilled mobility.

The literature on migration has defined skilled migration and skilled migrants in several ways (Lowell 2008; Millar and Salt 2008; Vertovec 2002). In this study, the meaning of skilled migrants matches that of Vertovec (2002). Accordingly, “skilled migrants – most broadly defined as those in possession of a tertiary degree or extensive specialized work experience – include architects, accountants and financial experts, engineers, technicians, researchers, scientists, chefs, teachers, health
professionals, and – increasingly – specialists in information technology (IT, including computing professionals, computing engineers, managers, sales reps, etc.)." (ibid: 2)

Skilled migrants face significant barriers that hinder them from joining the attractive high demand jobs; the barriers appear at different levels and are executed by different actors; most notably institutional policies, and employers. Challenges of labour integration has distinctively come out as a concern in contrast to neo-classical assumptions of labour market where the market is dictated by neutral and independent competitive forces which shape the globalized world economy. Such celebratory tones hold an unproblematic view of human capital and consider skill as an acquisition by individuals whereby they expect to yield benefits by investing in resources (Schultz 1961:8). Unproblematic assumptions overlook the ways skill is biased along lines of gender and socio-economic background (Steinberg 1990); race and ethnic background (Guo 2015; Yosso 2006; Aleman and Aleman 2010).

How skill should be measured and what it constitutes has garnered discussions in social science literature (for e.g. Grugulis & Vincent 2009; Steinberg 1990). The discussion emphasises whether or not educational qualifications should be the sole measurement; as well as the problem attributed to measuring soft skills. Grugulis & Vincent (2009:599) for example warn that the increasing emphasis on soft skills may legitimise discrimination, noting the extreme difficulty of measuring attributes such as personal traits, attitudes to work and individual qualities, which constitute soft skills. Similarly, Steinberg (1990) highlights the arbitrary and subjective basis of skill conceptualization and concludes that it is biased to the male gender by which the male exerts more power over the definition of skill.

Skilled migrants with IT credentials are recognized as quintessential examples of success in globalised labour market; they have been understood as representing the mobile subject with transferable, standardised and generic skills (Kofman 2013:580). However, as this study demonstrates, this assumption needs further rethinking that takes the subject’s racial background into consideration.
There exist social and institutional barriers that lie along lines of the intersections of racial, gender and other discriminatory stereotypes, which regulate and shape the conditions of work for migrants. Against the backdrop of this argument, one can demonstrate that skilled migrants encounter discrimination that block their upward socio-economic mobility, making labour integration difficult and at times unachievable. Racializing practices as Luke (2008:4) argues, are executed both by institutional forces and by objects of power, such as employers, though their power differs.

Constraining instruments that deter migrants’ chances of joining the lucrative labour market also come in terms of unrecognized foreign accreditation (Storen and Wiers-Jenssen 2010; Man 2004; Owen & Lowe 2008), language difficulties (Man 2004) gender bias, (Iredale 2004) to mention few. Triple glass effects (Guo2013) act as barriers that significantly contribute to deskillling of skilled migrants which consequently push them to work in areas they are overqualified for. Overqualification as Erdogan et al. (2011: 217), explain is a “situation where the individual has surplus skills, knowledge, abilities, education, experience, and other qualifications that are not required by or utilized on the job”.

Research has shown that overqualification is considerably pertinent to groups of ethnic minority skilled migrants; which means that not all skilled migrants face similar challenges of joining high demand qualified jobs. Migrants coming from the US and West Europe have been observed to seamlessly utilise their skill and integrate to the labour force; whereas those skills held by migrants from the 'global south' are unrecognised (Li 2008).

Discriminatory practices are but one determining element that influence labour opportunities. Labour integration is also further implicated by border regimes and migrants’ status of legality in the host country, the significance of border controls to influence and shape migrants’ labour choices is increasingly being demonstrated in social scientific research (Anderson, 2010; Krivonos, 2015; Maury, 2017). While international border controls employ a vetting process that regulates who enters in the country; internal state borders continue to exert control over migrants through policies which determine the conditions to stay or remain legally in the country. Thus, as Krivonos (2015:352)
argues, “the barriers restricting mobility are not only international borders, but also sub and supra state borders”. In the process, immigration policies/border controls function as “a mould shaping certain forms of labour” (Anderson 2010:301).

In order to continue living in the host country, international students join the lower echelons of the labour market. One major reason for this is due to the temporary nature of their visa; which exposes them to fragmented temporal working conditions characterised by insecurity and precariousness. As Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) note, insecure labour markets are produced by border controls, because they create complicated visa procedures which could lead to the deportation of international students if not followed.

This has major implications to the assumption of transnationalism in a globalised world shaped by borderless mobilities. Contrary to assumptions of a borderless globalised world which largely undermines the sovereign state (Hardt and Negri 2000), studies have demonstrated the ways in which migrants and their choices of labour continue to be affected by border regimes (Ahmad 2008; Anderson 2010; Krivonos 2015; Neilson 2009).

Migrants work in job sectors characterised by unattractive labour markets in order to remain living legally in host countries; in other words, immigration policies control legality by constructing labour dependent not just for work, but as Anderson (2010: 311) notes, in a way that regulates migrants’ relationship with employers and their residence status. Therefore, border controls remain integral in shaping mobility both externally and internally, and create certain forms of labour. This highlights the intertwined relationship between the labour market, mobility, and immigration policies where one is significantly dependent on the other (see also Krivonos 2015).

Thus, a work life for the migrant under dynamic and temporal conditions, is not only a means to secure economic ends, but also a means of stay. This consequently entails deskilling process where skilled migrants end up working in low waged work. The conditions of stay created by immigration policies direct the skilled migrant to low wage jobs, as the migrants do not enjoy the same kind of residential status as their native
counterparts, which then create unequal platforms for competition for the two skilled groups. The migrant first and foremost has to secure his/her resident status, and finds a convenient way of doing that through jobs in the lower labour market.

This of course cannot be seen in isolation from other forms of barriers to high demand jobs, more importantly discriminatory practices by employers, and institutional barriers. Therefore, a skilled migrant from a visible minority country faces a double layered setback when s/he attempts to integrate into the labour market. His or her chances to stay in the country is dependent on being employed; and s/he faces challenges at various levels to work in the positions s/he has specialised in. These major hurdles, as also shown in this study, lead the skilled migrant into joining low wage jobs characterised by insecure and precarious markets.

This study begins with the understanding that Ethiopian skilled migrants face significant constraints that hinder them from accessing attractive job markets. Labour integration is one of the subject that has garnered considerable research in migration studies. Extensive research lies on challenges of finding professional jobs faced by skilled professionals of migrant backgrounds, regardless of whether they had completed their tertiary education in the country of origin or country of destination. Heilbrunn Kushnirovich & Zeltzer-Zubida. 2010; Johansson 2008; Iredale 2004; Kyhä 2001; Lenard 2014; Li 2001, 2008; Man 2004; Maury 2017; Owen & Lowe 2008).

The findings in the above body of literature show that often migrants from the global south encounter challenges to integrate in the labour market, the findings in this study will also corroborate that. Deskilling experiences have been particularly pertinent to migrants from the global south on the basis of factors such as racializing stereotypes, language skills, and unrecognised foreign credentials. Skilled migrants thus end up working at the lower levels of the labour markets. This leads to a phenomenon known as brain waste, “where the skilled and the educated leave their home country, but then make little use of their skills and education in the host country” (Mattoo et al., 257: 2008).
Another equally important standing point in this study, in addition to institutional and other discriminatory disadvantages, is also that Ethiopian skilled migrants’ labour choices are implicated by their temporal residence status. All the research participants originally came with student visas and gradually changed their permits to a work permit in order to remain living in Finland. In the process, the skilled migrants were faced with barriers that block their chances of getting a qualified white-collar job, and thus end up working for jobs they are overqualified for so as to stay living in Finland. Therefore, their effort to remain in Finland comes at a higher price of a downward socio-economic mobility; an affirmation that their migrancy (Näre 2013) supersedes their skills.

Reactions to downward socio-economic mobility are different. Some migrants (whether skilled or not; or legal or not) tend to see their careers during their earlier stages of migration purely instrumentally (Piore 1979). They regard it as a temporary adjustment that will be changed in the future as they increase their social capital and develop attachment with the host country. However, they increasingly become cognizant of the migrant hierarchies which places value on them based on their ethnic and socio-economic status; and which they subsequently internalise to a certain degree (Koskela 2014).

Therefore, the study looks into the experiences of Ethiopian skilled migrants who originally came as international students; it discusses the challenges they face in trying to find qualified jobs and the role immigration policies play in the labour integration process. Based on the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews, the study aims to answer the following research questions.

- Why do Ethiopian skilled migrants in Finland work in areas below their educational qualification?
- What types of challenges do Ethiopian skilled migrants face that hinder them from accessing the attractive and high demand labour market?
- How does status of residence and Finnish immigration policies contribute to the deskilling of Ethiopian skilled migrants?
I discuss my findings by bringing forward the existing theoretical discussions on critical race theory, immigration controls and mobilities. Based on the data collected, I try to assess how ascriptive factors like ethnicity influence upward socio-economic mobility and contribute to deskilling in light of critical race theory (Guo 2015). Then, through the lenses of theoretical works of immigration controls (Anderson 2010); and mobilities (Sheller & Urry 2006), I look at how immigration controls also shape migrants’ choices of labour and the ways social and geographic mobilities influence one another.

Thus far, as far as I am aware of, no research that includes deskilling or challenges of labour integration has been conducted from the perspective of Ethiopian migrants in Finland; this may be perhaps due to their relatively small size in comparison to other migrant groups. Thus, it is my belief that this study will serve as a solid resource material for conducting further research; and will also contribute to the sociological discussions of labour integration, challenges of high skill migrants, and implications of border controls to the labour market in Finland. Prominent works in the area include research by Koskela (2014), Krivonos (2015), Laurén and Wrede (2008), Maury (2017) and Näre (2013).

This master’s thesis is organised as follows. In the following chapter, I briefly introduce immigration patterns in Finland pertaining to international students, labour integration, and skilled migrants. I also discuss Finnish immigration policies with respect to students and workers and requirements to obtain and maintain student permits and work permits. Then I outline the methods with which the data was collected, the characteristics of my research participants, and the data analysis process. In chapters 6 and 7 I present my research findings and analysis based on two main themes that emerged in my data. Finally, I conclude by writing summarizing remarks of the thesis.
2. International students and migration patterns: Trends in Finland

Migration in Finland is a relatively recent phenomenon; it is not very long since Finland transformed from a country of emigration into a country of immigration. The country turned into a net receiver of migrants, i.e. the number of people entering the country each year exceeded the number of people leaving Finland (Habti & Koikkalainen 2013; Forsander 2002). Koskela (2010: 57) notes that in general, migration in Finland has been characterised by humanitarian reasons; and the first noticeable groups of migrants were from Somali refugees who came to Finland 19990s. Thus, labour migration has not until recently garnered attention in Finnish migration policy. As Forsander (2003: 56) puts it “Finland’s immigration policy has not been determined by labour market considerations; instead it has developed as a result of external pressures, such as international agreements, or on the basis of ethnic loyalty”.

Statistical data regarding the educational background of foreigners residing in Finland is incomplete, they do not include information on educational credentials obtained abroad. Based on available data, however, 40 per cent of the persons aged 25 to 54 with a foreign background living in Finland had completed a tertiary level qualification (Statistic Finland, UTH survey 2014).

Migration research is Finland has been more dominated by discussions on challenges of integration by “longer established, culturally distant groups and their problems with integrating in Finland” (Koskela 2010: 59) than on skilled migrants. Regardless, Koikkalainen (2014: 160) noted that the number of tertiary educated migrants leaving Finland was considerably more than those coming in. Nevertheless, increasing studies on skilled migrants’ and international students’ social and economic integration as well constructed ethnic hierarchies depict the overarching and multi-faceted factors that shape migrants’ integration to the society and to the labour market (Korhonen, 2014; Koskela, 2014; Lulle & Balode 2014: Maury 2017).
Residence permits, policies and international students

Non-EU residents who are admitted to a higher education institute in Finland are required to obtain a resident permit through Finnish consular offices in their respective countries before arriving. The students are required to submit the following to be granted the resident permits: a study place (acceptance letter from Finnish higher education institute); financial guarantee of €6720 in their bank accounts; health insurance that covers medical expenses up to €100,000 for studies which take only one year, or up to €30,000 for studies that take at least two years (Migri 2018).

Residence permits are given for a duration of 1 year, and permit extensions are subject to similar requirements as that of a first-time request, including that the student now has to show a student credit report which indicates the amount of credits s/he took in the first year. It is expected that a student takes at least 40 credits in a year, however there may be exception, such as health problems.

The number of international students has been soaring in the last ten years, from 6000 in 2000 to around 20,000 in 2014 of which 76% came from countries outside the EU/ETA area (CIMO 2016; cited in Maury 2017:225). In 2015 alone, Finland issued residence permits to 5869 students from developing countries only, and the number increased to 6348 in 2016 (Migri 2016). The figure is expected to plummet in the coming academic year following Finland’s introduction of tuition fees in 2017.

After the completion of studies, international students can remain in Finland on a work permit. A provision of a permit for seeking work after finishing the degree or other qualification was added to the Aliens Act in 2006, with the aim of securing labour supply. According to Government Bill 78/2005, the purpose of the permit for seeking work is specifically to promote the efforts of students from third countries to seek employment and enter Finnish working life (Migri 2015:6). Furthermore, a student can also switch the grounds for residing to other categories and apply for a new permit on the basis of, for

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2 The rules and regulations discussed in this section are that of prior to Finland’s introduction of tuition fees in 2017.
example, family ties, research, employment, self-employment and victimisation in trafficking in human beings as well as seek asylum (Migri 2015).

However, many switch their permits to work permit either during or after completing their studies. A fulltime employment contract which pays a minimum gross salary of 1,189 per month is needed to obtain a work permit. Initially, a work permit is given for a duration of a year; it can then be extended to a four-year period after the end of the first period if the requirements hold.
3. Review of Previous Literature

Plenty of empirical research have shown the difficulties and challenges immigrants face in entering the labour market in general, let alone in areas that meet their qualifications (Heilbrunn Kushnirovich & Zeltzer-Zubida, 2010; Johansson, 2008; Iredale, 2004; Lenard, 2014; Li, 2001, 2008; Man, 2004; Maury, 2017; Owen & Lowe, 2008). The reasons documented in the literature range from language barriers (Li, 2008; Man, 2004) to effects of human and social capital to labour integration (Li, 2001), unrecognized educational certificates (Storen and Wiers-Jenssen, 2010; Man, 2004) and different forms of ethnic discrimination (Larja et al, 2012; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Perhoniemi, 2007; Lauren and Wrede, 2008).

In addition to better life conditions and simplified visa procedures by governments to attract temporary skilled migrants (Khoo et al, 2007: 481), educated migrants may also have been forced to leave their countries of origin because of adverse conditions in their home country, such as political conflict or economic collapse (OECD, 2002b, cited in Khoo et al, 2007: 482). Although this has been shown to be true, others have also pointed out that traveling longer distances is actually a privilege only the better-off can afford, and those affected by calamities, such as civil war often travel short distance to neighbouring countries (Castles, De Haas, and Miller, 2013).

Migration of the skilled has been extensively documented in the literature particularly from the late 1990s onwards. However, as Matoo et al. (2008:257) emphasized, the same cannot be said about the phenomenon of brain waste where “the skilled and the educated leave their country, but then make a little use of their skills and education in the host country”. Nevertheless, increasingly crucial research is being conducted which shed light to the prevalence of the problem in different Western European countries including Finland, Canada and USA. (Iredale, 2005; Koskela, 2014; Kyhä, 2011; Lenard, 2014; Owen & Lowe, 2008; Storen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2010).

This chapter is divided into 3 sections, which discuss the literature on the topics of skilled migration, overqualification, and labour migration in general. Each section lays out some
of the existing literature on the subject matter from different angles. The first sub-section discusses research conducted globally, but mainly in the Western hemisphere; the second one discusses the literature conducted in Finland; and finally, the case of Ethiopian migrants and challenges of labour integration are addressed. Research conducted exclusively on Ethiopian skilled migrants is not available as far as I am aware; therefore, I instead opt to turn into the literature on labour migration and socio-economic integration.

3.1 Research on skilled migrants and labour integration

There are different existing studies conducted on the phenomenon of skilled migration; researchers have used different theoretical concepts to interpret their data and guide the findings. A comparative study by Iredale (2004) on challenges of female migrants in Western countries, Japan and Korea, demonstrated that skilled women often sacrifice their own career for the sake of their family, or may be disadvantaged in the process by gender bias. It noted that many skilled women migrants faced additional barriers to entry in the occupation of their training due to family structures and obligations, gender bias and inability to undertake assessment procedures and training.

A study in Norway by Storen and Wiers-Jenssen (2010) analysed data of 3,224 persons participating in a Norwegian survey from 2002-2003 and revealed that graduates with diplomas from abroad and non-Western immigrants experience disadvantage in the competition for jobs in general, and jobs relevant to their qualifications in particular. Their study analysed the employment opportunities of different groups of educated individuals in Norway: including both immigrants and native Norwegians graduated in Norway; and immigrants and ethnic Norwegians graduated abroad. Their analysis was linked to the theories of social capital and country-specific human capital as well as theories of discrimination to explain such variations of lack of opportunities to join the labour market which was observed in their findings.

Of the different studies I revised, I have noticed the topic of migrant labour integration is more exhaustively researched in Canada than any in any other country (Lenard 2014; Li
2001; 2008; Man 2004; Owen & Lowe 2008). One of the reasons may be because, Canada has been described as a nation of immigrants (Owen & Lowe 2008:3).

In their study of foreign credential recognition and the relationship between immigrant integration and the Canadian society, Owen & Lowe 2008 (2008:5) noted that “while 70% of Canada’s immigrants have at least some post-secondary education, coordinating the recognition of the education and skills acquired outside the country, and successfully supporting the labour market integration of immigrants into jobs commensurate with the skills and education is a challenge”.

Lenard’s article (2004) on high skilled immigration in general argues that unlike the popular misconceptions which associate difficulties of entering the labour market solely on the low skilled migrants, both high skilled and low skilled migrants face challenges joining the work force. She argues that employers are unwilling to recognize the credentials migrants have gained outside the destination country, though the same credentials have satisfied the immigration officials’ requirements. “As a result, high skilled migrants are often forced to labour in employment for which they are over-qualified or in unrelated fields entirely.” (ibid: 14)

Man (2004), who conducted a qualitative research on deskilling experiences of female Chinese professionals in Canada, argues that the intersection of racialized and gendered institutional practices contribute to the marginalization of Chinese immigrant women. She concludes that due to these institutional forces, which affect migrants in the form of state policies and practices, restrictive professional accreditations, foreign credentials unrecognized by employers, or inexperience in the Canadian job market, skilled migrants are forced to become unemployed or deskilled workers (ibid:145). Man’s findings also show that processes of globalization and economic restructuring further complicate the deskilling of Chinese migrants.

A comparative research by Voicu and Vlase (2014), on labour integration of skilled migrants, native population, and other migrants in different areas in Europe during times
of economic crisis indicated mixed results. However, in general, their findings showed that skilled migrants integrated better than other migrants (Voicu and Vlase 2014:35).

The findings reveal extensive deskilling of migrants in a global context. The studies also show that not all migrant groups face underemployment. Discrimination is by far more prevalent towards migrants from global south and other ethnic minorities than it is from migrants from the north. Two studies by Li (2001; 2008) contend that in general immigrants’ credentials are penalized when compared to those of native born Canadians; and a foreign degree by visible minority immigrants carry a lesser value in the labour market.

3.2 Research on skilled migrants in Finland

The topic of labour integration has been approached from different angles and disciplines in the Finnish scholarship. Some sociologists have analysed ethnic and migrant hierarchies in care work (Lauren and Wrede 2008; Koskela 2014; Näre 2013) others (Krivonos 2015) have studied how border and mobilities affect migrants’ labour choices. Still others (Ahmad 2005) have analysed how migrants’ social networks affect finding employment in Finland. Kyhä (2011) has demonstrated that higher education level was largely not followed with employment; only a few respondents (6 %) gained employment by the end of the year after moving to Finland, and about a third (35 %) were employed three years after moving to Finland.

Koskela (2014) introduces a concept called migrant hierarchy whereby she interprets Finnish people’s categorization of immigrants along lines of ethnicity, socio-economic status, and other related factors. Koskela conducted in-depth interviews with fifteen immigrants with different ethnic backgrounds, including from the continent of Africa, Asia, and Europe. Her findings indicate two important things. First, skilled migrants are aware of the migrant hierarchy. Second, despite objecting the hierarchies, they have internalized it, to some extent, which in turn has implications to identity construction.
Ahmad (2005) for example, studied the role of social networks in finding work in sectors that require professional qualifications and that do not. In his study, he, a Pakistani origin, assessed the rate of success in formal and informal job applications in Helsinki, and found out that out of 116 jobs he applied, only three jobs were offered to him. And out of 284 jobs interviewed through telephone, he was again offered only three. He argued that his findings contradicted the neo classical theories according to which the labour market is devoid of socio cultural dimensions. He rather argued that it was socially constructed and must be analysed as affected by social and cultural aspects, as assumed in segmented labour market theories. (Ahmad 2005: 40).

Others have contributed to the discussion from social psychology perspective (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Perhoniemi 2007; Larja et al., 2012). A study by Larja et al., (2012) studied the prevalence of gender and ethnic discrimination in the Finnish labour market. One of their findings reveal that having a Russian name and accent significantly decreases a job applicant’s chances of getting interviewed for a vacant position in Finland. Discrimination against applicants with Russian names was found in 45% of all recruitment situations in the second stage (Larja et al. 2012: 179). Their findings also revealed that ethnic discrimination was over three times more prevalent than gender discrimination (ibid: 181). They observed similar findings in different occupations, including those that require certain qualifications and those that do not.

Similarly, Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Perhoniemi (2007) studied discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity. According to their data, 44% of immigrant respondents reveal that they have been discriminated at work because of their foreign background. The phases of discriminatory experiences emerge during periods of: applying for a job, getting promoted, being fired and being harassed at work (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Perhoniemi 2007: 232). In particular, their study emphasised the role ethnic discrimination and prejudice play in the adaptation and acculturation process of immigrants.
3.3 Research on Ethiopian migrants and labour integration

Skilled emigration became a concern to Ethiopia as early as 1970s when a socialist military junta took over the country in 1974. Though official figures are inexistent, empirical studies note that the return rate of Ethiopian migrants has declined in the last two decades. For instance, referring to a study by Dr Mengesha (2002), Shin (2002) indicated that 50% of all Ethiopians who went abroad and completed their studies have not returned in the last 10-15 years; this according to the study was an alarming ascension from the almost barely inexistent non-return cases during pre-socialist years.

Kuschminder & Siegel (2014) conducted a survey of 1,282 household of 15 communities in Ethiopia which included households of; current migrants, return migrants, and households with no experience of international migration. The survey found out that Europe and North America were the second favourite destinations with 22% of the total Ethiopian emigrants. The primary migration destination centre was the Middle East holding 50% off those under ‘current migrant’ category; Saudi Arabia was the most popular destination in the Middle East. Migration also carries a strong gendered dimension according to the survey, which revealed that majority of the migrants were young women who migrate to the Middle East for domestic work. Furthermore, only 12.69% of migrants completed tertiary education; and the majority (41.42%) had either no educational background or had primary education (Kuschminder & Siegel 2014:18).

Fernandez (2010: 88) contends that “in Ethiopia, migration has become an important strategy to cope with the multiple crises of recurrent famines, conflicts with neighbouring states, political repression, and high unemployment that many Ethiopians have experienced over the past few decades”. It is undeniable that the calamities have in deed largely contributed to a soaring surge of migration and displacement in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the statement disregards other significant migrant groups, such as international students, those who migrate for family reunification and for employment, and thousands of others who migrate to US every year on Diversity Visa (DV) lottery. From the year 2011-2015 only, 25,718 Ethiopians have migrated to USA through DV.
programme, according to US Department of State, Consular Affairs (“US Department of state” 2018)

Save for studies on domestic care work in the Gulf countries (Beydoun 2006; Fernandez 2010; Kuschminder & Siegel 2014) empirical studies focusing on skilled migration and deskilling practices of Ethiopian migrants are not available. There exists some literature Heilbrunn Kushnirovich & Zeltzer-Zubida 2010; Offer 2004; Ojanuga 1993) on Jew-Ethiopians, and the challenges of socio-economic integration. The migrant groups from Israel and the Gulf states share few similarities in that they are considered to hold insignificant socio-economic status in their respective destinations, and are mostly uneducated. They also have differences; those who migrate to the Gulf states are principally for domestic care work, that began as early as 1986 according to Beydoun (2006). On the other hand, in Israel, Ethiopian Jews have relocated permanently in late 1970s and 1984 as part of the Israeli government decision to receive Jewish descent migrants (Ojanuga 1993) which included Ethiopian-Jews.

Ethiopian migrants have been markedly studied in Israel; this according to Offer (2004) is because of their physical distinctiveness as dark-skinned Jews, and their particular cultural traditions and religious practices that has portrayed them to have “an especially exotic community in the eyes of the Israeli public and world Jewry” (pp 30). Most of the studies reveal the challenges of socio-economic integration Heilbrunn Kushnirovich & Zeltzer-Zubida 2010; Offer 2004; Ojanuga 1993) and ethnocentric prejudice (Ojanuga 1993) against Ethiopian-Jewish migrants in Israel.

A research by Heilbrunn et al., (2010) also studied challenges of immigrants from Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union face to enter the labour market and their coping mechanism. The study found out that different migrant groups encountered different barriers (objective and subjective), and also revealed that immigrants from the Former Soviet Union coped with stress better than Ethiopian immigrants (Heilbrunn Kushnirovich & Zeltzer-Zubida 2010:250).
Considering the unavailability of skilled migration and deskilling practices of Ethiopian migrants, I believe this study will be a valuable material and a stepping stone for further research on the topic.
4. Theoretical Framework

This section discusses how the concepts of skill and migration are intertwined and used theoretically in this thesis. Given the murkiness of the concept of skill, scholars have a competing view of what it entails, and how it should be defined. Below, I discuss two theoretical approaches relevant to my research topic. However, it should be noted that it is not my goal to test theories using the findings; but rather use the concepts as a theoretical guide to interpret the data.

4.1. Rethinking skill through Critical Race Theory

A system of knowledge that treats skill as a discrete phenomenon uninfluenced by socio-economic and political factors fails to understand the shaping power structures that inform the conditions and categories of the skilled. Skill is indeed socially constructed that vacillates beyond neutral epistemic content. Systematic deskilling practices create hierarchies of the skilled based on one or more of factors such as the subjects’ socio-economic background and gender (Steinberg 1990); race and ethnic background (Guo 2015; Yosso 2006; Aleman and Aleman 2010). The social construction of skill is influenced by biases against certain groups by deskilling and devaluing their educational credentials and work experiences.

Skill, a salient theme in my data, remains among the contested topics in social sciences; discussions in the literature mainly revolve around debates from the point of view of how skill should be conceptualised. The two spectrums include whether skill entails a neutral and measurable attribute (Hall and Lansbury 2006). For instance, human capital theory understands human capital as a set of skills acquired by individuals through the investment of resources, with the expectation that these investments yield benefits under the form of increased potential wages (Schultz 1961: 8). The definition evades pertinent socio-political and economic forces that reinforce some groups while disregarding others.

Empirical research has repeatedly shown the devaluation of migrants’ human capital, mainly from minority groups, and its insignificant return value to the skilled migrant
This is in contrast to the unproblematic and celebratory understanding of human capital unaffected by external social issues. Scholars have criticised reductionist understandings of skill that fail to grasp other components which include, according to Sawchuk (2008:54):

“the failure to recognize the socially situated and collaborative nature of all skill performance, the failure to openly address the imbalances of power and thus the tendencies to reproduce inequities, the failure to recognize economic, sectoral, organizational dynamics, and finally the failure to address the conflation of ‘actual skill/competency’ versus relations of ‘power/control’”.

Feminist studies for example (Bryant and Jaworski 2011; Steinberg 1990) have problematized skill, by showing how it is biased towards the male gender. Bryant & Jaworski’s (1999) study analyses the gendering of work, place and organizations across themes of women, work and reproducing bodies; male embodiment, organization and place; and absent bodies.

One of the ways in which skill is wrongly conceptualised, according to Fenwick (2008: 695) can be postulated by how “a conventional and a-political approach to workplace sills ignores the politics by which particular knowledge becomes valued, fails to recognize how notions of skill are constructed, and renders important knowledge and subversive skills invisible”. She argues that there exists a great deal of unrecognised and undercompensated everyday knowledge which appears in terms of actions such as relationship-building, conflict mediation, social organizing, creative problem-solving, knowledge translation (ibid: 695).

One approach of making sense of the subjective factors that problematise skill is through critical race theory (CRT). Delgado and Stefanic (2017: 3) see CRT as a movement of scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. CRT originally gained roots in the 1970s in the US in civil discourses of legal scholarship to analyse newer and subtler forms of racism, mainly of white-black
dichotomy of racial studies. It builds upon earlier forms of social and political activism against racism, by prominent figures such as Marin Luther King, Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X in the United States (Willis 2008).

Since then, CRT gradually developed and began to be used as a conceptual framework to understand racialized lives of minorities (Trevino, Harris, Wallace 2008). Analysing marginalisation/discrimination beyond the binary limits of Black/White provides a broader theoretical framework to understand layers of racialized oppression towards other marginalized groups. CRT places discriminatory practices broadly and includes economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious under its assessment (Delgado and Stefanic: 2017: 3). Latino critical studies, for example, note that racism, sexism, and classism are experienced amidst other layers of subordination based on immigration status, sexuality, culture, language, phenotype, accent, and last name (Montoya, 1994; Johnson, 1999).

Yosso (2005) argues that the varied extensions of CRT are neither mutually exclusive nor in contention with another. According to him, “naming, theorizing, and mobilizing from the intersections of racism, need not initiate some sort of oppression sweepstakes- a competition to measure one form of oppression against the other.” (ibid: 72-73) In deed it is through entertaining these multiple forms of oppression that we are able to capture the multiple-faceted layers of racialized oppression.

CRT underpins the structural inequalities of power through analysing the uneven racialized relations of subjects of power. When viewing power and race through sociological lenses, Luke (2008: 14) argues that power depends on whether social structures and authorities facilitates to it the appropriate conditions so that it can be recognised and purposefully applied. He rightly notes that racializing practices occur through unequal institutional forces- both by objects of power (such as employees) and by those who exercise power relationally (such as employers) (Luke 2008:4). CRT aims to be a tool of analysis in assessing the unequal power relations which are largely manifested in excluding and othering selected groups and their skills, while privileging others; immigrants are notable examples of “othered” groups.
Deskilling practices and creation of hierarchies in workplace have been increasingly studied in Finland in recent years (Forsander 2002; Koskela, 2014; Laurén and Wrede 2008; Näre 2013).

**4.2 Mobilities and immigration controls**

A growing body of literature has contended the traditional, more conventional conception of migration by which the impact of borders and migration controls are overlooked (Anderson 2010; Krivonos 2015; Neilson 2009) by giving due attention to how they shape and influence different migrant groups and shape labour decisions of the groups. I will utilize role of immigration controls (Anderson 2010) and the notion of mobilities (Urry and Sheller 2006) to analyse how the two inform the labour choices of Ethiopian skilled migrants.

Borders lay a pattern of filtering mechanisms both externally (for e.g. entry visa requirements) and internally (through immigration controls). After crossing international borders, migrants still experience bureaucracies of border controls through a range of mechanisms that significantly impact their lives. Neilson (2009:431) argues:

“Transnational processes have occasioned a proliferation of borders at both sub and supra-state-scales, which in turn implies an explosion of traditional nation-state geographies and an implosion that forces discrete territories and actors into unexpected connections, facilitating processes of production and labour exploitation”.

One of those groups affected by sub and supra-state borders are international students; whereby they are required to fulfil certain requirements to remain legal in the host country retaining their status as students and gradually as employees. Accordingly, joining the labour force has legal implications, which is one of the concerns that push skilled immigrants to jobs they are overqualified for. As Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) argue, insecure labour markets are produced by border controls, because they create complicated visa procedures which could lead to the deportation of international students if not followed.
I use Anderson’s argument (2010) on immigration controls on creating precarious workers as a point of departure to analyse how the Finnish migration services shape the labour options and choices of Ethiopian educated migrants. Anderson challenges the view that treats workplace exploitation in parallel with illegality and argues such conception fails to grasp how immigration controls themselves determine legality. She calls for a broader conception that examines “how immigration controls produce status more generally, in order to analyse the types of *legality* so produced and the impact of these on migrants’ positions in labour markets” (ibid: 306).

For international students, not only does a job have economic returns, it is also a very crucial determinant of a status of legality. The students view the job as a temporary solution that would change as they integrate into the society and complete their higher studies. Anderson (2010: 305) has also indicated that migrants could take jobs that don’t offer career development because it could offer opportunistic and instrumental gains. They view the job as a temporary solution or they can consider it as an opportunity to learn language or “to get foot on the ladder’.

As an international student, a migrant has a right to work 25 hours per week according to Finnish migration policy. And his/her right to extend his/her stay in Finland is subject to qualifying a set of criteria, among which is Financial/employment guarantee that amount to annual earnings of 6700 euros. For Ethiopian students therefore, a job, in addition to being a source of income, is also one of the requirements needed to extend a resident permit.

More significantly though, securing a job for skilled migrants is critical for changing a resident status of a migrant from type A (given to students) to type B (given to employees). The type of permit a migrant holds, has implications regarding his/her status, and evidently sets forth a migrant’s path towards his/her permanent residence as time passes. This is true to other liberal democracies where length of stay can contribute to rights-based claims (Cole 2000). Therefore, skilled migrants (in the process of doing their graduate degrees, or after completion) resort to jobs they are overqualified for, as a means of staying legally in Finland for a longer period of time, because finding jobs that
match their educational qualifications are difficult. Studies conducted in Finland also indicate how institutional structures create ethnic hierarchies (Laurén and Wrede 2008); and more closely to our topic, how mobility is achieved at social cost, including social downgrading and deskilling (Krivonos 2015).

Students and employees on a work visa are in an ongoing struggle to secure their resident status and are subject to deportations if they are presumed to violate their conditions of stay. As Anderson (2010: 309) rightly argues, immigration controls are not simply about conditions of entry across the border, but also about of stay.

New mobilities paradigm (Sheller & Urry 2006), another theoretical tool in this study, emphasises that social sciences have largely been a-mobile and ignored how the spatialities of social life presuppose (and frequently involve conflict over) both the actual and the imagined movement of people from place to place, person to person, event to event. The proponents suggest that a broader theoretical framework that moves beyond “the imagery of `terrains’ as spatially fixed geographical containers for social processes” is needed (Sheller & Urry 2006: 210). This does not mean a complete disregard of the significance of territories.

Nevertheless, the theory significantly shifts the locus of analysis from physical geography to mobilities. The impact of movements to interpret social life is also informed by technologies and other systems that enhance or deter social movements. Sheller and Urry (2006) note:

“analysing mobilities involves examining many consequences for different peoples and places located in what we might call the fast and slow lanes of social life. There is the proliferation of places, technologies, and `gates’ that enhance the mobilities of some while reinforcing the immobilities of others.” (Sheller and Urry 2006: 213).

The interplay of these systems hinders mobility to precarious groups, such as refugees. However, despite popular belief individual groups who are on periodic residence permits, such as international students are also subject to bureaucratic scrutiny to extend resident permits and remain in the country of destination. As Mezzadra and Neilsson (2013) note,
border studies are often associated with unskilled migrants in the literature. According to them, disregarding the skilled migrant from the discourses of problematic border issues, and applying questions of border to only unskilled creates a strange parallel which assumes that the “illegal” migrants must be unskilled (ibid: 137). Not only is the assumption, is a misnomer to undocumented immigrants, but also evades the often uneven and unrecognized relationship between skilled migrants and border regimes. This relationship, despite having far-reaching impacts, has largely been overlooked in social science discourse.
5 Methodology

5.1 Positionality during data analysis

Feminist researchers have challenged the positivist ontology in social sciences and brought credible discussions that outline how the researcher’s epistemological positionality influences the research (Archer 2012; Harding 1991). The production of knowledge has been criticised for taking certain narratives and assumptions for granted while disregarding others. Harding (1993) for instance depicted how the positionality of those dominant groups who conduct science define what is expressed as problematic in research.

Researchers like Abu-Lughod (1991) discuss how their positionality influence the research they conduct and acknowledge that there is no clear boundary between an insider and an outsider and that the two are not mutually exclusive. Similarly, Haney (1996) notes that her social location shifted with respect to the research participants in light of her varying social status during her ethnographic research in a juvenile probation department. She further admits:

“It would be naive to think that I ever transcended these divisions, and it would be easy for me to analyse how these "locations" shaped my work. Such an analysis would be too simplistic, however; throughout the fieldwork, these divisions intersected with others to complicate the picture.” (Haney 1996: 775)

While doing my thesis, the question of where I was situated with respect to the research subjects and the topic itself was something I was aware of. I do share considerable elements with the research participants; we all come from Ethiopia and have in different stages been employed in low-skilled jobs. I have been constantly reminding myself of my positionality in several phases of conducting this study. From the onset, my decision to choose this particular topic was influenced by the many informal conversations I had ever since I came to Helsinki in the fall of 2015. Whenever, the topic of searching for a job came up, I was always told that I should try the low skilled jobs, mainly in the cleaning...
business. As an individual who has two bachelor’s degrees and is doing her Master’s, doing a cleaning job was something I struggled to accept, but something I had to do as months progressed.

However, there were few aspects that set me as an outsider in relation to some of the research participants; I was reminded that I was a “researcher” and my short lived experience as a cleaner in addition to my former (also short lived) job as an assistant researcher had somehow delineated a line between a “researcher” and “a research subject”. So, I was consciously aware of my reflexivity and social position I held during the interviews and throughout the most part of the research. I framed my research based on the understanding that knowledge is constructed which “requires sensitivity to our own as well as the research participants’ subjective standpoints or perspectives” (Marvasti 2003:6).

Conducting a qualitative research is validated at this stage, considering unavailability of statistical data and unavailability of prior research on Ethiopian skilled migrants in Finland. Furthermore, I can substantiate my choice of methodology into what Ragin & Amoroso (1989) calls “commonality”. They underscore that qualitative research is especially used to study communalities, by which he meant studying shared characteristics of a small number of cases of which many aspects are taken into account.

5.2 Data collection method

“The interview has been a focal point for deconstructing the production of knowledge within research, leading to epistemological concerns over how we come to understand or represent another person’s ‘world view’ (Riach, 2009:357).”

My choice of data collection is best explained in Riach’s statement above. I collected data using semi-structured interviews; I use my interview questions as a tool to bring to light the story and perspectives of the research participants coupled with an aim of finding answers to my research questions. I formulated semi-structure thematic interview questions that help guide the interviews.
I used open-ended interview questions; I designed the question keeping in mind the research problems at the back of my head. The main goal of the interview questions was therefore to respond to the questions of challenges that hinder Ethiopian migrants from joining the high demand, professional jobs and also to answer how border regimes influence and inform Ethiopian skilled migrants’ choice of jobs. Berger & Luckman (1966:6) beautifully noted, “The most important experience of others takes place in the face-to-face situation, which is the prototypical case of social interaction”.

Furthermore, during the interview periods, I tried to reflect Magnusson & Marecek’s (2015:46) assessment of doing an interview when they write “The interview situation must encourage participants to tell about their experiences in their own words and in their own way without being constrained by categories or classifications imposed by the interviewer” Magnusson & Marecek’s (2015:46).

I tried to frame my interview questions without any preconceived assumption or idea about how or what the research participants should answer. For example, for the question “In your opinion, what are the major challenges to find jobs fitting your educational qualifications?” some of my respondents asked if I would want to hear about challenges related to employers and other structural constraints; or whether or not I wanted to hear about shortcomings from their own sides. I replied by saying anything they find as a challenge from all directions; the framing of the question, therefore, helped to produce relevant themes that led to bringing answers to the research questions.

5.2 Data collection process

All of my research participants have received their first degrees in different universities in Finland and in Ethiopia. And 9 out of 10 had completed their second degrees in different universities in Finland. And 1 out of the 9 was doing a second Master’s in IT; another joined a PhD program after the data was collected. The remaining one had two bachelor's degrees; a Bsc in computer sciences and a Bsc in IT from Ethiopia and from Finland respectively. They all worked in jobs that they were overqualified for in different phases
of their life in Finland. One of them managed to get an employment position related to his qualifications after over 3 years of job searching; the remaining were not yet so lucky.

I found my research participants through personal connections, and then through snowball sampling. To all the interviewees, I initially briefed them about the goal of my research project and asked if they were willing to participate. I informed them they had a right to withdraw from the research at any point, and also told them I would not be using pseudonyms when writing the thesis instead of their real names; nor would I use the data I collected for any other purpose than for this study. I told them I would discard the recorded audios after I had transcribed them. I gave all my participants the choice of selecting a suitable venue and a convenient time to conduct the interview.

The first five interviews were conducted between September and November 2016; then the remaining five followed between February to March 2017. All, but one of the interviews were conducted in cafes, the remaining one was conducted at a public library in Espoo. In all the interviews, I paused the interview after few minutes and checked whether the quality of the audio was clear and went ahead with the interview. The minimum duration of the interview was 40 minutes; and the maximum time was an hour and 15 minutes; on average the interviews took about one hour. All interviews were conducted in Amharic, the official language in Ethiopia.

When conducting the interviews, I tried as much as possible to give them the chance to express their views as broadly and as comfortably as possible. I led the interview with an idea of shaping the sessions so as to obtain ample, rich and relevant data on the subject matter. Ten Have (2004) better captures my motive when he notes that:

“the researcher arranges sessions with the research subjects in which the latter talk about their ideas and experiences at the initiative of and for the benefit of the researcher. In that sense, the data produced in interviews have an ‘experimental’ quality; without the research project, they would not exist”. (Ten Have 2004: 5)

I made a subtle guidance whenever I sensed the discussed went off-track, which only happened few times. On the contrary, two of my participants were less expressive than I
had expected and were reluctant to give a detailed account of their experiences. I believe they were timid by nature, especially when talking to strangers. I did try different techniques to have them provide more detailed responses; such as telling them about my own experiences as a cleaner, modifying the questions, and trying to create a “friendly” ambiance than a typical research environment.

My participants included 9 men and 1 woman. My original plan was to have a balanced number of female and male participants, so I could also analyse potential gender roles in interpreting the data. Nevertheless, that plan fell short as it proved to be difficult to find female participants. This was contrary to my original expectation. I actually thought that I would have less male participants, because of the assumption that jobs such as cleaning, were mostly regarded as “a woman’s job”. For this reason, I was under the assumption that the composition of my interviewees would lean toward females rather than males. This did not happen, and I remained puzzled why the women I approached declined to be interviewed. However, the data I collected from the only female participant included markedly peculiar information. This is discussed in the next chapter.

Another plan that changed as I progressed with the interview was to later include participants that were employed within their profession. My initial plan was to interview only those working in jobs below their qualifications at the time of the interview; however, that changed after coming across to a man who was working in a start-up IT company, but who nevertheless had had his fair share of struggles in the lower socio-economic terrain. Then I thought it would be a wise to incorporate both angles in order to understand how he managed to find jobs within the realm of his profession.

The table below provides a general description of my research participants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Length of stay in Finland</th>
<th>current job</th>
<th>previous job (if any)</th>
<th>Educational bg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amare</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>cleaning and postal delivery</td>
<td>Msc in IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belay</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>cleaner, barber, in building construction</td>
<td>Msc in IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonger</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>continued PhD program</td>
<td>Cleaning</td>
<td>Msc in IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gelan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>cleaning, postal delivery</td>
<td>Msc in IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hassen</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Doing Msc in IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obang</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Msc in IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selam</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>moved to Ethiopia</td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>Msc in IT and communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senay</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>railway station/ small entrepreneurship</td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>Bsc in IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seyoum</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>car rental, food processing</td>
<td>cleaning, car rental, food processing</td>
<td>Msc in IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merera</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>It expert</td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>Bsc in Comp Sc+ Bsc in IT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis (Braun and Clarke: 2006: 7). However, Braun and Clarke are suspicious of the claim of “a naïve realist view of qualitative research where the researcher can simply give voice”. Some consider thematic analysis and thematic coding as a tool and a process under the umbrella of a broader analytical method rather than a method in its own right (Boyatzis 1998; Ryan and Bernard 2000). However, Braun and Clarke (2006) convincingly argue against such assertions and present a list of justifications that place thematic analysis as an analytical method on its own.

I chose thematic analysis as a method of analysis because of it complements the epistemological position I hold in conducting the study; it provides flexibility to the researcher and gives room to examine “the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society” (Braun & Clarke 2006:9). Having said that, however, I cautiously reminded myself not to be lost in the haze of intricate data; and that I should actively search for themes in the data.

I tried to apply Braun & Clarke’s 6 steps to data analysis as a guideline, but I refrained from strict adherence. Instead, I regarded the steps as an approach of guiding my analysis. I began the process by listening to the audio recording multiple times in order to delineate important and recurring themes that appeared in the data. I understood that familiarizing myself with the data was a very important step that could seamlessly take me to the next step, leaving a solid foundation to the entire process of the research. As I did that, I jotted down notes and went through them, before I actually began transcription process.

During transcription phase, I opted for verbatim record of each of the interviews, taking into consideration its significance as a mirror of enabling my role in the research (Banister et al 2011: 96). I then proceeded to coding the data; I took the most basic segment, or
element of the raw data and information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998: 63). Following Braun and Clark’s (2006) guideline, I made an attempt to intersect features of the coded data in systematic fashion across the entire data set.

Below is an example:

Extract 1: I didn’t have a contract with the organization; (precarious working conditions) the company just calls people whenever dishwashers are needed in different cafes and restaurants in Helsinki, Vantaa, and Espoo areas. It was very convenient for me because I can say no anytime I have classes or anytime I am busy, because I had no contractual obligations. Because they usually have high labour demands, I made enough money that sustains me each month. So, I didn’t actually need to have a contractual job. But when I needed to extend my permit, I had to have that because I did not have the €6720 in my account. Not only was finding a job difficult, but because I had to make a decision that I didn’t plan ahead, it also affected my studies in my first year. (challenges related to 1. residence, 2. employment, 3. studies)

However, I did abstain from approaching the data by looking for specific questions; rather relied on and examined the data itself so as to generate accounts driven by data. At this stage I reflected on my research questions and made some modifications based on the refined data I had.

Next, I proceeded to searching for themes and building themes from the codes generated. I read the extracts, the highlighted notes, and sometimes even went back and forth to the raw data whenever I felt something was missing or needed clarification. Particularly at this stage, I found it practical to start off by making an effort to structure the bulky maze of coded data; and did not make a strict adherence of the steps suggested by Braun and Clark. Rather, I went back and forth to search, build and review them by giving myself the independence to synthesize the data and to eventually come up with concrete and analytical themes that I could seamlessly use as a tool to answer my research questions.
I cannot overstate the significance of these steps to the data analysis and to the study as a whole,

After thorough scrutiny, I formulated two broad themes along with 5 sub-themes under the broad themes. Accordingly, I framed the following broad themes and sub themes.

1. Deskillling practices by way of racial stereotypes
   a. Ambiguities of defining skill (feminist conceptualization of skill; racialized practices)
   b. Attitudes towards current jobs and searching for work
   c. Research participants’ interpretation of deskillling practices

2. Finnish immigration policies and their contribution to deskilling of migrants
   a. The interplay of social and geographic mobility
   b. Multiple subjectivities created by border regimes

5.4 Ethical considerations

Ethics are crucial part of conducting research; institutions employ ethical oversight to ensure their requirements are met by researchers. Key aspects which include “conforming to practices, such as obtaining informed consent from participants, anonymizing data, etc. has become part of the ordinary activities of conducting social sciences research” (Paoletti, Tomás & Menéndez: 2013: 2-3). Therefore, I have asked consent from all the participants; I have also told them that should they wish to, they can withdraw from the research anytime. I have used pseudonyms and preferred not to write the name of the institutions they graduated from.

Because cleaning jobs are often considered women’s tasks in many parts of the world, and also in Ethiopia, I took context and sensitivity into consideration while interviewing male participants. I tried to develop rapport and build trust by giving examples from my own experiences. Durand & Chantler (2014: 51) note, researcher’s interpersonal skills are crucial as they help make interviewees at ease to talk about their experiences. Most
importantly, I was cognizant of the fact that ethics is not an isolated incident deemed important only for gathering data, but a wholesome concept which runs from the inception to the end of the research. This has played its own crucial role for producing this master’s thesis from its inception to the end.
6. Deskilling by way of racializing and discriminatory practices

In this chapter, I discuss the first part of my research findings, and analyse my findings based on 3 sub themes under the broader theme of racialized deskilling through discrimination; I analyse my findings using the theoretical framework (CRT) discussed in chapter 4. As indicated in chapter 4, critical race theory (CRT) had its roots in legal studies. Solorzano & Yosso (2001) have laid out a genealogy of CRT that links the themes and pattern of legal scholarship with social science literature.

All my research participants came to Finland as students and gradually turned into employees. Most of them were working in jobs below their qualification; one of them was unemployed during data collection, and another joined graduate school after data had been collected. The only female participant moved to Ethiopia soon after the data was collected, she was formerly working as a cleaner. All the participants faced challenges integrating into the labour market; the challenges are discussed below.

In this section, I begin by discussing ambiguities of conceptualising skill and relate the critics towards my findings. I explain how skill is dictated by racial and ethnic backgrounds in the labour market; then I discuss about how my participants feel about their jobs in the lower echelons of the labour market. The final sub-theme for this chapter is discussion on how my research participants interpret practices of deskilling.

6.1. The social construction of skill

Neo-classical assumptions of labour migration consider skill as being shaped by competitive forces that themselves shape the globalized world economy. As Guo (2015:236-237) notes, “in the age of globalisation when competition is fierce among nation states and individual employers and employees, skill has been promoted as a strategy to ensure high employability, productivity, and economic competitiveness”. The skilled migrant is assumed to participate in competitive market where s/he receives financial remuneration equitable for her/his position and where his/her human capital is
properly utilized. The migrant’s skill in this case is transferable, acknowledged and rewarded; and social constraints are considered to be minimal. The male IT worker falls in this category (Kofman 2013).

On the other side of the spectrum, there is a global market for labour force whose skills remain unacknowledged and unrecognized. Many working in this labour sectors are female migrants working in the field of care and domestic work. Research has discussed the social construction of female domestic work (Anderson 2000); migrant divisions of care labour (Näre 2013); and hierarchies in migration and domestic work (Lutz 2008).

Skill is indeed unacknowledged and socially constructed when it comes to the experiences of my research participants. Amare’s story below supports this argument.

Q: can you tell me about your experiences on the IT related jobs you applied for?
Amare: I have a separate Gmail account just for applying jobs. I applied maybe a thousand times since I got my BSc.
Q: A thousand?
A: Yes, at least a thousand. Some exactly match with my qualification, others not directly related, but still close. With the amount of application I send out, I must have gotten a job by now or at least get much more interviews. They just discard our application, especially small companies. I am not saying all of them discriminate against us, there may be also good people of course. But a lot of them don’t trust foreigners; they think only Finns can do the work. I consider myself lucky relatively, because at least I’ve been called for more interviews than others. I think sooner or later I will find a job.

Amare’s experiences exemplify the hardship and hurdles of securing jobs for migrants in their field of study. Despite having received both BSc and Msc in IT, and having rigorously searched for a job, he could not find one. He had been actively searching for a job since 2011, while simultaneously working in job sectors for which he is overqualified for. He had mainly worked as postman for four years; and also worked as a cleaner for a few months. At the time of the interview he was unemployed.
We can see that Amare’s skills are unrecognised and unvalued, and could not bring desired economic returns. His story stands in contradiction to what Koffman (2013) called “the quintessential figure of the skilled migrant” (Kofman 2013); rather, it demonstratively reveals the struggle of an unsuccessful de-skilled migrant.

There is a large and not surprisingly contesting body of literature on knowledge and skill within the context of social inequality. Bringing the scholarship to the topic at hand, the arguments range from the construction of hierarchies of knowledge around social class (Bourdieu 1986) to feminist discourses on skill (Bryant and Jaworski 2011; Steinberg 1990); and racially problematized interpretation of skill (Guo 2015; Trevino, Harris, and Wallace 2008).

Feminist writers have demonstrated how the male IT technician has particularly benefited from transnational labour markets, unlike conventional “female jobs” which have remained undervalued and unacknowledged (Kofman 2013). Migrants with IT credentials are assumed to be acknowledged and privileged, and they are largely considered to benefit from migration policies. They are considered the archetypal examples of success in a globalised, transnational competitive labour market (ibid).

However, my data is a shocking contradiction to the above assertion. eight out of 10 of the research participants are male IT graduates holding either BSc or MSc and one is a computer science graduate. Seyoum’s account below, like Amare’s shows this contradiction. It further strengthens the point that skill, instead of being neutral, is socially constructed (Bryant and Jaworski 2011; Fenwick 2008; Steinberg 1990).

Both Amare and Seyoum moved to Finland in 2008 and did their Bachelor’s and Master’s degree in IT in Finland. Seyoum had also been working as postman. At the time of the interview he was working at a car rental company (cleaning cars, filling gas, and delivering the cars to and from customers for rent) and at a food processing company.

I regularly apply, may be twice a day on average, ever since I got my master’s degree. In the last month alone, I applied over 30 jobs. Some are really similar to my studies; others may not
be that close, but still related. Once in Oulu, a Finn friend of mine and I applied for the same position; he had lower skills than I did at the time. But he got a job at Nokia Siemens immediately and I wasn’t even called for an interview. I can’t of course say for sure it’s discrimination, but most likely, it is.

Seyoum believes that the reason he was unable to secure a job in his field of study was most probably due to his race. Racial and ethnic marginalisation has in deed repeatedly evolved as one of the main reasons that explain migrants’ inability to integrate into the labour market. (Cheung & Heath 2007; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Perhoniemi 2007; Larja et al 2012; Lenard 2014; Li 2001; 2008; Man 2004) Seyoum’s account is a further testament to unqualified socially constructed skill which is characteristically selective on the basis on one’s ethnic/racial background.

Steinberg (2009) argues that skill is socially constructed towards the male gender, and that males exert considerably more power over the definition of skills. Unlike representing the typical male IT worker as “mobile subject with transferable, standardised and generic skills in a globalised economy” (Kofman: 2013: 580), the two young men exemplify the opposite. They work in low paying jobs and are faced with deskilling experiences. They don’t utilise their skills for which they spent over two decades of schooling.

De-skilling as Sawshuk (2008) argues is a process revolving around autonomy, power, control and exploitation rather than skill per se. That is precisely what the above excerpt tells us. They have far too many times encountered hurdles that have precluded them from going up on the socio-economic ladder. This has brought racialized value judgements towards skill which depicts a salience of a crucial theme: racialized discrimination.

Demand for labour in Finland and in the European Union is not yet widespread or acute; rather, the problem lies in a structural supply and demand of skilled labour, where supply and demand do not meet- a shortage of skilled workers. Yet, already five or ten years from now, depending on economic fluctuations, the situation will look different. (Forsander 2002:113)
Transnational movement fuelled by globalization assume that competitive labour market leads to a continual demand for skilled workers across boundaries. While this is at best debatable, the findings in the study do not reflect that. Against Forsander’s note regarding “shortage of skilled workers” in Finland, the findings in this study show otherwise. It is of course very hard to criticise her argument, based on data from a very limited number of participants. Regardless, the findings in this study show a case of overqualified skilled workers, rather than the lack of it. However, she makes an interesting case, in the book, that utilizing migrant labour in general is a complicated process that necessitates bringing into discussion the role of other actors on the topic and not a simple matter that can be addressed through a simple political decision-making.

Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that in the case of my Ethiopian research participants, the IT workers are not “the quintessential figure of the skilled migrant in the knowledge economy, which many states and the European Union proclaim is the goal of a modern and competitive society” (Kofman 2013:580). This is not the case when it comes to Ethiopian skilled migrants mainly because place of origin/race matters. They face racialized constraints that made it very difficult to reap the fruits of a successful IT expert. Rather, they are faced with glass gates (Guo 2013) which has denied them access to guarded professional communities. It is also a chilling reminder of ethnic penalties whereby the skills go unacknowledged and undervalued Cheung & Heath’s (2007).

There is, however, an exception. Merera is the lucky one among the research participants to find a job in a start-up company in Helsinki. He explains:

I worked in different places before: I worked as a cleaner first at cottages and later offices here in Helsinki and outside Helsinki. I worked for more than 3 years as a cleaner before I got a job at a start-up company as an IT expert there. I consider myself very lucky compared to my friends. But I have applied over a hundred jobs and have gone through some rough times to land this job. Most IT jobs don’t require language as long as you can do the programming, but there were few that required language proficiency. I didn’t do anything different applying for this job, which I had not done in my other application. It was the right time and place, I guess.
We can draw from the above excerpt that the chances of getting a job corresponding to one’s credentials are minimal. Nevertheless, the chances still exist. Merera’s foreign credentials were not considered irrelevant and inability to speak Finnish was not a barrier to him. In fact, he did not have a Master's degree, and had done one of his Bachelor's degrees in Ethiopia.

Nevertheless, like the remaining 9 participants in the study, in spite of completing their degrees in Finland, and in spite of not facing hurdles related to unrecognised foreign credentials, as seen to be the case in other research findings (Storen and Wiers-Jenssen 2010; Man 2004; Owen & Lowe 2008), they still could not find jobs that match their qualifications

6.2 Attitudes towards current jobs and mechanisms of job search

When met with drawbacks, migrants settle into jobs with low wage that require lesser skill, where they take up jobs for purely instrumental reason and a means of survival. According to Datta et al. (2007), such coercive forces are labelled as tactics of survival where migrants are expected to respond to the more laborious tasks for survival. Like any individual, the skilled migrant aspires to get a qualified position, to move up the socio-economic ladder; but s/he is confronted with the ‘reality at hand’; s/he needs to pay bills, and also faces the pressure of extending the residence permit; another reminder of the impact of immigration controls in shaping the skilled migrants’ career. Belay describes the survival tactics in the following way:

I was psychologically ready to take up any job even before I moved here. I knew getting a professional job wouldn’t be easy. I needed the job to survive, plus I also need a job to extend my visa. I have done a lot of jobs in Finland: I worked as a cleaner; I worked in a building construction; I had my own business as a barber at one time. I think I applied around 20 jobs within my profession, but I had no luck. I got a job interview once, but it didn’t go anywhere because they needed Finnish knowledge.
My participants are not happy about the less qualified jobs they are working at. They mentioned frustration and despair. Some of them do not mind the feeling and think it is a form of stimulation and a reminder not to stay where they are. However, one in particular, Senay, has become complacent and has given up searching for a professional job over 3 years ago. He said he has applied around 20 jobs as soon as he graduated and gave up. He currently works at the railway station changing train spare parts; he also sometimes exports cars to Ethiopia as a side business.

All of my participants found the low echelon jobs through informal means, mainly through social contacts. This concurs with the assumption that establishes a link between network size and possibility of finding a job; because more contacts do mean more information regarding job vacancies distributed through word of mouth and other non-informal mechanisms. (Ahmad 2005). Merera’s account exemplifies the assertion.

Q: Have you taken any special training in your job as a cleaner?
A: No, the supervisor is normally present for some minutes on the first day to oversee how I clean, but I have never taken any training.
Q: how about at the start-up company?
A: there are few periodic workshops and training whenever we launch a new program.

On the other hand, when it comes to the professional jobs, all the applications and consequent processes were made through formal means. Furthermore, my participants received no formal trainings for the jobs in the low skill category. The disparity in job hunt mechanism is worthy of analysis because it delineates the hierarchy of the types of the jobs and the varying value placed in each. Jobs in the lower sphere, like domestic work are not presumed to have added to the stock of human capital (Kofman 2013:580) and therefore, undervalued and presumed not to require special skills.

6.3 Research participants’ Interpretations of de-skilling practices

Significant setbacks that block migrants from labour integration also include migrant’s legal status, sexuality, culture, language, phenotype, accent and surname (Montoya
1994; Johnson 1999). Four of my participants say they speak Finnish fairly; the other three have basic communication skills, and the remaining three have no Finnish proficiency at all. However, many of the jobs they applied for does not require knowledge of Finnish. My participants saw language proficiency as an additional asset when it comes to the jobs they were applying for. Some of them told me that language appears as a convenient reason to decline a job application by employers if they are not interested in hiring them. In this case language functions as a glass door (Guo 2013) which function as a barrier to immigrants’ access to professional employment at high-wage firms. As Creese and Kambere (2003:571) remind us this is more than communication, but about ‘power and exclusion, marginalization and “Othering”, racism and discrimination’.

All of my research participants feel that employers view their application differently from how they view the applications of native Finns. Two of them think it is natural for employers to recruit “their own kind”. This might be explained in terms of internalized racism (Baker 1983); this is where subordinate groups normalise and justify the marginalisation they face and unconsciously believe their inferiority. The following anecdote from Senay supports Baker’s points:

Q: Would you say, employers regard applications from all candidates (migrants and natives) impartially?
A: Of course not; and I don’t expect them to. It is normal if someone prefers his own kind than a complete stranger.
Q: But if you both have similar credentials; don’t you think you deserve the same opportunity as he does?
A: (reluctantly) Maybe, but I don’t think it is racism; I think they just prefer someone with similar cultural background.

Senay has normalized the stereotype he encountered and does not consider it as a concern if an employer discriminates against him solely on the basis of origin; for him, racial inequality is constructed and internalized. Pyke and Dang (2003: 151) say that ‘regardless of whether [racial subordinates] construct identities that internalize or resist
the racial ideology of the larger society, they are forced to define themselves in relation to racial schemas and meanings”.

However, other respondents have a different opinion. Among those, Bonger says the following:

Q: Would you say, employers regard applications from all candidates (migrants and natives) impartially?
A: Of course not. I am sure I would get an interview if I changed my name and apply. Plus, when you see the rate other Finnish peers with less skills get jobs, it’s quite evident. They are not required to know everything; they get the skills on the jobs. Because you are not required to know all at junior level. They expect a lot from us, but Finns get the opportunity even if they are not experienced. Even if they don’t say we don’t hire because you are an African, there’s a deep feeling towards Africans that makes them uncomfortable towards us. They may even do it unintentionally.

Bonger believes the metrics of evaluation for the two groups is unfair and views that he is disadvantaged in the labour market because of his racial background. He has applied over 30 jobs ever since he received his Master’s degree in IT in Finland. For most of his stay in Finland, he, like others, had worked mainly as a cleaner and postal delivery man. Currently, he was unemployed and received financial support from the unemployment office. (He continued his PhD programme after data had been collected.)

Having experienced downward socio-economic mobility that came as a result of institutional constraints led him to end up unemployed. Analogy can be made between Bonger’s and others with similar stories in this study, and Guo’s findings of the racialized experience of Chinese immigrants in Canada where he makes a striking observation by pointing out that “the social construction of immigrant as social construct uses skin colour as the basis for social marking (Guo 2009: 40).”

Bonger and other respondents, most often than not receive automated emails that their applications were “unsuccessful for this time”. As Mojab (1999) notes instead of a smooth
entry into the knowledge-based market, “[skilled migrants] remained either unemployed or pressured into nonskilled jobs, which demanded “the use of their hands rather than their minds” (ibid: 123).

Aside from complacency mentioned above, my data exhibited two consequent shortcomings on the side of my research participants: insufficient language skills and lack of prior work experience. My participants told me that work experience is not a grave concern in IT programs, as long as one can demonstrate that he has exposure to program development even without the formal employment framework. Language skill is also not always needed, but sometimes significant. Merera said he had an almost too close chance of getting a job once however it failed to materialize because of his poor Finnish proficiency.

Q: What are the reasons given by employers for declining?
A: I was only called for interview 3 times out of the many applications I did; they just said it wasn’t successful. But on the other one, I could see that they liked me already; especially, one of the interviewers was really keen to give me a chance. But, my Finnish was poor, and the job needs some level of Finnish language because at times, we are expected to explain to customers about the programs we develop. So, they couldn’t actually do anything under the circumstances. (Merera)

Language barrier lies among one of the major setbacks that hinder skilled migrants to professional employment according to existing studies (Kärki 2005, Vehaskari 2010, cited in Maury 2017). These studies also found other limitations such as lack of right contacts or work experience, discrimination and a restrictive residence permit system. None of my participants have prior work experience in their particular field of studies, except for some internship programs.

My participants face constraints similar to the findings above. This has major implications regarding factors such as; institutional constraints that remained stagnant since the publication of Kärki’s study in 2005; employer and policy biases; and lack of social capital on the part of migrants themselves. Therefore, finding solutions entails addressing these challenges from different angles by different actors who in different ways contribute to the problems.
The only female respondent in this study provided a peculiar data during the interviews; after dozens of job searches, and being unable to secure one, she decided to move back to Ethiopia and get married. She describes:

> I think I applied between 20 and 30 jobs; most of them were close to my field of study, but many required Finnish proficiency, which I lacked. The only time I get a close call was when I had a written test for some job, but it didn’t go anywhere. After obtaining a bachelor’s from Ethiopia, an advanced master’s from Italy, and another master’s from Finland, I just could not continue working as a cleaner (which she was working for 3 years). I had to make a decision. My boyfriend is in Ethiopia and we talked about our future. I am not happy about my life here mainly because of my job. So, we decided that I go back home with him; we plan to marry in a year.

Q: Do you think you would stay here if you had a professional job?
A: Definitely.

The social construction of gender is worthy of consideration here. Unlike the male counterparts, women are constrained by ingrained societal expectations which define womanhood in terms of the domestic sphere. The argument is supported by a long list of literature by feminist writers such as Simone De Beauvoir’s timeless book *The Second Sex* and and Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* to many contemporary feminist scholars (Anderson 2000; Breen 2005; Warren 2003). On the other hand, when viewed from another angle, her experiences contradict the argument that considers cleaning as a woman’s occupation (Kofmann 2013). The decision she took is completely different from the other male respondent who stood in similar situation as she did.

Gender in this study, has not come out as has been conventionally understood which are discussed above. It did not manifest as “a code word for research on women that continue to haunt much contemporary scholarship (Näre & Akhtar 2014). The findings show the skilled migrant’s search for professional jobs are particularly guarded and constrained by racializing stereotypes by powerful forces that shape the labour market.
7. Immigration policies and their contribution to deskilling of skilled migrants

The second part of my findings is discussed in this chapter. Below, I discuss how Finnish immigration policies of the office of Maahanmuuttoriäko affect the labour choices of my research participants. In doing so, I use Anderson’s discussion on immigration controls (2010) and Sheller & Urry’s (2005) to discuss the ways borders produce overlapping subjectivities, and the ways they shape downward social mobility.

Before proceeding to discuss how border controls shape skilled migrants’ labour choices, I find it appropriate to begin by providing a broader scope to the discussion of borders and justify my tool of analysis. Border regimes have been particularly significant to sociologists and anthropologists. Border scholars have approached borders as politically defined entities (places); as both dynamic processes and places; as classificatory systems; and of course, as a political territory (Green 2012: 2016). Green (2016) for instance has sought to understand the multi-faceted feature of borders: both as fixed objects and processes; as classificatory systems; as qualities; as relative locations; and as a political territory.

As political territories, borders signify hierarchies between “here” and “there” and create artificial and often enforced zones amongst territories. The effects of hierarchies produce competition; subjects tend to associate and define and sometimes associate themselves in relation to the other (Todorova 1995; Bakic-Hayden 1995). For instance, studies of Balkans show how ambiguous locations of Balkans lead to ambiguity of who constitutes Balkans, as the subjects themselves prefer to identify themselves not as Balkans, but as what Bakic-Hayden (1995) calls Europe “ Proper”. Similarly, Todorova (1995) points out that hesitation of the Balkans to be identified as East, and if so labelled only as “ a stain, not a sign in any fruitful way. According to her they would in fact try to compete to be more European than the rest, creating hierarchies of less and more “orientalised” members (ibid: 58).
Defining one’s categorical entity in relation to ‘the norm’ also continues once international borders are crossed. Migration by default comes after borders are crossed; and once international borders are crossed, their existence takes a different form. Nevertheless, the hierarchies continue. Empirical studies show that this may be established through institutional means (Lauren and Wrede 2008) or among migrants themselves by creating hierarchies and racializing others (Krivonos 2015).

By means of bureaucratic policies and procedures set by states and institutions, borders continue to inform migrant lives. The process may take different forms depending on the migrant status as either “legal” or “illegal”. As Anderson (2012:310) strikingly puts it, “[B]orders are commonly perceived as keeping ‘illegal immigrants’ out, but a migrant is not ‘illegal’ until they have crossed the border or have attempted to do so, and very often not until well after that”. Others have also raised similar arguments (Black 2003). Leaving aside the ambiguities of defining legal and illegal migrants, migrants recognized as legal by sub-state borders, encounter challenges that significantly shape their subsequent paths and career opportunities.

Immigration policies shape labour choices of skilled migrants in ways that transcend the regular employer/employee relation. Their search for jobs, unlike native residents and those with permanent residence status, is not just about economic ends, it is also about legality and a quest to remain in Finland. From this angle, even though, they may not necessarily need a job for monetary values, they have to join the labour force in order to legally live in Finland.

Hassen describes Finnish immigration controls as “unforeseen yet impactful”.

I lived off almost around 6 months by working as a dishwasher. I didn’t have a contract with the organization; the company just calls people whenever dishwashers are needed in different cafes and restaurants in Helsinki, Vantaa, and Espoo areas. It was very convenient for me because I can say no anytime I have classes or anytime I am busy, because I had no contractual obligations. Because they usually have high labour demands, I made enough money that sustains me each month. So, I didn’t actually need to have a contractual job.
But when I needed to extend my permit, I had to have that because I did not have the €6720 in my account. Not only was finding a job difficult, but because I had to make a decision that I didn’t plan ahead, it also affected my studies in my first year.

As international non-EU students, the status of residence for Ethiopian students like Hassen is subject to periodic renewal. As indicated in chapter one, students are granted resident permit that lasts for a year (type A). They are then required to renew the permit every year until they finish their studies. In order to extend a residence permit, among other things, Finnish immigration service requires that applicants must have a sum of €6700 in their bank accounts or a job contract that pays around a monthly average €550; this is where the jobs come in. Reliance on employment in order to secure legal residence is similar to what Barbier Bryggo and Viguier (2002) call “precarite”. Just like immigration controls function as “a tap regulating the flow of labour” (Anderson 2010), Finnish immigration policies create conditions in which skilled immigrants join labour forces well below their educational qualifications in order to maintain legality of stay, and resume studies in Finland.

Students most often than not find themselves in limbo: on the one hand, they have classes to attend and studies to do; on the other, they have to worry about institutional and bureaucratic structures that may affect their status and conditions to remain residing in Finland. These layers of concerns define and influence how the students see themselves; how they are viewed by their employers; and also, how authorities approach them, creating multiple subjectivities that often overlap. This is discussed in the next section.

7.1. Overlapping subjectivities through mobilities

In their book, *Border as a Method, or the Multiplication of labour*, Mezzadra and Neilson (2013:90) introduce what they called the *multiplication of labour*, which seeks to explain the intensification and fragmentation of international division of labour. For them two things stand out; on the one hand, there is the seemingly growing intensity of work in neoliberal contexts characterised by transnationalism and precarity; and information
technology; and on the other hand, emphasis is also given to the declining influence of international borders which impact mobility globally. (see also Neilson 2009: 430-435)

The second hypothesis in particular tend to take a rather utopian assumption of borders and downplays their significance to inform movements; nevertheless, it is quite evident that production of labour has gradually changed and is impacted by borders. The new labour market has created subjects with multiple roles with overlapping subjectivities and precarious conditions. Not only is this simply confined to theoretical assumptions, it is also supported by empirical studies (Neilson 2009; Krivonos 2015; Maury 2017).

I indicated in the first chapter the ambiguities associated with defining my research participants. They carry multiple identifications: they are international students; they are skilled migrants; they are also overqualified migrants shaped by precarious labour markets. I noticed how some of them use the labels interchangeably while conducting of my interviews. I also saw that others have encountered these multiple subjectivities in their research (Neilson 2009); and realised this wasn’t a problem itself, but a theme for analysis. Obang below mirrors this multiple subjectivity:

Obang: Well no one takes notice of my academic qualifications. But I am doing another master’s now. I try to attend class and be a good student; but with my job, as you can imagine, it can be difficult.

Q: But do you see yourself as a student or a cleaner?

Obang: Hmmm I think both. It depends whom I am taking to. For my family back home, I am always a student; of course, I am always a cleaner to my bosses. And to Finnish authorities, both are relevant.

Of course, it’s very unlikely that individuals would only prescribe to a single identification. A person can be a student, an employee, a mother, a wife and more, all at once. What makes the topic at hand particularly relevant for analysis is because it signifies how mobilities are informed by overarching institutional factors and border regimes which in
turn have significant and consequential impacts to skilled migrants. The shifting identifications create insecure subjects whose fate largely rely on immigration offices and their set of bureaucratic procedures; this is mainly caused by their migrancy (Näre 2013).

Mobilities as a social discipline has largely been ignored and social science has for long remained “sedentarist” (Sheller and Urry 2006). Sheller & Urry (2006: 209) proposed a broader theoretical project which “aimed at going beyond the imagery of ‘terrains’ as spatially fixed geographical containers for social processes and calling into question scalar logics such as local/global as descriptors of regional extent”, which they coined as **mobility paradigm**. Nevertheless, this has been changing and increasingly, scholars are unravelling layers of contingencies associated with mobilities, borders, transnationalism and so forth. The experiences of Obang are particularly relevant when viewed from this angle.

Not all of my participants seem to vacillate between these subjectivities. One in particular fully endorses his position as a student and prefers to be identified as such.

I am student, and this (his job) is just temporary. I know I will get a qualified job sooner or later. But of course, we all have to start somewhere (Hassen, IT Msc graduate).

Piore (1979) notes that during earlier stages of migrants’ immigration career, migrants tend to view their jobs instrumentally; this may be due to lower subjective expectations, less language and more limited understanding of the labour market. This however changes as people ‘develop a more permanent attachment, they no longer feel indifferent (Piore 1979: 64). While it is outside the scope of this study to investigate how migrants develop permanent attachment or how long the process takes, my data speaks volumes about restricted opportunities to socio-economic integration.

### 7.2. Social mobility predicated by geographic mobility

The [mobilities] paradigm attempts to account for not only the quickening of liquidity within some realms but also the concomitant patterns of concentration that create zones
of connectivity, centrality, and empowerment in some cases, and of disconnection, social exclusion, and inaudibility in other cases (Sheller & Urry 2005: 210).

As noted above, mobility is non-linear process affected by ensuing factors such as integration, employment and legality. As much as it leads to social integration, it also creates marginalisation and exclusion. Just as it brings upward social mobility and empowerment, it is also followed by downward mobility and disempowerment. The outcomes are contingent upon a number of issues such as the migrant’s legal status, social and human capital, and other institutional frameworks that may facilitate or hinder integration.

When a student enters Finland from a non-EU member state, s/he is also entering an EU territory; meaning s/he can move freely in any of the Schengen states without having to request another visa than the one s/he already obtained. The literature discusses the grey areas of EU border making process (Abeles 2000; Holmes 2000), and the roles EU policies and its multi-billion-dollar industry play in keeping migrants out which by themselves create illegality (Anderson 2014). Against this background, a student (mainly from the continent of Africa and other developing countries) entering Finland (an EU territory) is facing precluding conditions that views the legal migrant as a potential illegal. This has been stated by a Finnish national police board (2015,17) which identified students from certain African and South Asian countries as being a risk to “immigration on wrong basis” (cited on Maury 2017:226).

Therefore, before arriving in Finland, international students go through a vetting process where they are required to submit all documents including statement of financial security. Belay shares his experience and difficulty meeting standards of international border regimes below:

I was declined a permit initially and applied again on the following year which thankfully I was able to get. The good thing was that the university transferred my admission to the following year after I informed them I had visa problems. It failed the first time, because I could not
present documents that verified where the money in my bank account originated from. At the second try, I was well-prepared and submitted everything that was expected from me.

Many of my research participants were initially admitted to universities outside Helsinki; and moved to Helsinki mainly in search of jobs. The triangular mobility from Ethiopia to Finland (out of Helsinki) and then to Helsinki, in addition to the apparent geographical movement, is more importantly indicative of degrading and deskilling of professional expertise that produced downward social mobility.

There are layers of themes involved while assessing downward social mobilities of migrants. The migrants are seen as opting for an easier alternative to stay in Finland by working in sectors they are often overqualified for. Through such requirements, the Finnish immigration service is basically regulating and shaping “migrant jobs”. This goes in line with what Anderson (2010) calls precarious workers. My point is not to assert or imply that the immigration service conducts a vetting process as a policy to create precarious work conditions, but to point out that its policy leads to precarious work conditions.

To use Goldring and Landolt’s (2011) argument, this can be summarized as “an attempt at controlling and regulating workers’ mobility and permanence which enhanced national policies and global management techniques. They rightly argue that “this has revamped the normative framework into organizing citizenship and migrant legal status as a source of state control and of employer strategies of exploitation and labour market segmentation” (ibid: 326).

The bureaucratic structures create unfavourable conditions leading migrants to resort to prioritising convenience over utilising potential and skill. Selam’s account exemplifies this:

People may not realise it, but resident permit extension process is some work on its own. I am expected to go through bureaucracy hurdles that my European classmates aren’t. Extending a permit usually takes 3 months after you officially submit your application to authorities. Because many students extend their permits during summer, there is always a long waiting
line even to get an appointment time. So the whole process takes me at least 5 months; on top of that, there is class. So how can I focus on my future career? So, the best and easiest option to remain in the country was to work as cleaner, at least for some time. (Selam, IT and communication Msc graduate).

Majority of my search participants (8 out of 10) had their visa status changed from student permit to work permit before they had received their diplomas. This is not peculiar to this study; similar status alterations were observed in another study in Finland (Maury 2017). My participants’ decision to switch permits is very crucial for our analysis for two reasons. First, it is a vivid projection how the statuses formally change from “a student” to “a worker/employee”. Second, and more importantly, it is a testament to how immigration controls takeover migrants’ paths. To put it in more colloquial terms, their plans were trapped in the maze of less recognized, but nevertheless influential entanglements. Gelan’s account best describes the two points above:

I had mixed feelings when I changed my student permit to a work permit. On the one hand I was relieved because it made it easier to remain in Finland without having to worry about bureaucracies. On the other hand, I had struggled with myself to come to terms with the fact that after over two decades of schooling, I ended up being a newspaper distributor. If someone had told me before that this was where I would end up, I wouldn’t have believed them.

Finland formulates policies with the expectation that recruiting international students attracts highly skilled workers to the European labour markets, create new networks and enhance business opportunities to Finland (Cai and Kivisto 2013:61). However, in reality, as Mezzadra and Neilson (2013: 132) argue “[skilled migration schemes] produce discrepant temporalities of waiting, withdrawal, and delay by compelling subjects to negotiate their way among different administrative and labour market statuses”. Many end up joining the less attractive jobs in the lower socio-economic sphere.

The contradiction is further explained by Sassen (2003) where she takes empirical studies as a point of departure to argue against the assumptions that industrial economy requires highly educated workers. She explains that empirically, there exists “an ongoing demand
for immigrant workers and a significant supply of old and new low-wage jobs that require little education" (Sassen 2003: 260).

The findings in this study have demonstrated that skill is indeed socially constructed, and labour integration is further complicated by bureaucracies of residence permits and the quest to live in Finland at the cost of socio-economic downward mobility.
8. Conclusions

The aim of this master’s thesis was to analyse the challenges of labour integration from the context of Ethiopian skilled migrants and to assess the influence of Finnish immigration policies in informing labour choices of the migrants. I explored these themes using Critical Race Theory, Anderson’s (2010) immigration controls, and mobilities paradigm (Urry and Sheller 2006). Difficulty of upward socio-economic mobility and labour integration is explained in terms of discrimination on the basis of the migrants’ racial background. The limitations are further complicated by the migrants’ temporary residence status which contributes to their deskilling.

The concept of skill has drawn grey areas in social science literature, and more pertaining to this study, in migration studies. The assumption that treats skill lightly in isolation from factors that shape its meaning, such as the subject’s cultural and social background fails to see the power structures that inform skill. On the other hand, problematized assumptions consider skill subjectively as being affected by an intersection of gender and racial and other socio-economic factors.

Critical Race Theory, one of the main conceptual frames in this study, has been used to explain how minority groups have been institutionally and socially disadvantaged. The theory had its roots in the US civil rights movement of black resistance movements against white supremacy and has gradually developed to analyse discrimination of other minority groups (Aleman and Aleman 2010; Guo 2015; Trevino, Harris, Wallace 2008; Yosso 2006). Yosso (2006) for example has credibly noted the non-mutually exclusive intersections of oppression where the layers come into play in the form of socio-economic, political and gender-based discrimination and warns against measuring one form of oppression over the other.

As I demonstrated in this thesis, deskilling emerges through the use of power and exploitation, a point also supported Sawshuk (2008). Multiple studies corroborate to this
and have indicated that migrants are not equally beneficial in the labour market. However not all migrant groups seem to be affected. Foreign credentials, for example, are seen to penalize visible minority migrants including blacks and other migrant groups from the global south and benefit migrants from Western Europe and USA (Li 2008).

The social construction of skill is also interpreted using a feminist lens; and conceptualised as being subject to biases towards the male gender, who exert control over its definition. (Bryant and Jaworski 2011; Fenwick 2008; Steinberg 1990; Kofman 2013). Kofman (2013) also argues that the IT sector, unlike other fields, is advantaged by globalized labour mobility, and IT experts seamlessly transfer their skill across the globe. However, my research finding portrays a different picture. My data demonstrated that contrary to the above assumption, in the case of Ethiopian skilled migrants, their IT skills have not yielded benefits to them. This is particularly concerning because the participants have all completed their higher education in Finland, and it cannot be explained in terms of unrecognized foreign credentials. I have, thus, indicated that the assumption needs to take into account racial discrimination, and reconsider the role that IT expert’s racial background plays in influencing the labour market.

Language is another factor that affects labour integration. My findings showed that in rare cases, lack of proficiency was found to be a reason to deny high demand, attractive jobs. Similarly, Guo (2013) uses the *triple glass effect* to illustrate how deskilling is maintained through the multiple layers of barriers facing migrant professionals. He argues that language is one of the components used by employers as *glass-door* as a technique to deny migrants’ access to high demand professional jobs.

The thesis also demonstrated that the research participants were not happy with their current jobs; some view their discomfort positively as they consider it a stimulating factor, not to give up the search for professional jobs. All of my participants found the jobs in the lower echelons of the labour market through their own social contacts using informal means. On the other hand, the high demand jobs. Number of contacts means more information regarding job vacancies distributed through word of mouth and other non-informal mechanisms (Ahmad 2005).
Another important theme that has evolved in this master’s thesis is the ways in which residence permits shape labour choices of skilled migrants and contribute to their downward socio-economic mobility. Finnish immigration policies have multiple implications in informing labour choices of Ethiopian skilled migrants and in general negatively influence labour integration.

I have shown how geographic mobility led to downward social mobility. I also discussed and how mobilities in general produce multiple subjectivities and create statuses of students, employees or both, which has implication to legal residence and consequently to deskillling. In addition, immigration policies, also negatively influence labour integration by way of “state control and of employer strategies of exploitation and labour market segmentation” (Goldring and Landolt’s 2011: 326). Labour, in addition to being a source of income is seen as a matter of securing legal status. In this case, skilled migrants are forced into joining unattractive jobs characterised by *precarite* (Anderson: 2010).

Therefore, Finnish Immigration Services (*Maahanmuuttovirasto*) may need to rethink its resident permit policies in light of findings of this thesis and similar studies; and introduce policies that help integrate skilled migrants into the labour market, which was in fact was stated as one of the guiding principles of its provisions (Migri 2015:6).
9. References


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10. Appendix

Guidelines for qualitative interviews

Background Questions

1. Name
2. Year of birth
3. Gender
4. Educational background
5. Current job/position

Research questions
6. Do you have a work permit, or are you still on student visa?
7. Did you get your work visa during or after you finish your studies? And can you tell me about the process it took?
8. Can you tell me a little about the jobs you had in Finland?
9. Can you tell me a little about your current job(s); including the type and condition of the job?
10. What kind of special skills are needed in the job?
11. Have you taken trainings either before you start your job, or during?
12. How did you find the job, through formal and informal means?
13. Did you ever have to work just because you needed a job contract for extending your permit?
14. Have the degrees obtained in Ethiopia, been recognized from the Finnish National Bureau of Education?
15. Could you tell me a little bit about the job vacancies you applied to, that are related to your educational qualification?
16. Can you say a little about the process including interviews, or if you know the reason for not getting the position, and anything you can tell me about the application process?
17. In your opinion, what are the major challenges to find jobs fitting your educational qualifications?
18. Do you still regularly apply for professional jobs?
19. Would you say, employers regard applications from all candidates (immigrants and natives) impartially?

20. Are you hopeful that you find a qualified job in the future?