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Mentoring across difference: from integration to relations of solidarity among migrants and majority Finns

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Abstract:

In a changing migration landscape with ever-growing ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity, the need for encounters and engagement across lines of difference is becoming increasingly evident. In Finland, a country characterised by a strong civil society, many migrant-majority encounters take place facilitated by the third sector. Notably, third sector programmes like migrant mentoring are often formed in the shadow of the integration paradigm, which creates hierarchies among migrants and citizens and places the onus to adapt firmly on migrants. Present in third sector is also the ideology of humanitarianism, where wishes to support migrants are expressed as one-directional charity, producing distinctly paternalistic relations.

As such, the point of departure for this thesis is treating "integration" and "humanitarianism" not as theoretical categories of analysis, but as a problematic categories of practice. The aim is analyse the alternative intersubjective modes of relating that appear in the cracks of integration practice. Here, I employ the notion of solidarity as formulated by Jodi Dean, describing relations committed to reciprocity and an active engagement with difference. In a nutshell, this study investigates the everyday self–other relationships between migrant women and their majority Finnish counterparts, as facilitated by a third sector one-to-one migrant mentoring programme. My methodology is qualitative, and the data consists of semi-structured individual interviews with ten women (five mentors and five mentees) living in the Finnish capital region, and who at the time of data collection had completed their official mentoring. The material was studied using qualitative content analysis.

The analysis shows that the lived relations between mentors and mentees, or migrants and majority citizens, blend modes of relating: integration, humanitarianism, charity, friendship, reciprocity, and solidarity all appear in the relationships studied. While mentoring certainly produces relevant employment outcomes, I argue that participants also contest the idea of integration as a hierarchical, productivity-enhancing practice, as they engage in mutual cultural exchange, open their home spaces and become genuine friends. Moreover, while humanitarianism defines many desires to join mentoring, I contend that the mentoring encounter itself can become solidaristic. This is seen through reciprocity, engagement with difference, a mobilisation of political values, and the beginnings of constructively dealing with feelings of discomfort over visibilised structural inequality. Overall, the findings underline what contemporary research on migration and inter-ethnic relations have discussed as hybrid solidarities: that is, relations which work from within a humanitarian form to, albeit implicitly, oppose the status quo of migration management.

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1 Introduction

> "The enemy of solidarity is not difference but the lack of engagement with difference – an engagement that is based on mutual recognition and connection"
>
> (Boudreau Morris, 2017: 466)

Diversity in Finland today is a fact – or rather, it has always been one. In addition to the historical presence of the indigenous Sámi and other linguistic and ethnic minorities, accelerated migration to the country has led some to describe the population as one of "superdiversity" (Martikainen and Pöyhönen, 2023). Still, a just model for inviting and engaging with this presence of difference is far from enshrined in Finnish migration policy, and is neither sufficiently engrained in everyday encounters among citizens and migrants, nor, as organised programmes of interaction, granted stable state funding (Saukkonen, 2023). Instead, a few related problems persist. While the sensationalised "failed multiculturalism" (Lentin and Titley, 2011) recedes as the catchphrase of the day, the idea of "integration" is increasingly used as a proxy for voicing anxieties about racialised and Muslim migrants in the Nordics (Rytter, 2019), and functions as a mechanism for creating hierarchies among migrants and citizens, with the expectation that only migrants need to adapt (Pötzsch, 2020; Schinkel, 2018). And, in both public discourse and in academic theory, the very idea of difference has been overly problematised and seen as a force which jeopardises the social, rather than a historically present, constitutive part of the social (Schinkel, 2018: 8).

To live together as mutually engaged residents accountable to each other's plights, a certain degree of understanding and commonality is required. Yet, a narrow framing of commonality based on shared citizenship, ethnicity, or cultural heritage is not enough, and fails in "captur[ing] the complex and multiple entanglements and engagements of people" (Oosterlynck et al., 2016: 765). As such, in this thesis I turn to the intergroup relations of migrants and majority citizens, and look for evidence of how, in our mundane engagements, could we stand in solidarity with each other when the social positions we occupy could equally drive us further apart? Concretely, I investigate the everyday self–other relationships between migrant women and their majority Finnish counterparts, as facilitated by a third sector one-to-

one migrant mentoring programme. The research is concerned with how mentors and mentees in the programme (here pseudonymised as PAUS) engage with difference, and I look at the different political intersubjectivities that are reinforced, dismantled or born through long-term interaction with those presented to us as "different". The differences that frame these engagements, are analysed as two things: difference as socially constructed inequalities and hierarchies such as among citizens and migrants, and difference as a neutral or positive feature of the way humanity looks, speaks, and practices culture. Interweaving both types of difference, there results complex relations from the intersecting and unstable social positions – which is why I here emphasise differences in the plural, taking an *inter*- and *intra*-sectional view (Yuval-Davis, 2011: 158) to analyse migrant-majority relations.

One possible way of conceiving migrant-majority relations has been through the prism of "integration", referring to discourse and activity designed to manage the difference that arises from immigration (Lentin & Titley, 2011; Masoud, 2023). In this thesis, I do not treat "integration" as a theoretical concept, but rather as a problematic "category of practice" (Rytter, 2019: 691), and I depart from the understanding that the reigning ideology of unidirectional integration is not doing the job of facilitating reciprocal relations (Schinkel, 2018) – although, the ideas of "two-way-" or "relational integration" (Klarenbeek, 2024) do go further and have already shaped my experience of practicing in the field. Another questionable model for migrant-majority relations I examine is humanitarian charity, which appears especially in migrant aid programmes not unlike migrant mentoring, which aim to support but also reinforce power differentials and de-politicisation (Doering-White et al., 2024; Hernández-Carretero, 2023). Consequently, what characterises both integration and humanitarianism is an assumed apoliticality, hierarchical relations, and the privileging of citizens as the normative standard.

As such, a different model is needed both for praxis and for theoretically understanding alternative ways of engaging with difference as well as across power and privilege. For this, I turn to solidarity. Rather than imposing this concept onto varying practices of mentor pairs, I have taken a rather abductive journey, meaning the iterative moving between theory and empirical data (Timmermans and Tavory, 2014), to arrive at why this concept should explain what goes on between mentors and mentees. From years of experience in the integration field and as a student of sociology, to choosing preliminary research questions, to conducting

qualitative interviews and subsequent analysis in tandem with theory, I have above all come to see reciprocity, mutuality, and equality as the most crucial features of intergroup relations. For this reason, I follow Jodi Dean's formulation of "reflective solidarity" in her book *Solidarity of Strangers* (1996) to view difference, aided by active engagement and reciprocity, as constitutive of solidarity. Moreover, solidarity as a concept is a necessary complement to that of "friendship" or "good population relations" (Valtioneuvosto, 2021), as this brings in the inherently political work of considering power relations in daily life. Thus, I argue solidarity is relevant beyond the classical application to collective, contentious politics (Featherstone, 2012) also in mundane encounters (Oosterlynck et al., 2016; 2017) and in semi-institutional contexts (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019) like in the hybridising third sector. This is especially because third sector relational practices, such as the present case, can "prefigure inclusive alternatives", "often without claiming political change publicly" (della Porta & Steinhilper, 2021a: 181).

My contribution to research hence lies in the bringing together of solidarity theory with integration(-critical) research, third sector literature, and migrant mentoring literature. Where not much global research has done so, and even less in Finland, I explore the middle ground of messy, lived experiences where integration and charity get entwined with solidaristic, reciprocal relations. The research questions I pose are the following:

1. How does mentoring as a goal-oriented integration practice translate into the lived experiences of participants?
2. How is hierarchy negotiated and reciprocity enacted within the mentoring relationship?
3. To what extent do the relations born out of mentoring provide alternative, solidaristic ways of relating across difference(s)?

To answer these questions, I analyse qualitative interview data collected from ten participants in the programme: five mentors and five mentees. The sample was selected in connection to another Nordic comparative qualitative research project about migrant mentoring, which I was employed to conduct locally. Based on that project's guidelines, my sample includes women participants from "non-Western countries" (for a critical discussion, see Section 3.3) who had an employment focus on mentoring. They all live in Helsinki or the surrounding capital region and had completed their mentoring period at the time of the interviews. For this thesis, my intention and effort has been to re-use the data in a deeper, qualitative analysis that stands

firmly in dialogue with theory. Additionally, I attend primarily to the social relations between mentor and mentee, going beyond analysing integration work as merely an employability-enhancing practice and rejecting that as the end-all measure for migrant settlement (Asikainen, 2023).

I begin Chapter 2 by introducing (in 2.1.) how hierarchies of difference are expressed in the Finnish migration context and in integration practice, and I outline how the third sector's historically close position to the state impacts contemporary integration practice. In the following literature review of research on migrant-majority relations (2.2.), I move from critiques of integration discourse and practice to consider how a changing context creates possibilities for hybrid and contentious operations within the third sector. I then discuss three contexts that migrant-majority relations have been studied through, relevant for the present study: solidarity activism, everyday encounters, and migrant mentoring itself. Subsequently I present my theoretical framework (2.3.), which draws on theorisation of solidarity across difference(s) by Jodi Dean (1996), complemented by more contemporary theorisations of migration and inter-ethnic relations.

In Chapter 3, I highlight the methodological choices made during this process, explaining the background and data of my case study as well as how I addressed the ethical and positional concerns raised by having had a professional entanglement with my interviewees. In Chapter 4, I present my results and analysis following the structure of my research questions. First, in Section 4.2, I address the de facto "integration" outcomes of mentoring like access to networks, jobs, language improvement etc., but also how participants themselves actively make sense of integration in the context of their own lives (Asikainen, 2023), and how they claim independent agency amongst rhetorics of charity and integration. Second, in 4.2 I turn to the common starting point for mentoring of humanitarianism and hierarchical power dynamics, but crucially also to how this is upended in the active process of mentoring in favour of reciprocal experiences and friendship. Third, applying more theory of reflective solidarity (Dean, 1996), I argue in Section 4.3 that the everyday engagements with difference and discomfort, when combined with reciprocity, suggests migrant mentoring also may create other intersubjective relations than those of hierarchical integration.

2 Intergroup relations in practice, literature and theory

2.1 Background

Hierarchies of difference in the Finnish migration context

In order to discuss modes of relating across difference(s), I first turn to the Finnish context of migration – a context which serves as the playing field for the cross-cultural, cross-ethnic interaction relevant to the present study. Although Finland has never been purely ethnically or linguistically homogenous – considering the historical presence of Finn-Swedes, Roma, Tatars, and the Indigenous Sámi (Keskinen, 2019) – the country's population is today increasingly diversifying. From being a country of emigration up to the 1970's and 80's, receiving refugees mainly from "conflict areas" like Chile and Vietnam, Finland in the 1990s began receiving markedly more immigrants, initially in the form of return migrants and refugees from e.g. Somalia and Yugoslavia. Later, Finland has become a country for work-based migration, and relatively large numbers of people from e.g. Iraq and Ukraine have recently sought asylum and temporary protection in Finland. Statistically, the year 2023 saw the biggest population growth in nearly 70 years due to migration: at the end of the year, a total of 480 303 people born abroad without Finnish background lived in the country (Statistics Finland, 2024a). The share of migrants in the population have thus increased from 0,5 percent in 1990 to 8,6 percent in 2023. In terms of language, the past years have seen record numbers of foreign-language speakers move to Finland: by 2023 one in ten Finns had a foreign language as their mother tongue (Statistics Finland 2024b).

With this population change in the course of a single generation there have come, and continue to come, changes and challenges to how people in Finland think, work, believe, eat, vote, and, interact with each other. Applying Steven Vertovec's term, Martikainen and Pöyhönen (2023: 34) have described the Finnish context as one of "super diversity", that is, as a situation with an accelerating "diversification of diversity" where multiple intersecting similarities and differences among people combine to produce new effects on social, political and economic relations. Thus, although the idea that diversity in Finland is *new* has been opposed (Keskinen et al., 2019; Näre, 2013), the *further* diversification of the Finnish population raises questions that can be seen either as complications, or as welcome opportunities for self-examination. And,

while Finnish political intersubjectivities have historically been formed by a relative lack of exposure to difference in its global sense, it is the absence of engagement with a racially charged past and present in the public conversation which risks doing more harm to current inter-ethnic relations (Keskinen et al., 2019).

There is now a plethora of writings in Finnish migration studies that point out the challenges around this recent acceleration of difference. A large part concerns the prevailing hierarchies among majority citizens and migrants. As majority Finnish citizens continue to represent the zero-point against which all others are measured, internal migrant hierarchies select and favour highly-educated and -skilled, preferably "Western" migrants (Koskela, 2013). Moreover, xenophobia and racism are not subsiding but seen through name-based discrimination on the labour market (Ahmad, 2020) and in experiences of everyday racism, of which Finland has one of the highest rates in the EU – according to a representative study surveying immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa and their children, 54% reported experiencing racism in the past 12 months, compared to the (still-high) EU average of 34% (EU, 2023). Much research also points to the systemic nature of how racism is embedded in institutions (e.g. Keskinen et al., 2021), and discriminatory hierarchies are seen in the differential legal categories created for those fleeing wars in Ukraine and Iraq (Näre and Tkach, 2023). From the point of view of migrants, this context complicates establishing a life in Finland, where structural barriers already hinder finding non-precarious employment, networks, and avenues of local social or civic participation (Kunwar, 2020; Masoud, 2023; TEM, 2023). At the intersection of these aspects of settling in, compound challenges are also produced, as for example women migrants who have arrived as refugees face "a triple disadvantage" (Leibig and Tronstad, 2018).

Adding to the factual burden of finding one's footing in Finland, citizens place the expectations to adapt firmly on migrants. Research shows how citizens consider migrants' own actions the most relevant obstacles to integration (OECD, 2023). In an EU-context Finland ranks particularly high in this pattern of belief, despite that Finns consider the current state of integration slightly more successful than citizens in other EU countries (ibid: 148). As a whole, the political climate is increasingly tense, with vicious xenophobia and deeply migrant-hostile attitudes both in public discourse and government, where steps are taken to further enshrine the hostile environment in policy and law (e.g. YLE, 2024). All of this provides a backdrop

against which protecting migrant rights and livelihoods remains important. Equally important is doing so without falling into models of migrant aid that reify inter-group hierarchies, ignore or over-emphasise historical difference, deny migrants' agency, or that fail to recognise the responsibility of citizens. Instead, we must develop models that ensure a reciprocal, mutually safe and joyful existence. While this dilemma will entertain the rest of this thesis, I first turn to looking at how integration practice in the third sector frames cross-cultural encounters.

The Finnish third sector & conventional integration practice

In Finland, as in the general Nordic welfare state-model, the relationship between state and civil society has historically been one of consensus and strong interdependence. Associations have enjoyed relative autonomy from the state, and not had an important role in service provision, although being called upon as service providers slightly more than in the other Nordics (Saukkonen, 2013: 11). Following the social democratic model (Salamon and Anheier, 1998: 229), they have also had a representative role in decision-making, conveying citizen's social and political wishes through organised advocacy, contributing greatly to shaping Finnish political culture, which by international comparison has followed a strong logic of consensus (Luhtakallio, 2012). Following Étienne Balibar (2001: 213), the Finnish political context could thus be construed of as a culture of mediation, rather than a culture of struggle.

Beginning in the 1990s recession, traditionally state-provided services have increasingly fallen on the third sector to provide (Pirkkalainen et al., 2018; Saukkonen, 2013), and collaboration with the public and private sectors is also emphasised from within the third sector as a way of surviving austerity. Today, 44% of Finns say they have volunteered in the past 12 months (Turja, 2024), but associations still struggle with decreasing rates of volunteer recruitment, on which they have relied heavily, and third sector activities are ever-more individualistic and de-politicised. As a result of these changes, concerns have been raised for the autonomy of the third sector, especially concerning work with migrants (Pirkkalainen et al., 2018).

Although migrants in Finland engage with associations in various ways (cf. OECD, 2023; Sipinen, 2024), the relationship between the third sector and newcomers largely plays out in the field of integration activities. In the field, "integration" (in Swedish also *integration*, in Finnish *kotoutuminen* or *kotouttaminen*) is the most prevalent term used to describe how

migrants become "accepted" into the host society, above all by participating in the labour market (Masoud, 2023). Additionally, migrants must "integrate" in relation to the welfare system and civil society, while, depending on who one asks[1], either retaining their culture and language of origin, or coming to adopt canonical local habits and values (Pötszch, 2020). From the first Integration Act in 1999 and its amendment in 2011 to current preparations for the 2025 reform of the act, the third sector has always been called upon to complement the personalised integration plans drawn up by municipalities or TE (employment) offices, as well as in the integration of those who are already employed (Masoud, 2023; Valtioneuvosto, 2021). Despite funding instability, today integration projects in the third sector have proliferated, encompassing guidance counselling, job workshops and language learning, peer support groups, and the facilitation of cross-cultural meetings (Bontenbal & Lillie, 2022: 865).

In research, the third sector has been lauded for its ability to create real-world social and professional networks in a context where informal channels for getting jobs are extremely important for both citizens and migrants in the Nordics (Karlsdóttir et al., 2017: 33). To illustrate this, a SITRA study claims that 71% of Finns found their job outside of open job listings (Jämsén, 2016). As such, third sector associations supporting migrants often place emphasis on employment-promoting activities to alleviate a real need among migrants who lack such contacts and other local-specific resources. The emphasis on employment and productivity, however, is also driven and exacerbated by the fact that associations today rely on funding from the state and municipalities, meaning that integration activities are affected by ideological tendencies in the public sector (Asikainen, 2023; Masoud et al., 2021).

Beyond the historical connection between the civil society and the state, many Finnish scholars have described the two as "completely merged", making it hard to separate public and private spheres, or the official and the voluntary (Luhtakallio, 2012: 15). The worry about the third sector's autonomy is thus especially poignant in the realm of hybridising integration work: "if migrant associations become only contractors of public sector integration measures, the

[1] In academic theory, "integration" and other concepts describing migrant acculturation have been theorised and debated (see e.g. Berry, 1990, Heckmann, 2005). These conversations have also trickled over into practice, where the question of *who* is required to do *what* in contexts of diversity remains important.

advocacy role may be diminished and associations may only become an extended 'hand' of official integration policies" (Pirkkalainen et al., 2018: 26). As such, publicly sponsored integration work is what ties much third sector work to migrant populations. This highlights how the very term "integration" in reality is linked to de-politicised practice, sometimes without the resources or bandwidth to question the status quo of migration policy or integration practice.

Nevertheless, the third sector is not fully captured by the state's emphasis on labour market participation as the end-all measure of integration. Here, there is still often room for an individualised, holistic approach to participants, and migrants can enter the space of a third sector organisation with a lower threshold than in public services (Bontenbal and Lillie, 2019: 5). Crucially, this also allows that even an ostensibly employment-enhancing activity, including meeting places, can in practice take on multiple other roles, and provide a setting for "doing integration" as a practice where participants can negotiate integration in terms of their own lived experience and in *dialogue* with its official discourse (Asikainen, 2023: 2). Thus, it is the contexts of specific relationships which determine how integration is translated into practice.

2.2 Researching migrant-majority relations in civil society

In this section I provide a literature review of research into migrant-majority relations, zooming in on a selection of social contexts from the institutional to the everyday, and considering each of their implications for inter-group relations. I use the idea of integration as a problematic starting point, but also cover potentially redeeming trends from the field and research. I turn then to consider what hybridisation processes mean for the third sector's contentious potential to facilitate more politically explicit and reciprocal relationalities. Finally, I examine solidarity activism, everyday encounters, and migrant mentoring as three spaces of encountering which create distinctive yet overlapping intersubjective relations.

Critiques of "integration"

The purpose of this thesis is not to approach "integration" as a theoretical framework or a category of *analysis*, but as a problematic category of *practice* (Rytter, 2019) – or, as *object* of research rather than the *project* of it (Schinkel, 2018: 8). This is partly because as a concept,

"integration" is "fuzzy" (Grillo, 2018), and the scope of the current study does not extend to a theoretical treatment. Instead, I here explore what it means for third sector mentoring to be affected by integration ideology, that is, how the integration frame shapes fundamental ways of conceiving of interpersonal and political relationships among majority and migrant populations. The academic literature, especially Critical Migration Studies, has widely criticised the use of "integration" in both policy and research as a term that is supposed to describe such relations.

The two main issues are that the term implies, first, an asymmetrical power relationship between citizens and migrants, and second, a unilateral direction of action, a process where something is done *unto* migrants without their involvement or agency[2]. As Schinkel (2018) elucidates, using the term particularly in research is a moral-conceptual error, since "integration" essentially conceives of (racialised) migrants as the *other* to the "society" they are supposed to integrate into, while (white) citizens are equated with "society" itself and are left unexamined, outside of the realm of critique relating to social problems. This in turn problematises only the "guests" but not the "hosts" in an interaction that by definition requires (at least) two parts. As a whole, "'integration' becomes a decidedly un-social and non-relational concept" (Schinkel, 2018: 3), as using "integration" would make sense if one analysed the state of a *system*, rather than how well *individuals* have integrated, as is done in both public and third sectors in Finland. This highlights the uncomfortable tension central to this thesis where the third sector, one the one hand facilitates inter-cultural connections (a reciprocal project), while on the other insists on mentoring being an "integration" practice for migrants (a unilateral project).

Across the Nordic countries, empirical research has followed this critical approach. In Denmark, Rytter (2019) argues, "integration" as an ideal and practice has encouraged and helped construct certain social imaginaries, resulting in specific, asymmetric ways of relating among self and other, or, among majorities and minorities. The term is especially problematic

[2] Some have argued for using "inclusion" as an alternative to "integration" (e.g. Pötzsch, 2020). While this clearly avoids some conceptual pitfalls, the assimilatory subtext inherent in a group having the power to include, integrate, or *do something* to another unilaterally, remains. Both terms are also flexibly and sometimes interchangeably used, which is why I focus on the critiques of underlying issues that can be directed at either term.

since it is highly racialised, not least because it in public discourse is employed as a proxy for discussing anxieties related to Muslim migrants. Notably, Rytter observes that the asymmetry is seen in the often related "host"/"guest" metaphor, whereby the host sets rules and the guest must leave if impolite, obtrusive, or, unable to accept (unfair) rules (ibid: 687). In Finland, critical studies of integration education programmes have argued that they in fact act as exclusionary inclusion, meaning migrants are first excluded in order to be made integrata*ble* subjects (Masoud et al., 2021). Similarly, Pötzsch (2020) studies the Swedish-language integration path (in which PAUS also situates itself), and argues that Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) programmes in Finland have been "characterized by a politics of apoliticality" (2020: ii), partly due to curricula restrictions, but also through active sidestepping of political topics, as well as constructing racism in Finland – a relevant issue for students – as a past phenomenon. These concerns are important to this thesis due to the worry that activities infused with the logic of integration, including third sector mentoring, may promote encounters as ones where the local majority is entitled to teach or "civilise" newcomers, ultimately reinforcing an unequal relation. In turn, this precludes alternative, solidaristic and reciprocal ways of relating.

Another pressing concern is that integration practice involving majority citizens deploys humanitarian frames, which deepens the depoliticisation of relations and thus contributes to the perpetuation of hierarchical power relations. In a highly relevant study of Norwegian volunteer activity aimed at helping newcomers settle, Hernández-Carretero (2023) shows how an integration frame may shape relations towards an "anti-politics of inclusion". In it, volunteers overtly act to include newcomers but may also inadvertently reproduce state logics of difference and hierarchy by differentiating between certain newcomers and others, as well as by emphasising divides between the "helpers" (Norwegians) and the "helped" (migrants) in their own interactions. In order to support social cohesion and avoiding politicised conflict, volunteers focus on the given tasks – equipping newcomers with tools such as language and cultural understanding – while actively silencing religious or political topics and minimising differences between themselves and the migrants. The argument is that a "depoliticization from below" thus takes place (ibid, 2023). Completing the evil cycle, research has also found that migrants themselves downplay crucial differences and emphasise similarities to the majority population as a survival strategy (Juul, 2010). As such, although volunteering to support migrants can be transformative for individuals who get tools that help them forward, on a larger

scale there is a risk that humanitarian integration support may reinforce power differentials by favouring consensus over dialogue and engagement with difference.

The critique of "integration" communicates a key implication for research and practice: namely, the need for exploring the relationships and encounters between majority and migrant groups, highlighting the role of citizens – who previously have been rendered invisible. In academic research, calls have been made for an agenda where focus is also laid on the "native", for example through "migrantising the citizen" (Anderson, 2019), that is, through destabilising citizenship as a category, examining internal differentiation among the citizenry (e.g. due to race, gender, class, sexuality or disability), or in otherwise rejecting the binary between citizens and migrants. Similarly, Schinkel's argument against integration essentially involves a rejection of research that uncritically *omits* majority populations as an object of study, granting their position as already "integrated". As a parallel to Critical Whiteness Studies' idea that Whiteness is an invisibilised category, Pötzsch argues that "if critical perspectives of social inclusion are to become a lived reality [...] then majorities must also be subjected to the "integration spotlight." (2020: ii). Even those that defend the use of "integration" as an academic term have adapted their approach following the persistent critique. For example, Klarenbeek (2024) argues that rather than speaking of integration as a process involving only immigrants, we should approach the concept as one describing relational change, applying equally to all people of a society. This amounts to studying *relational integration,* where "we analyse the emergence, reproduction, or transformation of hierarchical membership relations." (Klarenbeek, 2024: 249) Considering the ideal of reciprocal integration, Klarenbeek argues: "Integrative processes are those in which people increasingly recognise their fellow members as equals, such that hierarchies decrease. Importantly, not only do relational integration processes involve people gaining standing, but also others giving up standing" (ibid: 244).

Some of this sentiment concerning where the "integration spotlight" should fall, is observable also outside academia. Today, Finnish third sector practice, and to some extent even state policy, recognises the importance of visibilising the majority citizenry in integration practice. There has been a shift towards what is often called "two-way integration" (TEM, 2019; TEM, 2023), or the idea that integration should be horizontal and interactive, involving both citizens

and migrants for example through "friend programmes" (Valtioneuvosto, 2021: 127)[3]. Interestingly, some studies specifically see the third sector as central to challenging unilateral integration. For instance, one Nordic study has called for a greater emphasis to be placed on civil society in integration work, arguing that it is in facilitating meetings among citizens and migrants that integration is, or can be, enacted as a *two-way* process (Karlsdóttir, et al., 2017: 6), and the same has been echoed in Finland (Koskela, 2010), where Saukkonen (2020) also has argued that Finland today is a long way from assimilationist models of integration.

Thus, there is to some extent a common tendency to include the majority population in academic research, Finnish third sector practice, and public policy. Still, the adoption of the integration critique is imperfect and only partial, and it does not mean the third sector categorically is radical. Often, the name of the game is only "good population relations" (Valtioneuvosto, 2021: 126), a term which smooths over systemic inequality. Similarly, one should be careful in differentiating between integration politics, policy, and practice, remembering "the Finnish Paradox" (Saukkonen 2013b: 113-114), whereby Finland as a political discursive construction is inclusive and generous, but in practice remains closed-minded and bureaucratic (Bodström, 2020). To fully address how contentious politics, migrant solidarity and the third sector may interrelate, the next section zooms in on this very issue.

Third sector hybridisation

As neoliberalisation has shrunk the sphere of possible political action (Keskinen 2021; Mouffe, 2005), there is a need to look for politics elsewhere than in the traditional places. It is especially important to open up for the – at least *a priori* – possibility that contentious solidarity politics happens in the institutional third sector (Agustín and Jørgensen, 2019). Thus, while in the background section I discussed traditional third sector integration practice, I here turn to the contentious politics which can take place within third sector initiatives.

In the introduction for a symposium on migrant solidarity, Donatella della Porta and Elias Steinhilper (2021a) address this very issue. Based on a wide literature review, they argue that the overlapping crises of austerity, neoliberalisation, polarisation and xenophobia have all

[3] Although in communications towards migrants, Bodström observes that the Finnish state encourages interactions with the welfare state at the expense of interaction with local citizens (2020: 7).

affected the operations of civil society, requiring complex responses that draw also on contentious politics. As such, there has been a complication of the conventionally strict conceptual divide between *civil society*, with its depoliticising frames, vertical organisation and action based on consensus, and *social movements*, with their politicising frames, horizontal organisation and disruptive action. Instead of categorically separating the third sector and social movements, della Porta and Steinhilper (2021a; 2021b) argue that it is more helpful to locate what happens in each instance on a *spectrum* between humanitarianism and solidarity. Overall, trends in research point to a hybridisation, that is, the process by which the frames and forms of action of social movements and the third sector come to overlap (della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021a: 179). Thus, humanitarian discourse is not always the predominant approach in the third sector, but one part of an ambiguous mix where "NGOs simultaneously align with and contest the interests of migration management" (Doering-White et al., 2024: 1).

Similar studies have also pointed out the same hybridity. Fleischman and Steinhilper (2017) argue that volunteer work with migrants during the 2015 so-called "refugee crisis" in Europe created a "dispositif of helping" embedded in humanitarian parameters, avoiding explicit politicisation and contextualisation of structural issues. This may involve some reproduction of the helper-helped dynamic, but importantly, it has mobilised people far beyond the usual suspects of leftist and anti-racists involved in solidarity work. Other studies have documented and described the political potential of humanitarian volunteering as "enabling humanitarianism" (Sinatti, 2019), and "subversive humanitarianism" (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019), respectively referring to actions that are either proto-political and conducive to further politicisation, or actions which may not have a political form but carry an implicit opposition to the political status quo. As Stierl also has explored, "possibilities exist for political dissent to emanate from *within* humanitarian reason" (2018: 704).

Similarly, in their analysis of a Copenhagen community centre – whose purpose, like my case study, lies at the intersection of providing assistance to migrants and facilitating cross-cultural meetings – Siim and Meret (2021: 230) show that "the assemblage of humanitarian and reflective solidarity can evolve and co-exist" and that facilitating interaction in safe spaces can "encourage a proactive dealing with differences and inequalities". However, they also point out

how advancing equality in practice can be difficult for associations under financial pressure to serve certain groups, like individuals with refugee status at the expense of asylum-seekers.

In Finland, many of the observations about the third sector's hybrid role have been made in relation to advocacy work. Here, studies have observed that despite the officially non-party-political stance required of associations, interviewed staff have political commitments and actively advocate on issues ranging from asylum-seekers' rights to integration services and anti-racism policies (Bontenbal and Lillie, 2019: 14). Others have argued that migrant associations' political bite lies in "the politics of presence", that is of keeping certain issues on the political agenda (Pirkkalainen et al., 2018). Notably, less has been written in Finland about the personal relationships between migrants and majority Finns and the third sector's role in this.

In sum, the third sector is enmeshed in a dual process of hybridisation, taking on forms and aims of both the public sector and social movements. Moreover, the sector is internally diverse, differing in size, professional organisation, and stability of funding. Thus, we should not be excessively idealistic about civil society associations' radical potential but allow and explore their hybrid praxis. It is important to recognise its "ambivalent and contradictory effects that range from forms of antipolitics to transformative political possibilities" (Fleischman and Steinhilper, 2017: 17), and to look to contextualised practice to assess the effects of hybridisation and to observe which exact shape migrant-majority relations take.

Solidarity activism

The research exploring migrant-majority relations by developing a framework for social justice and solidarity with migrant issues has often focused on contentious politics and collective struggle. Such studies provide a point of reference for my analysis since, given the hybridisation of (non)contentious politics in the third sector, many of their findings have direct relevance also for informal, individualised, institutional, and presumptively apolitical projects like third sector migrant mentoring. Especially since 2015, a wide range of contentious mobilisations by or with migrants have been studied. Such studies have centred on migrants claiming rights from the nation state (Näre, 2020) or else asserting themselves through "acts of citizenship" outside of the exclusionary logic of citizenship (Isin and Nielsen 2008), but also in terms of other new relationships and political subjectivities created among migrants and their citizen supporters

(Ataç et al., 2016). A lot of this solidarity activism is framed around physical borders, for example on Mediterranean shores and in resisting symbolic borders (della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021b).

Although solidarity is not always the central concept for analysing migrant-majority relations, nor is it always defined theoretically, these forms of collective action correspond to the commonly applied definition of migrant solidarity as struggle. An explicit application of solidarity theory in the Nordics is Hansen's (2020) study of left activists' solidarity with precariously situated migrants in Malmö, where she follows Featherstone (2012) and Scholtz (2008) in defining migrant solidarity as the crossing of pre-given divides to create relations, not of charity but mutual aid and reciprocity, with the aim of making political claims or achieving a more equal order. Although struggle is Hansen's observed form of action, she also includes friendship as an important solidarity praxis. In a Finnish study, Merikoski (2021) interprets majority citizens' hosting of asylum seekers in their homes as "contentious hospitality", a practice of politicised volunteering blurring the boundaries between solidarity activism and charity, as well as the public and private spheres.

Another important contribution of solidarity activism research for this thesis, is that some such studies question or problematise the role of privileged actors – especially citizens and white women – in solidarity relations with migrants or those otherwise racialised as "other". Based in research, some argue for the importance of autonomous spaces among migrants and those racialised as "other" in developing methods of communal survival and love, as well as in determining an antiracist feminist agenda based in lived experiences of those marginalised (Keskinen, 2021). This echoes the idea of "solidarity from the margins", where the primary solidarity relation is argued to lie among subaltern groups *against* the system or the privileged (Bhardwaj, 2021).

In studying the activist solidarity encounters among white Canadian and Indigenous women, D'Arcangelis observes what she terms white women's "impulse to solidarity", that is, the latent or actualised desires to use solidarity work as an opportunity for acceptance, inclusion, forgiveness, healing, purpose, empowerment, or friendship for themselves (2022: 13), especially in alleviating "white settler guilt" (ibid: 158) – for me translating to "citizen guilt". Crucially, white women's desire for cultural proximity risks reductive romanticisation of the

"other", at the same time as they engage in self-making projects of being "a good settler" – parallel to being "a good Finnish host". D'Arcangelis' critique is less urgent in the present case study, as e.g friendship is invited by the activity and since the transgression of cultural boundaries is not a risk but the *purpose*, explicitly called for by the mentees. Regardless, these problematic aspects of the messy everyday relations between the differently privileged remains an important and applicable consideration in analysing mentor motivations. Moreover, it reminds us of the importance of continuously examining our relational social positions, and engaging with discomfort as our motivations are questioned (Boudreau Morris, 2017).

Everyday encounters

Beyond the activist realm, informal everyday encounters between migrants and majority citizens have been addressed in research. These encounters are often studied as non-contentious but relevant for general social cohesion. For example, a recent OECD and EU study (2023) finds that EU citizens who interact weekly with non-EU migrants are "more likely to believe their integration is successful [...] and feel better informed about immigration and integration" (OECD, 2023: 134). In Finland the level of social interaction with immigrants falls below the EU average even when adjusted for the relative size of the immigrant population (ibid: 135), suggesting a special need for contact. On a neighbourhood level, Stolle et al. argue that "the *absence of direct contact* with or sustained knowledge about individuals of different racial, ethnic or class backgrounds serves to reinforce prejudices that are themselves based on inaccurate and rigidly held stereotypes" (2008: 59), whereas the *presence* of it leads individuals to be "less influenced by the racial and ethnic character of their surroundings" (ibid: 71). Interestingly, this outcome of *difference coming to matter less* can be interpreted as a depoliticising or individualising effect and is echoed by research which finds that negative experiences of migrants reinforce assumed categories, whereas through positive experiences immigrants are more likely to be perceived as individuals (Paolini et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, research has showed that a diverse social milieu does not have an unambiguous effect on intergroup relations and can in reality lead to either conflict or trust, weakened or strengthened prejudice – the result depends on the *quality* of the interaction (Koopmans and Veit, 2014). In contexts (like Finland) where the majority population still statistically dominates, Koopmans and Veit also find that contact impacts groups differently: while

immigrants may come to trust majority citizens more, majority citizens also have "distant and negative experiences, which are more consequential for reducing trust than the positive contacts are for increasing it" (2014: 106). Following this, it would seem that *close ties* are crucial for bringing out the positive effects of contact. Some contemporary researchers have validated traditional contact theory's emphasis on long-term, positive relationships like friendships (Allport, 1954, in Koopmans and Veit) or generally "bridging ties" (Laurence, 2011). The importance of interethnic friendships for lowering perceived "ethnic threat" has also been observed in the Nordic countries (Kouvo and Lockmer, 2013). Similarly, qualitative scholarship of the everyday observes that in super-diverse neighbourhoods in London, majority residents view "commonplace diversity" as ordinary and positive, and an "ethos of mixing" in public is a norm, but this however struggles to extend to private space (Wessendorf, 2013).

In another strain of research, some have shifted the frame on everyday encounters, interpreting them as an arena also for contentious politics, reinterpreting hierarchies and practicing inclusive community. For example, urban studies have challenged the "scholarship of the everyday": "even as they work to combat contemporary anti-immigrant politics, these scholars unwittingly lay the groundwork for viewing migrants as dangerous strangers" by constructing the social issue as uniscalar and caused by the arrival of migrants (Çağlar and Glick Schiller, 2018: 12). On this view, everyday encounters can be observed as "city-making practices" where migrants are active makers of sociabilities, rather than passivised threats to social cohesion. Similarly, Ataç et al. (2015) have argued that in addition to explicit political struggle, migrant solidarity also plays out through *invisible politics* "in the micro-political spectrum of everyday life and the private sphere", and that "It is precisely through these less spectacular, often invisible everyday struggles (…) that the status quo is called into question." (Ataç et al., 2015: 6-7). Finally, ties to local volunteers acquired through non-contentious channels can also lead to resources and political support – and thus to better chances for contentious struggle (Rosenberger et al., 2018).

Migrant mentoring

Finally, encounters between migrants and majority citizens have been examined in the form of facilitated mentoring. Immigrant mentoring is a practice which has moved from North America to Europe and proliferated, including in Finland (Steel et al., 2019). In Helsinki alone there

today operates around a dozen mentoring programmes for migrants, half of which are dedicated specifically to women. What immigrant mentoring *is* or *does*, however, can be analysed in quite different ways. First, it can be – and most often is – seen as a conventional integration practice focused on the mentee, a tool to increase employability and knowledge of the local language, culture and customs. In the today sizeable mentoring research, volunteer-based "mentoring-to-work" is widely acknowledged to be an effective tool to support the inclusion of migrants in the labour market (De Cuyper et al., 2019; Karlsdóttir et al., 2017; Liebig and Tronstad, 2018; OECD, 2017). Through mentoring, immigrants gain valuable, tacit information and local networks, termed "bridging capital", both through mentors themselves, but also via the mentors' extended contacts (De Cuyper et al., 2019: 110). Other observed benefits for mentees include psychosocial or subjective integration effects like self-efficacy, confidence, social connectedness, counselling and friendship (Gower et al., 2022; Humberd and Rouse, 2016; Jaschke et al., 2022).

Second, mentoring can also be examined as a more general social encounter, facilitating relationships that may also reject the imposed integration frames and encourage mutual exchange. This approach is much rarer. Even studies that would primarily focus on mentoring outcomes for migrants other than employment have been described as "entirely absent" (Jaschke, 2022: 5). Still, social mentoring for newcomers as a *practice* is emerging in Europe (Crijns and De Cuyper, 2022). It is also accepted that mentors do gain from the process, learning about the plights migrants face, increasing their intercultural understanding and communication, as well as honing their own professional skills. Thus, "while asymmetrical, the mentoring relationship is reciprocal in nature", and "the asymmetry only concerns content and not the nature of the relationship" (De Cuyper et al., 2019: 116; Steel at al., 2019). Although traditionally mentoring is defined as a relationship between a more and a less experienced person, oriented towards developmental growth of the latter (Eby et al., 2008), equality is also important to contemporary definitions (e.g. Steel et al., 2019). Still, while the importance of mutuality and reciprocity in migrant mentoring is widely accepted among researchers, it is a value spearheaded primarily by practitioners (De Cuyper et al., 2019: 115-116), where avoiding paternalist attitudes even can be a criterion for recruiting mentors (Crijns and De Cuyper, 2022: 23). The exact meaning and role of mutuality thus remains fuzzy as it has not been theorised thoroughly. Additionally, there exists a gap in the mentoring literature as to how exactly

immigrant mentoring affects the power relations and the political subjectivity among participants, especially concerning how mentoring may reinforce or challenge hierarchies of citizenship, race, class, or gender.

A reason to study this is because the mentoring literature already has been interested in interpersonal subjectivity through the idea of *identification*: "a process by which individuals realize cognitive overlap between the self and other over time in a relationship" (Humberd and Rouse, 2016: 435). What this overlap means in terms of political or essentially socially embedded subjectivity, is less studied. One interesting aspect here is how these identification processes in action shape mentor pairs' ideas of their cultural similarities and differences. A pertinent Finnish study argues that the role of cultural difference has been over-emphasised through the idea of "intercultural mentoring" (Osula and Irvin, 2009, in Steel et al., 2019). Instead, we should recognise that pairs have "shared ambitions, qualities, and values", and treat mentoring as an essentially interactive practice (Steel et al., 2019: 276). In the history of mentoring theory, we thus see that different ways of theorising difference/similarity have already been operationalised with political effects.

In the same study, Steel et al. remind us that in mentoring, "unpleasant, conflicting, unexpected and surprising events and outcomes also occur" (2019: 282). For this reason, it is important to keep in mind how Hernandez-Carretero's findings of depoliticisation (2023), as well as the firmly rooted hegemony of consensus in Finland which is "inclusive, but not pluralist" (Luhtakallio, 2012: 15), might affect the interaction when mentoring becomes uncomfortable or brings inequalities or different beliefs up to surface. In other words, genuine self-examination and openness to difference is not a given feature or outcome of mentoring. Finally, it is worth remembering that one-to-one relations do not solve systemic oppression. There is a complex, interconnected, and dynamic social world around mentor pairs, and researchers and practitioners alike would do well by not falling into the idea that "all would be great if more disadvantaged migrants knew more white rich ladies" (Gowdy, 2024).

In sum, the intersubjective relations between migrants and majority citizens have thus been explored to a great extent in terms of activism, moderately in terms of everyday encounters, and very little by looking at mentoring, especially when it comes to conceiving of relations that transcend integration and humanitarian paradigms. Thus, I hope to bridge the largely

disconnected bodies of literature on migrant solidarity and "integration" practice, by looking at encounters facilitated by the third sector. What is clear from the literature is that the division between contentious and non-contentious politics, or between activist struggle and everyday encounters including mentoring, is neither binary nor absolute, but illustrates different ways of conceiving the intersubjective relations between groups where one group generally holds power and privilege and the other generally does not. As I have argued above, the case of third sector integration work illustrates particularly well how reality resists the neat classification, and it is for this reason it merits the attention of the present study.

2.3 With solidarity towards a theory of difference

In this thesis, I argue that engaging with difference on a grassroots level is a crucial praxis for just migrant-majority relations. This argument relies on, and is informed by, a certain way of theorising difference, which I turn to in what follows. Analyses of intergroup praxis and argumentation around alternative bases for political intersubjectivity, such as integration or solidarity, are fundamentally structured by how difference is theorised (Dean, 1996). Accordingly, I dedicate the first part of my theory section to laying out how I conceive of the differences, similarities and worked-towards commonalities between my two participant "groups": migrants and majority citizens. In the second part, I turn to my main theoretical concept of solidarity, and address this along humanitarianism as two alternative modes of understanding possible ways of relating in cases such as the mentoring encounter.

Engaging with similarity & difference

To explain what I mean by so-called "difference(s)" among migrants and majority citizens in the mentoring encounter, migration background itself is certainly a relevant separator – the most salient in the data, given how the mentoring programme frames the roles of mentor/mentee. Yet, I wish to present a more nuanced take on the social functions of difference(s), as these are crucial mechanisms my participants navigate in the attempt to connect and self-reflect.

Talking about migration without considering the nation state is difficult, as the national border is one of the mechanisms which separate migrants and citizens in the first place. To address

this, I recognise what much of the sociology of migration has argued: namely, that the very history of the nation state is based in the dual process of 1) ideological work of *differentiation* between the in-group (subjects/citizens/natives) and the out-group (strangers/foreigners/ migrants), and in 2) the manufacturing of *sameness* among the supposed members of each group (Anderson, 2019: 8). As critical ethnic and race studies maintain, the supposed sameness or homogeneity within states is connected to the history and ideology of constructing race (Goldberg, 2002), then combined with a self-obscuring of this work, to the point where today "racial logic is often disguised in the language of cultural differences" (Keskinen, 2021: 202). Similarly, differentiation processes "create 'certainties' of discreteness, distinctness, and discontinuity" among peoples, which in turn are essential to the functioning of global capitalism by justifying hierarchies (Melamed, 2015: 79). As such, both similarity and difference have been socially constructed for uses that symbolically exclude or include, and which simultaneously impose deeply material effects. A project of social justice then must render visible and reject the process of hierarchical differentiation. For this reason, my research challenges any absolute division of mentors and mentees into discrete and internally cohesive groups, recognising overlaps in experiences of in- and outsider status.

A vast body of theories exists on the topic of difference in relation to migration (e.g., Kymlicka, 1995; Taylor, 1994; Vertovec, 2007), as do critiques of these. It is beyond this thesis to engage with the full theoretical debate around concepts like multiculturalism, yet, a fundamental observation from uses of this concept is the recognition that difference also can be something of value (Kymlicka, 2015; Saukkonen, 2023). Differences can be based in real practices and beliefs that the language of social constructions alone cannot capture. In the case of integration research, Schinkel argues that difference has not sufficiently been theorised, with the effect that difference has a priori been problematised and seen as a force which jeopardises the social, rather than a historically present constitutive part of the social (Schinkel, 2018: 8). As right-wing populism is built on the idea of homogeneity, the work of resisting such politics must first then recognise that a "homogenous Finnish population is a myth" (Näre, 2013: 74).

Finally, I take both an *inter*sectional and *intra*sectional view on difference: I recognise differences as plural, intersecting to produce specific effects at different social locations, while also problematising the boundaries of such social categories, emphasising their shifting uses

(Yuval-Davis, 2011: 158). An intersectional approach is necessary to this thesis because in examining inter-group relations I do not only want to prioritise or reify the groups in question, "majority Finns" and "migrants". Rather, I wish to examine the various intersecting identities of each of my participants. At the same time as my participants are migrants or citizens, they are also women, younger or older, of different ethnicities, most highly educated and employed. Moreover, most of them are Swedish-speakers or migrants learning Swedish, in the latter case producing an "minority within a minority" (Pötzsch, 2020: 8). Across these categories, multiple hierarchies entwine, resulting in a messy, moving, and context-dependent ranking order where privileges are relational.

As such, similarities and differences are complex, unstable categories, which this thesis attempts to engage with and detangle. In the words of Boudreau Morris (2017: 466): "The enemy of solidarity is not difference but the lack of engagement with difference – an engagement that is based on mutual recognition and connection". In this vein, commonality must be seen as something worked toward rather than pre-existing. This is true in both research methodology (Gunaratnam, 2003) as well as in practice, where made commonality can be a more useful basis for action than assumed similarity (Boudreau Morris, 2017). In the next section, I outline the rest of the theoretical framework, discussing how two specific modes of relating between migrants and majority citizens, solidarity and humanitarianism, have different answers to the question of *how* difference should be engaged with in a just manner.

Relations of solidarity vs. humanitarianism

In the broadest sense of the word, "solidarity" has always interested sociologists. From Durkheim, Marx, Weber, and Habermas to Foucault, Beck, Giddens, and Putnam, social theorists have inquired into the fundamental glue that makes living together in society possible, providing different answers to this in their accounts of the forces that pull us apart and bring us together. Although other terms may be used – today especially "trust" or "social cohesion" and "social capital" (Oosterlynck and Van Bouchaute, 2013: 31) – solidarity remains an important theoretical concept for sociology interested in social justice, due to the term's both descriptive and normative power (Laitinen and Pessi, 2015: 2). Still, "a considerable share of the migration and refugee literature applies the concept of solidarity in a rather blasé manner"

(Bauder and Juffs, 2020: 57). Since the possible levels of abstraction of the term are manyfold, I will here anchor the discussion in some specific theorisations of solidarity with migrants.

An oft-cited definition of migrant solidarity comes from David Featherstone's theoretical treatise on international solidarity, where the term is fundamentally understood to encompass transformative and inventive relations of "forging of links in opposition to common enemies", thus producing new ways of relating beyond pre-existing likeness (Featherstone, 2012: 11-12). I follow this definition in recognising the importance of transformation and producing new political (inter)subjectivities. Similarly, I also argue for a commonly accepted argument in the migration literature that "solidarity is not necessarily based on a pre-established, homogeneous, and exclusive community", but an essentially action-oriented exercise in collective practice (Schwiertz and Schwenken, 2020: 408).

The importance of continuous practice is reflected in Jodi Dean's understanding of *reflective solidarity* as "the mutual expectation of a responsible orientation to relationship" (1996: 3). For her, solidarity is "continuously (re-)negotiated in a context of difference and multiple concrete particularities, rather than based on an ideal of pre-given agreement, shared views and expectations" (Siim and Meret, 2021: 221). Nevertheless, regarding who the solidarity relation *opposes*, Dean argues differently: "Solidarity can be modelled as an interaction involving at least three persons: I ask you to stand by me over and against a third" (1996: 3). Here the third is not necessarily a human "enemy" as for Featherstone, but a discursive tool just as fluid as the "we" of the solidarity relation. In rejecting the "us" vs. "them" frame, difference takes on another role: it is not a dividing line between those inside and outside the solidarity relation, but a necessary condition for solidarity: "Dissent, questioning, and disagreement no longer have to be seen as tearing us apart but instead can be viewed as characteristic of the bonds holding us together" (ibid: 8).

Another effect of this theoretical stance is that solidarity can be read in more situations than those of explicit or politicised struggle. In a typology of solidarity as a sociological concept, Oosterlynck et al. (2016: 768) have argued that non-contentious *encounters* are a source of solidarity on par with contentious *struggle*. Similarly, others have argued solidarity can, to some degree, exist within the activity of institutions (Agustín and Jørgensen, 2019).

An important criterion in common for Dean's reflective solidarity and the contentious "struggle" conception is that solidarity relations should be reciprocal. That is to say, a solidaristic relation is based on mutuality, an equal give-and-take, if not in the specific interaction then expecting it in wider societal relations. Siim and Meret (2021), who have applied Dean's reflective solidarity to migrant-majority relations, highlight the importance of reciprocity:

> Solidarity in this case relies on fundamental reciprocity and offers the possibility of community among those who actively participate, while respecting and taking responsibility for their differences. From this angle, the challenge is to create solidarity by accepting others as 'one of us' (Rorty, 1989), not 'like us' but on a collective, rather than individual, basis. It involves becoming aware of and creating, safe spaces, places and forms of communication to overcome inequalities and diversity between and within groups. (Siim and Meret, 2021: 221)

Centring reciprocity as an ideal of interpersonal relations is also rooted in a recognition of our fundamental social embeddedness, present in Hegel's philosophy of recognition as well as solidarity theorists who focus on struggle (Bauder and Juffs, 2020: 51). In a normative sense, these theorists hold that social action must be reciprocal as otherwise we fail to recognise that social problems do not arise in vacuum, and that all in society hold a place in relation to such problems. In short, individualism and blindness to privilege must be thrown out, and a recognition of how we mutually constitute social relations be taken in.

The criterion of reciprocity distinguishes solidarity starkly from a common alternative conception of migrant-majority relations, namely humanitarianism[4]. Della Porta and Steinhilper claim that "inherent in the idea of humanitarianism is its adherence to principles such as humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence" (2021a: 178). On this view originating in Enlightenment ideals, unidirectional charity replaces mutuality and reciprocity. The impulse to act is based not on a recognition of embedded relationality but on individual liberty and the presumed "universal humankind" to which one owes assistance, especially when vulnerable groups need gift-giving in the form of donations, food, clothes, shelter, medicine, jobs or services (Papataxiarchis, 2016). This is not to say that charitable donations are

[4] In the literature, humanitarianism is either seen as not filling the criteria for solidarity at all (Della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021a; Hansen, 2020) or as a less desired form of solidarity (Bauder and Juffs, 2020) – either way, it contrasts types of solidarity committed to reciprocity.

unimportant, but alone, in terms of political subjectivity, they produce distinctly paternalistic relations. As critical humanitarian studies argue, a focus on third sector organisations' alleviation strategies depoliticise problems by ignoring structural causes of inequalities (Doering-White et al., 2024; Ticktin, 2011).

In their typology of solidarity in the migration literature, Bauder and Juffs (2020) argue that the humanitarian frame is linked to "emotional" and "rational" socialities, based respectively in a Humean view of private compassion and a Kantian sense of universal responsibility (Bauder and Juffs, 2020). Interestingly, other critical examinations of the affective dimension of interethnic contact have rebutted the idea that affective motivations to action must be linked to paternalism. In a treatise on compassion, Hoggett (2006) argues against liberal perspectives of compassion that involve pity and sees the "other" only as victim, and for a solidaristic view of compassion infused with anger and the recognition of the "other" as an agent as well as victim. Of course, this division between solidarity and humanitarianism, or reciprocity and charity, is an ideal-typical distinction which serves to illustrate in broad strokes tendencies of privileged majority populations to relate to immigrants. In concrete contexts, such as with migrant mentoring or as discussed above of the third sector, the distinction is complicated and blurred.

Finally, in theorising solidarity it is worth discussing the power (im)balance not only in terms of the inherent ways that reciprocal or charitable relations position participants, but also in terms of broader social positions. This is especially important in discussing a case like migrant mentoring, where both mentor/mentee roles and ethnic, class, gender divides risk pushing participants into a dynamic of helper/helped. For Featherstone, that "solidarities are constructed through uneven power relations and geographies" is an essential feature (2012: 11). Following Mohanty's (2003) notion of "noncolonising solidarity", Boudreau Morris (2017) also emphasises the importance of inviting uncertainty and cultivating *discomfort* in solidarity relations across power imbalances, through questioning, listening, and examining one's own historically specific social location, and unsettling stable and justificatory narratives of why one possesses power and privilege.

Thus, I arrive at a definition of solidarity as 1) the active building of relations through ongoing practice and engagement with difference 2) with an implicit or explicit political dimension, 3) based on the ideal as well as enacted principle of mutuality or reciprocity. Moreover, I recognise

that solidarity 4) exists in overlapping forms in both explicitly political, contentious struggle and everyday, non-contentious encounters (della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021a; Oosterlynck et al., 2016: 5) which, at least in theory, can exist to some degree within the activity of institutions (Agustín and Jørgensen, 2019).

3 Data & Methods

Having set out the empirical context and the theory used in this thesis, I will in this chapter outline my methodological commitments and assess how choices in data collection, analysis and ethics affected the research.

3.1 Methodological rationale and the in-depth interview

The overall methodology of this thesis is qualitative, and the methods were designed to be flexible and exploratory since migrant mentoring has not been studied extensively with a solidarity lens. As I wished to explore the nuances of subjective experiences and address personal interpretations of social relationships, conducting individual qualitative interviews provided the most appropriate method. The qualitative interview has for long been a "favoured digging tool" (Benney and Hughes 1970, cited in Taylor, 2015: 101), a metaphor which is central to this research. I wanted to get more than an overview of mentoring outcomes or an evaluation of the programme: instead, it was important to understand power relations, detailed experiences of social connection, fracture and (in)equality, and the complex ways that beliefs, habits and values may change through encounters. I knew that the relevant causes and effects of mentoring would be mired in a larger field of migration politics, identity- and claims-making. For understanding this complexity on the individual level, a quantitative survey or more structured interviewing would have been inappropriate. Moreover, I chose to employ an in-depth, semi-structured approach to interviewing, which has an advantage over more structured and limited interview styles in exploring processes and understanding *how* interactions may lead to certain outcomes, rather than measuring them (Brinkmann, 2020).

In migration studies, the qualitative interview has been used extensively and successfully, as it allows researchers to access mobile populations while keeping an open-ended research agenda and enables more collaborative research where participants' viewpoints and interpretations are made visible (Fedyuk and Zentai, 2018). Specifically in the migration literature concerned with studying solidarity practices, there have been calls for using in-depth, qualitative methodologies as well as research sensitive to spatio-temporal contingencies other than simply nation state and citizenship, since solidarity happens across a broad spectrum of here-and-now practices (Oosterlynck et al., 2016: 778). Following these recommendations, I have especially

attempted to stay sensitive to the specific context of my study, and I do not claim that my results could be generalisable across place or time.

Resulting from these methodological commitments is also a relativist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology: I understand the intersecting "differences" among my participants to be socially constructed although materially significant (Fraser, 2003), and I allow that their experiences correspond to multiple lived realities. Moreover, I emphasise that the context of my study majorly shapes the knowledge produced herein, and I acknowledge that qualitative interviewing inherently involves the (inter)active interpretation and creation of meaning (Rapley, 2004), and thus I take my "inevitable role as co-constructor of meaning into account rather than trying to downplay it" (Brinkman 2020, 444).

3.2 The case study

The PAUS mentoring programme

The case study was chosen both due to its suitability for my research aims and due to practical opportunity. Namely, at the time of data collection I had worked for multiple years as the coordinator for the mentoring programme "PAUS" (a pseudonym), which is a part of the activities aimed at newcomers to Finland organised by the third sector association "Porten" (also a pseudonym). PAUS offers one-to-one mentoring between those who have moved to Finland, and those who are established in Finland. The programme is restricted to the Finnish capital region – where Porten is physically located. Porten receives funding from both the public sector and private foundations, and from this pool funds are allocated for one or two part-time mentoring coordinators.

The scope of mentoring is broader than many other Finnish mentoring programmes aimed at migrants. A mentoring period can involve job search support (experience sharing, giving tips about the labour market, CVs and application letters, or additional networking), language practice (Finnish, Swedish or English), discussions about culture and society, and the more personally determined hobbies, projects or questions that relate to finding one's footing in Finland. Semi-officially, the above mentoring goals have reverse equivalents for the mentors – it is the mentees' needs and interests that set the agenda for mentoring, but mentors' requests

to learn specific things are welcome. In the matching process, each participant is interviewed holistically, and individual complexities and tailor-made solutions are central to matching outcomes. In light of research arguing that Finnish integration policy over-emphasizes economic and linguistic integration at the expense of individual psychosocial integration among long-term migrant residents (Kunwar, 2020), an important aspect of PAUS is to address overall well-being among all regardless of time lived in Finland.

The profiles of participants are thus varied, but some trends exist. The average participant is very highly educated: a whole 86% of mentee participants have a higher education degree. The programme attracts more women, who constitute around 65% of participants. Often, unless otherwise wished for by participants, matching participants close in age are prioritised. Among participants' (self-defined) countries of origin, Asian countries make up 32%, European countries 22%, Middle Eastern and North African 15,6%, while Russia on its own provides 14% of participants. In summer 2022, a special round of mentoring was held, where people from Ukraine with temporary protection got mentors. In recent years, the share of immigrants in the mentor pool has increased and in both 2022 and 2023 made up 37% of mentors. The majority of other mentors are Swedish-speaking Finns, due to Porten's network and position as an information- and culture centre serving the Swedish-speaking community.

The duration of mentoring is six months, and participants are recommended to meet at least three times per month. At the beginning of mentoring, new pairs are invited for a kick-off event where they are introduced to their pair, decide on their personalised goals and commitments, plan concrete activities for the period, and meet others in their cohort. Circa 20 pairs are matched every spring and autumn. During the following months, the pair meets on their own following their own schedule and location preferences. No particular reporting back to Porten is required, but the coordinator checks in with each participant during the mentoring to provide support if needed, and serves as a general point of contact for any questions participants may have. The larger team in which PAUS operates additionally offers free guidance counselling for migrants and organises job-search and social events, both of which are offered as supporting activities to mentoring participants.

Notably for this thesis research, PAUS itself follows the ideas of two-way integration, non-hierarchy and the notion that both mentor and mentee can (and should) learn from the process. This is for example reflected in peer-mentoring matches and in the encouragement of the reverse, non-traditional dynamic where mentees can offer and mentors receive. Other official values that are included in mentor preparation discussions include active engagement, equality, trust, respect, honesty and openness to difference, as well as the underlying principle of voluntary participation.

After I had worried for a while that my overlapping roles as programme coordinator and researcher would be too complicated to deal with, the following arguments for selecting PAUS overtook the downsides. First, this type of mentoring merits studying because it is a useful example of migrant-majority encounters that would not occur organically. These are increasingly on the public agenda (Valtioneuvosto, 2021) and so must be understood also academically. Second, the programme provides a needed setting for studying the majority population and immigrants in a comparative way, there being a direct 1-1 ratio of each "group". Third, although PAUS is an institutionally embedded practice (a far cry from explicitly political pro-migrant claims-making), its small scale and resulting semi-independence provide an interesting terrain where integration is the name of the game, but where solidaristic frames may take root. Of course, my direct relationship to PAUS still raises questions of positionality, which I dedicate a section to below.

A co-Nordic research project as background

The data collection opportunity arose in connection to a Nordic collaborative research project, in which Porten participated together with two Danish and Norwegian mentoring programmes. The aim was to investigate how mentoring initiatives impact immigrant women's employment, education opportunities and overall social integration. Additional goals included international dissemination of knowledge on migrant mentoring models and developing recommendations for cross-sectoral collaboration and migrant mentoring practice in the Nordics. The motivation for the project's focus on migrant women was based on reports of this group having the lowest employment rate compared to migrant men or any gender Finnish citizens (Statistics Finland, 2023).

The data used in this thesis was collected through interviews carried out by me in fall 2023, prompted by the Nordic collaboration project and thus largely following its needs and guidelines, but with some important adaptations. As such, this is semi-original research, in that parts of the same interviews used here have been analysed elsewhere. However, both before, during and after the interviews I have had room to modify the data collection process enough to allow asking additional, different questions of the data. I have also been able to adapt the approach towards the academic, often taking extra steps to ensure academic standards and rigour, and generally deliberating more on what each choice would mean for my own process. After the last interview was conducted, all choices in the process have been my own entirely. In practice, the data is self-acquired, in that I personally selected participants, arranged and conducted each interview.

The main contribution of the Nordic project and anchoring the study in PAUS while being an employee at Porten was the institutional pretext which helped me greatly in getting access to participants. However, my methods and thematic interests are somewhat distinct from those of the project's. The most important thematical distinction is that my research questions do not only concern employment but expand on the social and political aspects of mentoring. In terms of the methodological characteristics that generally are used to differentiate research from programme evaluation (cf. Brandon and Ah Sam, 2020), the Nordic project falls somewhere in between. It borrowed from academic research methods but mainly addressed the *value* of the participating programmes; it was designed to produce recommendations but not generalisable conclusions; and the (ideal) goal was to feed into collaborations and decision-making processes among political power holders. Since the data for this thesis was collected during the same interviews, I inevitably inherited part of this context, particularly in that I still situate this as a practice-relevant study. Yet, the most important methodological distinction between this academic thesis and the evaluative form is that even if this thesis may contain hints of programme evaluation, the scale is not a linear one between success and failure, but in a broader, theoretically informed mapping of effects on the lives of participants.

3.3 Data and process

Similarity and difference in the sample

The data sample consists of 10 interviews, divided into 5 with mentors and 5 with mentees. That I should include both groups in the sample was always essential, as hearing both perspectives enables a more genuine relational analysis, and since I – following an increasing trend in migration research (e.g. Anderson, 2019; Pötzsch, 2020) – strived for my research to reflect the normative stance that the responsibility of co-existence in diversity lies not on newcomers, but on society as a whole. As Schinkel argues regarding researching integration, "the very calibration of who to include in research is thus crucial", since by only studying migrants we risk a frame where migrant participants "constitute a perfect negative image of those who are included in society" (2018: 4).

A fine-grained selection of interview participants was possible as statistical information on past participants was available through PAUS's database. Some sampling criteria were prescribed to me through the Nordic comparative research project, but some criteria I was free to add myself. Following the core idea of that project, the first prescribed criterion was that mentee interviewees should identify as women, and that at least some mentor interviewees should be women. Since the majority of mentoring volunteers are women, odds made it so that my sample of mentors also were all women. As the project focused on employment, the second prescribed sampling focus was that participants needed to have had job search or career development as part of their mentoring goals. However, because of PAUS's holistic approach, we also allowed inclusion of goals that *in*directly supported employment, such as language practice or networking. As such, the participants that I selected for in reality had a wide range of goals, which is discussed in my results.

The third prescribed criterion regarded the mentees' nationalities. As one participating organisation is funded by the Danish government, the Nordic research project needed to apply and sample using their classification of "non-Western" countries, with a focus on "MENAPT"

countries[5]. Here, I reject these classifications, but the fact remains that all my mentee participants come from countries on the Danish "non-Western" list, with a high concentration in the so-called "MENAPT"-group. Notably, PAUS itself does not collect data on official nationality (some participants may in fact already have Finnish nationality), the data collected is instead on "country of origin" which applicants themselves define. All had a more or less permanent residency status in Finland, and those with residency tied to employment were not currently at risk of losing their legal status. For the mentors' origins, we welcomed the comparison between mentors born in Finland and those with experiences of migrating to Finland, and thus I have one mentor interviewee with a country of origin other than Finland. The four others defined their country of origin as Finland. Incidentally, the resulting age range of the interviewed mentors was 23-50, and of the mentees 30-36.

The final few prescribed criteria were that interviewed mentors and mentees needed to be from separate pairs, had to have completed their 6 months of mentoring, and done so within the last 2 years. This was to allow for anonymity and honesty in interviews, as well as senses of completeness and recency of the mentoring. It is also worth noting, that the "invisible participants" discussed in the interviews, namely the mentoring pairs of my interviewees, were also all women. This resulted because matching across gender is less common. Two of the "invisible" mentors had themselves migrated to Finland, and one had lived extensively in their mentee's home country. All of the "invisible" mentees were also from "non-Western" countries.

In addition to these criteria, I decided that I would sample for those pairs who I knew had been active and had frequent meetings (or other contact) during the official mentoring period. Without this criterion, the longlist of interviewees was indeed long, and I would have risked interviewing people who did not have much to say about their mentor/mentee, or even those who had not met more than a few times. Thus, I prioritised richness of interviews. While active contact does not necessarily amount to successful mentoring or a deeper relation, one can argue

[5] "MENAPT"-countries in Danish statistics include: Syria, Kuwait, Libya, Saudi-Arabia, Lebanon, Somalia, Iraq, Qatar, Sudan, Bahrain, Djibouti, Jordan, Algeria, UAE, Tunisia, Egypt, Morrocco, Iran, Yemen, Mauritania, Oman, Afghanistan, Palestine, Gaza, the West bank, Eastern Jerusalem, Pakistan and Turkey (Danish Ministry of Integration, 2020). "Western" countries include the 27 EU-member countries plus Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, Andorra, Monaco, Liechtenstein, San Marino, Vatican City, UK, Australia, New Zealand, USA and Canada. All other countries are classified as "non-Western" (Danmarks Statistik, 2023).

frequent contact at least is a *prerequisite* for it, and as such I already in sampling selected for those who may have established connections of friendship or solidarity.

The interview process

I decided to collect data by conducting semi-structured, in-depth, individual interviews. This aligned with the method chosen by the Nordic study, for which the team designed a prescribed semi-structured interview protocol focusing on concrete mentoring outcomes. However, covering these questions only took around 30 minutes, and so I had time and opportunity to dig deeper during the further 30 minutes had I asked participants to commit to. For the prescribed part, I was still allowed to manoeuvre freely and clarify, probe, add or skip questions. The latter half of each interview then became even more unstructured, and I often followed the lead of the interviewee to what they found interesting and relevant to their experience of mentoring. Overall, the themes covered were the following:

- The motivations for joining the programme and what mentoring achieved
- Other unexpected effects, including an overarching discussion of what the relationship has meant to the interviewee
- The content and form of the mentoring
- Experienced similarities and differences to the mentor pair
- Experiences of hierarchy and/or equality within the relationship
- Effects of the mentoring on how interviewees see the societal relationships between migrants and majority Finns.

Seven out of the ten interviews were conducted physically at Porten, and three were held through Zoom. Due to the personal and in some cases sensitive nature of the interviews, private conditions for the interviews were necessary, avoiding the possibility of being overheard. Especially at Porten, this was crucial considering the lively comings and goings of colleagues and clients. To address this, I booked rooms with sound proofing at work, and elsewhere held online interviews in a private room. All interviews' audio was recorded with multiple devices, and stored behind password protection. All mentee interviews were conducted in English, as was one mentor interview. The remaining four mentor interviews were held in Swedish.

Data analysis

My analysis method uses tools from qualitative content analysis, since it is at times descriptive and thematic, and since it often interprets the interviews at face value (Schreier, 2014) with "empathy" for the interviewees' subjective experiences (Willig, 2014). On the other hand, my analysis also draws on critical or "suspicious" interpretation (ibid), critiquing the humanitarian and integration discourses sometimes put forth by participants. I do not see these as contradictory approaches, as following Ricoeur, I argue a dialectic between the empathy and suspicion is necessary to produce understanding and explanation (ibid: 5). Regarding expertise, I recognise that my subjective interpretation of the integration-world I have studied and worked in does bear weight, but I do not favour it exclusively. Instead, I have tried to find balanced explanations that incorporate both my own and my participants' interpretations of that world.

This research process has been abductive, meaning the researcher's iterative moving between data, analysis and theory, establishing provisional hypothesis, looking for surprising findings, and making inferences based on robust literature (Kennedy, 2018; Timmermans and Tavory, 2014). Although I identify my process as abductive, induction, deduction and abduction can also be seen as three necessary stages to any qualitative research (Reichertz, 2014: 5; Timmermans and Tavory, 2014: 16). Abduction, it can be argued, is still preferable because it is realistic about this fact, inviting creativity, flexibility and recursive methods. While moving from data collection to analysis has been fairly linear (although my simultaneous experiences of academic study and working with mentoring surely have fuelled each other), I have employed a more iterative approach when it comes to the relation between theory and data, moving back-and-forth between the two. I have used theories of solidarity not as a mechanical hypothesis to test but as a "source of inspiration" (Kennedy, 2018: 6), and stayed sensitive to what the data might present that requires modification or rejection of such theory. While I have not thrown out solidarity theory, I have for example needed to adopt a more nuanced theoretical take on what might be considered political or contentious.

On a concrete level, analysis really begins with transcription**,** as its entextualisation unavoidably involves choices of selection and representation of reality, and the transformation of the dynamic to the static (Jenks, 2018: 10). Still, combined with transparency this can be

embraced instead of problematised, and transcription is often seen "inherently productive" (ibid: 7). The active choices I made began with conducting a standard orthographic transcription. I used an automated transcription tool which I then combed through manually. Modification choices were to include important extralinguistic elements such as pauses, laughter, sighs, irony and overall emotional intensity of the conversation at certain points (Bazeley, 2021). Analytic decisions regarding false starts and "um"s or "mm,"s were often made in situ, depending on whether they signified changes in the direction of thought or interactional confirmations (ibid). Regarding formality I took a vernacular approach (Jenks, 2018), especially relevant in Swedish interviews where I preserved original speech patterns which often take an informal character, e.g. in dropping syllables. Similarly, I have not corrected grammatical errors in either English or Swedish, as I wished to retain authenticity and not to "sanitise" marginalised forms of English (ibid). I conducted analysis directly on Swedish transcripts, and for presenting quotes in my results I made literal translations, keeping the style and manner of the speaker.

Broadly, the coding and analysis process took the following steps. First, using Atlas.ti software, I conducted open coding with descriptive and structural codes that resulted in a mapping of the more concrete aspects each interview covered: mentoring goals, goal-related results, mentoring methods, experienced similarities and differences, and experiences of equality and/or hierarchy. Second, drawing both from the literature and my own data, I identified the theoretical concepts of solidarity and humanitarianism as relevant frames for my analysis, along with the related concepts of equality and hierarchy, charity and reciprocity, similarity and difference. Third, I conducted focused coding by re-reading the transcripts and applying my key thematic concepts. I took care not to de-contextualise quotations or assume my analytical concepts were mutually exclusive (Saldaña, 2013: 207-208), which proved important since multiple conflicting frames were at times present in interviewees' stories. Finally, I used writing out the results as a tool for analysis in itself (Bazeley, 2021; Saldaña, 2013). Still, in reality, the process was even more iterative than described here, with each stage of reading, coding, and writing overlapping further.

3.4 Ethics & positionality

Ethical considerations & reciprocity in interviewing

In addition to what has been discussed above, some further measures were taken to ensure the research process be transparent and just. Whereas the original Nordic research project only demanded verbal consent, for this thesis I sent out a more detailed information sheet and secured consent in writing before each interview. In the consent form I clarified the two parallel research aims and their separate thematic focuses, and explained how the data would be handled. Recognising that consent is an ongoing process also in research (Klykken, 2022), after each interview I reminded participants of their right to withdraw their consent or to leave out specific details of their accounts, and I cut out some details accordingly. I assured each participant confidentiality, and especially that their own pair would not be involved in the project. This was important for participants to speak freely and feel secure that their pairs would not find out about comments made about them.

In this writeup, I have given semantically coherent pseudonyms to both the mentoring programme and the third sector organisation it operates in. While a total obscuring of the public links between me and my work is impossible, I chose pseudonymisation in order to limit the immediate recognition of the programme, thus granting another layer of concealment of my participants' identities. Moreover, all interviewees have themselves been anonymised, and given a pseudonym to not depersonalise the data (Heaton, 2022). Initially I asked all interviewees if they would like to choose their own pseudonym, but all preferred to let me choose. As such, I followed Steel et al. (2019) study on pseudonymisation in a migrant mentoring context, and selected pseudonyms starting with an M for mentors, and an A for mentees, in line with the Swedish term "adept" or the Finnish "aktori". Given that pseudonymisation has identity-framing and positioning effects, I wanted to avoid favouring Finnish, Swedish, or English names, especially as migrants already face discrimination based on their names (Ahmad, 2020). Instead, I followed some carefully balanced tactics of pseudonymising participants from diverse backgrounds (Lulle, 2021; Saunders et al., 2015), and hand-picked names from linguistic traditions that resonate with the participants' distinctive backgrounds without revealing too much.

Given the small circles in the Swedish-speaking community, in certain migrant groups in Helsinki, in the even smaller number of those who have participated in PAUS or among those studying Swedish in an integration course, there was a risk that others may identify the participants through my account. For this reason I have not specified my participants' exact countries of origin and I occasionally leave out other personal details, especially when multiple facts in combination could lead to de-anonymisation. Thus, I present my results thematically rather than through overview tables or vignettes of individual interviewees.

In addition to these measures, the idea of reciprocity which is theoretically central to this thesis also features strongly in my own ethical commitments. I recognise that the researcher's responsibilities extend beyond the "do no harm" principle, require examining hierarchies in the research relationship, and working towards a mutual give-and-take (Krause, 2017; Huisman, 2008). For this reason, an early thesis plan considered using Participatory Action Research (PAR) methods. In the end, my limited resources meant it was not feasible to live up to the ideal of deep, cyclical engagements and collaboration between researcher and researched (Kemmis et al., 2014). Especially with migrants there was a concern that my participants would not get anything tangible out of the process in exchange for their time and knowledge. Yet, I still carried with me PAR's general ethical insights of reciprocity and practice-oriented critique – which of course have been argued for elsewhere too, notably in feminist and decolonial methodology (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Thus, it was important that the research process should not be extractive, but as reciprocal as possible – a methodological insight which also ended up characterising the social relations within this study.

In practice, to make interviews more of a mutual conversation I employed as much as I could of both "strict" and "complementary" reciprocity (Johnson, 2011). "Strict reciprocity", or the sharing of in-group experiences, for me involved, when it felt appropriate, volunteering some personal information about my own experiences of migration, return-migration, integration, and cross-cultural relationships. Although I am not a migrant in Finland and here enjoy the privileges of citizenship and whiteness, and though our migration experiences have been very different, this often led to recognition, even to palpable relief that I could understand them on a personal level. These tactics lessened the experienced hierarchy between us, helped establish trust, and facilitated a warmer, mutual conversation. Trust is fundamental to establish in all

qualitative interviews, but is even more important in the context of migration, where mistrust conditions the relations between migrants and officials, especially on irregular migration paths (Krause, 2017; van Liempt and Bilger, 2018), which some of my participants had previously taken.

Additionally, I engaged in "complementary reciprocity", that is sharing of assistance or information (Johnson, 2011). When triggering painful memories for research, such assistance must involve a compassion, empathy and reflective listening, and knowing when to stop probing (Brounéus, 2011). Our interview topics covered war, loss, and discrimination, and many interviewees expressed surprise at how deep in emotional territory we suddenly found ourselves. I actively took the role of an empathic listener, showing through facial expressions and body language – if not words – that I was emotionally and intellectually present, focused on their story and appreciating that they chose to share often very intimate details with me. While discussing participants' current challenges, I could also offer them what I have learned from the experiences of others in their situation, and I recommended appropriate services such as the guidance counseling offered by Porten when I felt this could solve some practical questions for individual participants.

Finally, my research also has the ethical aim of feeding back into larger praxis. Many participants responded enthusiastically to recruitment emails, and in interviews expressed that a motivation for speaking to me was to show others in their situation the benefits of mentoring, and to give feedback to me how the programme could be more effective. Although I do take a critical perspective on the practice, I felt a sense of duty to root my critique firmly in their experience, and ultimately to deliver something that could be useful in developing services for their peers. Following Huisman's observations of researching migrant communities, I thus attempted to "integrate service and research" (2008: 392) as an ethical imperative both on the individual and community levels. In a way, this also follows PAR's ideal of research being a "practice-changing practice" (Kemmis et al., 2014: 26). While the extent of my impact is limited, having any at all was made possible precisely because of my personal position and the close relation between the research aims and the service aims. Thus, the next important ethical consideration is evaluating how my positionality affected the interviewees experience and the knowledge produced in this thesis.

Reckoning with entangled positionality

My relationship to the interview participants has some very important implications. The main concern regards my professional entanglement with the case study: having been the coordinator of PAUS, I knew all participants well from before and had a professional but warm relationship to them. The countless conversations I have had over the years with PAUS participants about their struggles and joys have certainly influenced the direction of this research, crucially by motivating the choice of topic, driving the research questions, and informing analytic decisions. Above all, I had long observed the deep social importance that mentoring connections can have, and I knew of cases where the encounter had caused either genuine transformation or disillusionment. I thus knew that immigrant mentoring cannot be reduced to an employment-enhancing practice, and that within it is a complex power-landscape where different hierarchies can be either reinforced or negotiated. Viewed in this light, my insider position not only facilitated access and aided sample selection of "active" participants, but also provided a first-hand understanding of the context, and an already existing basis for trust.

Regardless of the benefits, conducting research in our professional domains carries risks (Taylor, 2015). The first theme of risks concerns hierarchy. Despite my attempts at reciprocity, a power imbalance remained between us due to my past role as coordinator. This presents a possible limitation, since my participants may have emphasised the positive aspects of their mentoring, both because I represented the organisation that they may still rely on for support, and because I personally had facilitated their matching, they may have said what they thought I wanted to hear. To create at least some separation, it was important that I had mentally and practically distanced myself from the programme by giving up coordinating duties, and that I selected interviewees who were no longer officially enrolled in the programme. Furthermore, the power imbalance between me and the mentee participants was exacerbated due to my own secure position as Finnish citizen and my privilege as a white woman. Although all of them had some form of residence permit, many held worries caused by imminent changes to permit regulations. Some – those I had known the longest – saw the interview as an opportunity to vent about these worries, and expressed relief at being able to talk to me, compared to the colder and bureaucratic approach required of e.g. TE-office staff. Others, however, were hesitant to

express negative experiences or opinions on any stereotypes about Finns or migrants, perhaps avoiding topics for fear of repercussions or that I simply would not understand.

However, despite the norm of discussing positionality in terms of "insider/outsider" status, multiple migration scholars argue that this binary is reductive of the complex and fluid roles between researcher and researched (Fedyuk and Zentai, 2018; Gawlewicz, 2016; Song and Parker, 1995). In my case, gender brought me closer to all participants, and me being Swedish speaking created an immediate understanding with these mentors. As I was younger than many mentors, age separated me from these and brought me closer to some mentees. Education, cultural and ideological standpoints were equally relevant as ethnicity for establishing trust and ease. In this varied field of similarities and differences I employed a "politics of connection", whereby "worked-for connectivity is based upon a searching out and a recognition of points of disconnection, and a getting closer to others through inhabiting, accounting for and putting to work the distances between us" (Gunaratnam, 2003: 27). In other words, I focused on different commonalities with each interviewee to make the situation feel informal, natural, and less hierarchical, and otherwise signalled complicity and empathy through words, body language, and humour – all while reflexively interrogating the remaining differences between us. As with reciprocity, this process too has clear parallels to the active identification work done by mentors and mentees when establishing their relationship.

The second theme of risks are epistemological, and involve the difficulty researcher-professionals may have in suspending their own professional assumptions and steering clear of imposing any preconceived frameworks (Taylor, 2015: 40-41). I have been conscious of the risk of allowing certain terms – notably "integration" – to slip over from the professional setting to the academic and thus that I would reify the categories of "migrants" and "Finns" and their hierarchical societal order. In this thesis I challenge the terms, but in interviews I had to engage with them as salient categories, for example using "integration" as a placeholder for multiple meanings, because of the existing shared practice of using it as a catch-all term.

Related to epistemological concerns is also the question of how my ideological commitments to anti-racism, equality and reciprocity in ethnic relations affected the research. A sociological convention has been not studying fields one has a political or ideological stake in (Taylor, 2015:

41). However, a subjectivist epistemology, especially of the constructivist or postmodern variety, rejects the idea that research ever can be value free or neutral. Pretending to write from a zero-point would what Donna Haraway has called a “god trick”, or “seeing everything from nowhere,” (1988: 582, cited in Bhavnani et al., 2020). Thus, there is today a large body of work in sociology that accepts or invites morally driven research, as the alternative of claiming neutrality is often seen as a non-desired, misleading approach (Rapley, 2011). Of course, rejecting the possibility of objective interpretation puts an even higher onus on reflexivity and accountability (Bhavnani et al., 2020; D’Arcangelis, 2018), and so I have in the above sections attempted a thorough account of choices made in the process.

4 Relations from charitable integration to reciprocal solidarity

The following three sections scrutinize what different intergroup relations were born out mentoring for the interviewees. First, I analyse mentoring as an integration practice focused on outcomes and consider how the traditional frame was negotiated with participants. Second, I look at the relationship dynamic itself, focusing on experiences of hierarchy and reciprocity. Third and last, I will return to mentoring as an intersubjective relationality using the theoretical framework of solidarity.

4.1 Mentoring as an integration practice

The task-oriented purpose of mentoring

What happens in a mentoring relation is shaped heavily by the wishes, goals and needs of the mentee. Despite considerations for equality, the primary driver of PAUS mentoring remains the idea that the programme is *for* immigrants. The situation and wishes of the mentee had determined – at least initially – what all participants believed the purpose of mentoring was. In this way, the starting point for mentoring falls under integration practice as a unilateral project (Rytter, 2019; Schinkel, 2018). These explicit goals do not describe everything that the mentoring relationship became; however, it was a practical and intuitive (if not prescribed) starting point for mentoring.

The reasons that the interviewed mentees joined the programme were varied, as was the case for the "invisible mentees", that is the mentees of the interviewed mentors, whose stories are here included as second-hand accounts. Although all mentees were somehow ultimately working towards finding secure employment in Finland, this took different forms in practice. Some had been unemployed at the start of the mentoring and were actively looking for jobs, some had jobs but felt these positions were insecure or did not correspond to their education level and interests, and some were enrolled in integration plans, at vocational school or university. Thus, the mentees' employment-related wishes for mentoring, expressed at the start of their six-month period, included job search support in the form of getting advice from their mentor and learning from their experience, expanding their field-specific professional network, or – reflecting the general high educational level of PAUS participants – support in getting into, or out of, academia.

In addition to this, the initial goals also included Finnish or Swedish language practice, generally experiencing and learning about Finnish culture and society, acquiring specific information, or for those who had very recently arrived, getting to know the capital city and surrounding areas. Yet another motivation, corresponding to a common plight of migrants' social lives in Finland, was exemplified by one mentee: "That time I was really lonely. I didn't have any friends, actually. Yeah, of course, I had some [friends from my home country], but (...) I didn't have that from local people, friends." It is worth noting that this project's sample selection for employment-related goals was based on information from the application stage, while these are the participant's own post-mentoring accounts. Thus, it is clear that even in cases where employment initially may have motivated sending an application form to PAUS, there had already been an overall shift away from the professional aspects – either at the time of expressing one's goals to the mentor, or upon remembering them after a longer time.

The interviewed participants who had employment-related goals all saw improvements in this arena. Two mentees moved from unemployment into full-time positions that corresponded to their education, skills and interests – as did the mentee of a mentor participant. Another mentee moved from a less secure job to a stable one, both in her field. Yet another mentee was already on track to get a job, studying through an integration course towards a role in a high-demand field of work, but she still felt that her mentor's network could later be of help in finding work. One of these mentees also got tools and information related to specific questions she had about her neurodivergent child with special assistance needs, which was a prerequisite for being able to work. One interviewed mentee secured teaching practice in the mentor's workplace, despite having to drop it when it clashed with the delivery of her child. One mentee and one mentor's pair got academic support, respectively in planning for a PhD and in finishing one. One mentor's mentee had been in an integration course during mentoring, and with improved language skills had continued into further education. Similarly, a mentor's mentee moved on from a language course and eventually got an internship with the possibility of turning into full employment. Another mentor told of her mentee struggling to get appropriate jobs and then getting an industry-relevant internship right after the mentoring period.

Because employment questions were not relevant for all participants, the overall outcomes also included improved language skills, learning about Finnish history, culture and society, and exploring the city through a longer-term-locals' eyes. Regarding language improvement, this was slow but meaningful. Azar emphasised that, in contrast to language courses, "it has effect when you're talking with native tongue", and Molly stated she noticed the "gradual integration in Finnish society" when her mentee began using "joo" or "noniin" as casual filler words, as well as ordering and paying for things using Finnish.

Goals related to exploring Finnish culture and society were often met by simply "doing culture", by which I mean the hands-on experience and exchange of cultural practice, which is commonly seen in mentoring but which has enjoyed less theorisation (Crijns and De Cuyper, 2022). Borrowing from Asikainen's "doing integration" (2023: 4), I also use this term to emphasise how in the lived experience, a personal or social re-interpretation of integration-as-employability often arises. For example, for Ayda, Azar and Märta culture was a strong focus for the mentoring, and they all attended events, historical sites, and "did" seasonal celebrations, such as baking cinnamon bread for "lillajul" or "pikkujoulu". These participants spoke highly of what the programme had meant for them, especially in respect to their expectations. In fact, doing culture was something that touched most participants: the two most common ways to meet were walking in central Helsinki or on nature paths near where they lived, and visiting cafés for a coffee, tea, or treats. Some also visited museums, the cinema, concerts, parks and beaches – all of which are relaxed activities that both "PAUS" as a pseudonym and the real name of the programme allude to. In these instances, the mode of meeting often became a vehicle for making sense of their own positions in relation to Finnish culture and society, something which in turn can create a sense of belonging (Asikainen, 2023: 14).

Doing culture quite inevitably becomes a conversation, a sharing of one's practices in both directions. For example, Maria tried a dance from her mentee's country of origin, "which was very fun and I enjoy a lot", she laughingly told me. For mentors, their access to their mentees' homes provided unique social and cultural insight, for example into the mentee's culinary culture as they shared home-made meals or visited well-chosen restaurants: Amrita humorously tells of when her mentor, a person grown up in Finland, paid a visit to her home and dealt with the level of spice in traditional dishes, and Molly appreciates being taken to eat

more than just “always these very *classic* dishes”. In general, centring meetings around food was a way for many to access each others’ cultures first hand while raising interest and understanding for it – a type of encounter that fits the manner that “two-way integration” (Klarenbeek, 2021) is often employed in the field: as a concrete, culturally expansive experience. Moreover, food itself has been studied as something that gives a reciprocal twist to hospitality relations, where the guest getting to cook for the host can instil a sense of autonomy and agency (Vandervoort, 2017).

The idea of access takes on another layer of significance, since in all this “doing culture” often meant that participants visited each others’ hobbies and homes. Access to such local, symbolic and physical space was even more important for those who had arrived as newcomers, as even semi-public places like hobby clubs and other local practices have barriers to entry in the form of costs, information, or expected socio-cultural capital and pre-existing know-how. Through their mentors and their networks, mentees got new hobbies: Ayda and her mentor walked in the forest, which she continues doing, while Anna learned to bike and found a swimming instructor through her mentor, and so learned this new skill. Moreover, another significant act happened as multiple mentors invited their mentees to their private homes and summer cabins, breaking a symbolic barrier between migrant “outsiders” and the symbolically powerful space of a Finnish home – itself arguably a political act (Merikoski, 2021). Ayda concisely states how the personal and private defined the mentoring encounter:

> if you have a job, you go to job, you made your job, and you return your life. But this is not job! That’s why this is volunteer thing, and that’s why she take me to her life. (Ayda)

As the PAUS framework in fact encourages participants to do home visits and share hobbies, the type of access and social integration she describes is an accomplishment within the programme’s own terms. At the same time as breaking social boundaries, however, the mentor pair’s actions also transgress the ideological, symbolic separation between migrants and citizens. Thus, the mentoring takes on a double-edged function: it embodies at once the logic of integration, and a counter-logic of connection, something of a qualitatively different, even political, character.

In sum, the concrete goals set out at the beginning of mentoring were to a great extent met, and each pair completed at least one of their goals. All participants summarised the mentoring as beneficial, helpful, rewarding, or the like. As such, using an "integration" frame, the overwhelmingly positive results suggest that mentoring "works": it produces employment outcomes, linguistic improvement, and brings migrants, especially women, closer to working life and participating in Finnish society. The participants themselves often discuss in the language of "integration", but their practices of doing culture and opening up spaces for each other highlights how the mentoring practice at one can be understood as conducive to integration and a more transgressive practice involving personal interpretations of what integration is or should be.

Claiming and conceding agency over achievements

Determining exactly how much causal influence a programme or a mentor has on their mentee's achievements is a conundrum for measurement (Gower et al., 2022), especially without a control group. Still, the ways that agency was *discussed* by participants points to how in mentoring, power relations – including those of a conventional integration paradigm – are actively engaged with and brought to the fore. On one hand, all mentee participants do talk of help received. They tell of these achievements being aided by the information, tools, and support gained directly *from* the mentors, or due to the extension of the mentees' networks *through* the mentor. An example of the former, Aleksandra is clear in the effect her mentor had on her journey: "that person has been sitting with me preparing for each, like stage of the application process (…) So the experience built through that did help". Her mentor had notable insight into recruitment practices, and so the mentoring took a hands-on form. She summarises: "I was following a lot of these resources that they gave me and it worked out. Like it really, really helped." Notable examples of mentors' networks leading to jobs for mentees are the cases of Anna and Marianne's mentee, who both found opportunities through their mentors' contacts' companies, and after screening were hired in their own fields.

However, some mentees were themselves aware of the conundrum of where to attribute causality. For example, in telling me how she came across the open position through her mentor's partner, Anna claims her own agency in the story, stating, "But I get job not because of that." Instead, she assesses:

> It was combination for me of everything that I've done before I've got here in Finland because I've studied all the time, I tried to... update my skills, my knowledge (...) it was like the combination, I think, the right place, right time and maybe right person, me as a right person at the same time. (Anna)

Speaking later of her mentor and attending Porten's guidance counselling, as well as other services she had used in Finland, Anna again highlights this:

> For me, every person did specifically what I needed at that moment. As I said: I don't need someone who will solve all of this for me. I needed someone who will give me this like, you know, support, encourage me, strength to do something, stuff, and provide me information I need to use, like, all of this stuff. (Anna)

Here, she is in control, *using* her mentor, the third sector and public services as tools to her own ends, almost in defiance of a surrounding world that wants to diminish her capability. Similarly, in order to recognise such agency of the mentees, causality in mentoring must be seen as more nuanced than paternalistic versions of the integration or humanitarian paradigms admit. That is, mentoring achievements are produced not only moving from mentor to mentee, but in a complex web of inputs and acts. This is highlighted as the mentors, too, are hesitant to claim causality over their mentee's achievements, but prefer to attribute agency to their pairs. For example, Monika praises her mentee as "entrepreneurial" and "a very active woman who maybe just needs sparring and a sounding board – just as one might need oneself". Likewise, about her mentee's language improvements she positions herself as a bystander: "she is very, very accomplished and skilled in Swedish. So it was just a pure pleasure to follow that development." In the same vein, Molly does not feel she did all that much:

> you might give a little push, but it's totally her who has then realised that 'Hey, maybe I can express this instead and do that and emphasise these aspects' [...] Of course, as a mentor, you are there to support but to a large extent in the background. (Molly)

In my analysis, these insights do not mean that the mentors *do* very little, but that they do not want to elevate their input at the expense of diminishing their mentees'. The initial, humanitarian wishes to help (discussed in the next section) is thus contrasted with how agency is talked about when actual practice *with* another person has occurred, and a more nuanced understanding of agency emerges from both mentor and mentee.

These stories highlight that mentoring can facilitate "integration achievements" in two ways: first, by building on the mentee's capabilities by *augmenting* their existing range of abilities

and giving *context-specific* information and tools, including by being an available emotional support and *sounding board* open for discussion and feedback, and second, by providing *access* to new situations, spaces, people, and opportunities. Here the effects of the mentors' effect are clearest in that they provide information and encourage psychosocial integration effects like self-efficacy and confidence (Gower et al., 2022; Jaschke et al., 2022), and since they facilitate other new encounters, providing "bridging capital" (De Cuyper et al., 2019), in turn crucial to the networks necessary to finding work in Finland (Jämsén, 2016; Karlsdóttir et al., 2017). Conceived thus, the mentors' inputs explain the often urgent necessity of mentoring for migrants, while also recognising the agency of the mentees' and their inputs towards the outcomes. While mentoring produces results desired by the integration paradigm (jobs, language skills, etc.), it is already clear that it simultaneously becomes a space where the power dynamic between mentor/citizen and mentee/migrant demands the participants' attention.

4.2 Finding the relationship dynamic

So far it is clear that while migrant mentoring can facilitate straight-forward, integrative practice, the space the mentor pair inhabits is at the same time vast: the time frame is long, the possible activities broad. This enables a variety of dynamics to develop, and when sustained, the mentoring relation inevitably develops into something more, a relationship in its own right, not controlled by the frames of the program. To understand these possible dynamics, this section explores the relationship between mentor and mentee, discussing power (im)balances by looking at the motivations for joining, the friendships formed and considerations for equality and reciprocity.

The humanitarian starting point for desires to mentor

In the data, the impulse to mentor a migrant seems largely shaped by humanitarian discourse. Regardless of how humanitarianism subsequently was engaged with, it formed a basis, a zero-point to which participants referred and framed their possible subsequent rejections. Although helping a highly educated migrant enter the labour market is intrinsically different to urgent forms of humanitarian aid, the idea of *helping* and *support* were discussed by all mentors. In the most fundamental sense, Molly described the motivation to mentor as "a need to help, maybe, or give support" to this group she had previously observed working in jobs that did not

correspond to their education level – an unfair treatment in her assessment. Through the commonly referred to idea of "helping someone integrate" the link between the humanitarian and integration paradigms was also made clear. The most explicit humanitarian lens was employed by Märta, who actively rejected mentoring being political:

> Of course it's taking a stand. You want to help those who are suffering. But I've never thought of it that way, instead I've thought that it's like what one human should do for another. And forget all politics, forget all religion, forget all that, except for this human contact that is incredibly important. (Märta)

Instead of a context-specific political rationale, the motivation here is closer to humanitarianism's categorical imperatives of what human beings in a universal sense owe each other (della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021). Previously, Märta had donated clothes to Ukraine through initiatives she termed "extremely important", but now wished to do "something concrete […] something more than that". She saw mentoring as a next step from such donations of money and clothes – a classic case of humanitarian "gift-giving" (Papataxiarchis, 2016) – although here she emphasised the comparatively local aspect and direct impact of mentoring. In a similar way, other mentors' initial contact with the idea of mentoring were also based in humanitarian support in the form of "giving of *oneself*" and "one's *time"* to the needy as a gift.

Maria echoed this humanitarian desire of "giving", but, having moved to Finland herself, she based it in her personal experience of trying to establish a life here, where "the struggle sometimes was unbearable". She thus quickly discarded the idea that mentoring is political, focusing on the personal wish to give others the support she never got. Interestingly, her peer-approach can also be interpreted as "mechanical solidarity", a form of internal solidarity among in-group members which does not actively work to find commonality because it is a pre-given (Thijssen, 2012). This in turn suggests that the peer-status does not preclude a humanitarian lens, as the peer-status itself can avoid politicisation and some active work of considering differences.

Another aspect of the desire to mentor that came up was that the mentoring role may be both self-centred and performatively political. In a quite self-aware way, Marianne reflected on this repeatedly:

> But of course, maybe we all carry dreams of getting to save someone. It's probably a little part of this desire to mentor, that when you first think you're going to do it, you might have an unconscious, automatic hope that you'll make a huge difference. It could be.
>
> It is very political. Like, the whole desire to help, the desire to help foreigners specifically. The desire to say something about oneself as a social actor. That you position yourself – I haven't had much opportunity to brag about this, but it's possible, you can put it in your CV. You can tell others that 'Look, I'm international!' (Marianne)

Here, Marianne observes the humanitarian-adjacent discourse of ambitiously "saving someone" as an inherent risk in mentoring migrants, a hubris trap which she suggests she has had to work against falling into. Moreover, as she notes, mentoring may even benefit the mentor more than the mentee, especially if there are direct professional gains, but also if the relation is used by the mentor to improve their self-image, moral conscience or social performance, more than to assuage the immediate material or mental needs of the mentee. In this way, the supposedly selfless humanitarianism is not always opposed to selfish projects, and may in fact overlap. For D'Arcangelis, such "self-making projects" (2022: 53) are an inherent risk in solidarity relations, whereby (white) women draw selfish gains of relieving guilt and extracting social capital by getting into proximity with the Othered and spinning a liberal narrative around it where they position themselves as a saviours – or in this case, good Finnish hosts. As such, the White desires to *help* (humanitarianism) and the desire to *be helped* (self-making) co-exist, though seemingly contradictory (D'Arcangelis, 2018).

Nevertheless, through the way Marianne discusses the initial desire to mentor and the way she now sees her motivations, Marianne attempts to distance herself from the humanitarian paradigm including its self-making variety, while recognising it has played a role. As such, it is possible to at once recognise and reject the paternalistic and selfish approaches. The mentoring period, as well as the interview itself, is what Marianne believed helped her actively reflect on her motivations, and somewhat distance herself from approaching the encounter as a purely self-making project. Thus, it is already here clear that while the humanitarian acts of "helping someone integrate" plays a central role in the desire to mentor, within it exists pockets of critique and self-reflection that complicate the produced intersubjective relation, and which will become even more important as we consider other depths of engagement in mentoring.

Friendship: beyond the prescribed relationship

The pursuit of "local friends" or "international friends" is a common reason that both mentees and mentors join PAUS, making the programme fall somewhere between the two "poles" of favouring objectives and results versus qualitative companionship and social support (De Cuyper et al., 2019: 113). In this study, the sampling focused on mentees who had career-related goals for mentoring, but for many, there was a depth to the relationship also crept up on them since they had not considered mentoring as an encounter that can be so personal, impactful and long-lasting. For example, Ayda wonders at this:

> I mean, it was too much than what I expect, our relationship, but because I didn't expect something like that. I said, 'Okay, she will be my mentor. I will have mentoring just walking, little bit practice Finnish and finish like that'. I was thinking like that. But it became to a really close friends, and… It was too nice. It was surprise for me, actually. (Ayda)

One of the reasons Ayda became so close with her mentor was that they could speak the mentee's mother tongue together, since the mentor had lived in Ayda's home country for many years. She laughs when she states that this became the reason they abandoned their initial goal of Finnish practice, and, despite still struggling with Finnish she is happy about this.

> [My mentor] was– still is, actually, big chance for me in Finland. And… When I have something or when I, you know, feel I'm abroad, then when I thinking about [her]… I can say she's my… How can I say? Yeah, of course, not mother, father, but it's a really close relative, so I can say that. I feel more comfortable. I can say if I have some problem, I can exactly directly call her. I am 100% sure she will help me. (Ayda)

This is an apt example of how initial, quantifiable integration goals deemed fundable by the public sector are in practice subverted as two people meet and define their own relationship and points of connection. Just as Steel and others (2019) have observed in Finnish mentoring practice, sometimes "situation-specific awareness" demands that programme rules be broken to encourage genuine communication on equal terms. And the effect of this choice is clear: while the mentor pair diverged from their path of shaping the migrant into an integrated, productive subject, preferring their own softer, qualitative relation, this in turn did have hugely beneficial effects for Ayda. She tells of the kinship-like relation as a vehicle for belonging (c.f. Junnilainen, 2022), which *did* help her on her "integration" journey, and which *is* recognised as an

achievement in PAUS's own framework. Still, the warmth with which she spoke of her mentor transcends the simple numbers logic of "integration outcomes".

The above also highlights the importance of the mentor as a possible mediator between two cultures. Two other interviewed mentees had mentors who themselves had moved to Finland, and for them peer identity was also an important part of the identification and subsequent friendship. While Aleksandra thinks that her and her mentor's shared background – even their specific "national identity" – was not important for achieving her *professional* goals, it was crucial for forming a friendship:

> A surprise is that I actually made a friendship. It's super difficult to do that when you are an adult. So yeah, that was like the chemistry was kinda surprising. (…) And maybe now that I think about it, probably the immigrant background also kinda helped, because you can talk to people who are locals or who never lived abroad […]. And they can show empathy to you and understand that it is difficult. But those who had the experience like myself and been immigrants in here, they understand how hard is that and how to deal with it. (Aleksandra)

This sentiment was echoed in what Maria felt for her match:

> I think it helped a lot that we have similar- cultural similarities, because I really can sense their pain, you know. Pain of isolation, lost family connection, lack of small talk, you know, hugs ((laughs)), things like that, that in our, in our countries are just the normal, the normal thing. (Maria)

In this way, obvious pre-existing similarities relating to migration journeys were important for identification – "realising cognitive overlap" (Humberd and Rouse, 2016: 435) – and depth of the relationship. In other situations, the "cognitive overlap" did not arise from shared immigrant background or language skills, but the shared ground had to be found or made on other bases. In itself it is not surprising that Finns and migrants became friends. The intersectional perspective tells us that any given social position is an amalgamation of identities, experiences and roles (Yuval-Davis, 2011), meaning that gender, class, education and field of work, sharing cultural references, parental status were also present as important touch-points for identification. Considering such factors, similarity between participants certainly did exist. Yet, differences also abounded, and for this reason I will return to how the experienced sense of commonality was not always given, but made with conscious effort.

While the language of friendship was used to describe most relations, it was used differently and somewhat unevenly among participants. Namely, among the interviewed mentors, the motivation of getting new friends and openly inviting new human connection certainly played a role in joining PAUS. But, the mentors were overall a little more hesitant to describe the relationship as one of "friendship". This can partly be accounted for by cultural differences in defining friendship, in that Finns may have a higher threshold for simply using that label than other cultures. Another part of this hesitance, however, I interpret as a consequence of role clashing, a tension between the *desire for connection* and the *desire to help*. As the relationships played out, these two motivations and their associated roles – being a helping mentor versus being an equal friend – often required different things of the mentors. Märta, who has mentored multiple times, experienced both roles:

> In both cases it has become a friendship, which I think will continue in very different ways. In this second case, it's– it's a woman who, as I said before, is very well-placed, but it's really like, 'Let's go out for dinner or a glass of wine' or something like that. And it's just like – I don't even feel like I'm a mentor in any way. Not at all, instead it's just like we're friends. […] Whereas in the first case it's more like you feel that you're needed in a different way. You know, you're needed for someone to learn and cope in Finland. That like a completely different premise. (Märta)

Both friendship and direct support are clearly important aspects of mentoring, as Märta sees it. Still, the two taken together highlights a central tension in the mentoring dynamic, between the hierarchy implied in helping, and the equality necessarily involved in friendship, it being in its ideal form a fundamentally mutual relation.

Of course, *desiring* friendship has also been criticised as a motivation to engage in solidarity work – for similar reasons as the selfish, self-making projects of white women (D'Arcangelis, 2022). Still, I argue that the presence of friendship in this context should rather be seen as a negation of another possible risk, one more acutely present (and often raised: e.g. Della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021a; Hoggett, 2006): namely that the migrant-majority relation should become one of paternalistic charity. Especially in the asymmetrical integration context, the mutuality of friendship is a first (but not last) step towards rejecting the integration paradigm of migrant-majority relations, in favour of something more personal, possibly profound, and equal.

Reciprocity and equality: disrupting the hierarchy of “helper” and “helped”

The starting point of the PAUS framework does not only call for mentors to share their local expertise. The programme attempts to foster equality in the relationship, by inviting a reverse dynamic, whereby also mentors are encouraged to set their own goals for mentoring and to reflect on what they wish to learn, and mentees to consider what they can teach. Discussions around this happen especially in the one-to-one mapping interview upon registering. However, the relationship can still be affected by prevailing understandings of mentoring as essentially a goal-oriented and top-down practice, or by pre-existing beliefs about the cultural “other”, how you should relate, and what they can give you. Thus, the top-down mentoring model of simply “helping” the mentee, as discussed above under humanitarianism, is present for many pairs. For example, even though Maria is an immigrant in Finland herself, the mentoring role superseded the peer relationship with her mentees. When asked if they ever taught or gave her something in return, she responded: “I wouldn't say so. But it's not because they maybe didn't want to do it, but… I was trying to keep the focus of our relationship on them. Because I felt in a way responsible, maybe.” Similarly, Amrita saw her mentor as “someone more senior” and of “some more higher level”, distinct from peer relationships with colleagues – which to her was the whole point of having a mentor. As such, the seniority in terms of experience in Finland is essential to the goal-oriented purpose of migrant mentoring.

Nevertheless, even when the relationship was asymmetrical in content, the experience of equality between partners was crucial for many. All participants explicitly maintained that they felt they were equals with their pair. While most mentors were aware of the inherent asymmetry in the mentor/mentee role, and some hinted at acknowledging their own position of privilege as (white) citizens, they all strived towards establishing equality. On the inherent problematics, Marianne sums it up: “It's kind of hard for me to… to lead without leading. It’s not possible to be like, super equal. When you’re both constantly aware that this is what it is because I am supposed to help you.” Still, she ultimately described them as friends who arrived at “glimpses of *true* understanding and *true* connection”. Likewise, Monika tells:

> I always strove for [equality] and not to lecture. Because I mean, it’s like– who am I to just– or well, I can tell you certain things about how things are in Finland, how things work, but what's right or wrong and what decision somebody else makes, that’s– it’s not up to me to ever get on my high horse and criticise, instead I absolutely went into it to

> make it an equal relationship. (Monika)

The Finnish mentors reflected on their own privileges by comparing their experiences of living abroad (always through their own free will), and through discussions of what the mentees' did *not* have (social/cultural capital, networks) and the things they have had to do (persevere, endure, keeping their hearts open) – overall, a reverence for the mentees' "strength" was communicated. Thus, among the mentors there was clear evidence of reflections on the *circumstantial* limits to equality – stemming from the mentor/mentee divide and societal hierarchies – but also of attempts to reflect and somewhat to actively overcome these in the *personal* relationship.

Among the mentees, participants conveyed a deep-seated feeling that the equality established in the mentoring relationship was quite different to the ways they have been met by lay people and bureaucratic structures in Finland, thus marking the mentoring as somewhat of a unique experience. For instance, Ayda tells a compelling anecdote about the importance of her mentor constructing her as an equal:

> She never make something to, 'Yes, I am better than you, or I am here, I'm from here, you are, you know, background, you don't have job', something like that. (…) Yeah, I feel that we are equal. Because she, you know, one time, we meet with somebody, with her friend, I think. (…) She introduced me, 'This is [Ayda] and my really good friend', yeah. Yeah, that time I feel really good. She didn't say I'm mentoring her or something like that. She just 'She's my friend'. (Ayda)

Discursively emphasising friendship rather than mentorship thus became a tool for moving away from hierarchy, even if the content of their relationship remained somewhat traditional. Especially by contrast to other mentor-like relationships Ayda had had, the one with her PAUS-mentor stood out as emotionally relieving precisely because of the mentor's redefinition of their relation as more equal. Similar work seemed to have been done by Amrita's mentor:

> I always respect her because she's done her doctoral degree here. But I always tell her she's so humble. Like she don't– I'm nothing in front of her actually, but she's so humble and she don't make anything wrong or like that. She make me so comfortable with her, so equal with her like that. […] that's why we become friends, right? Because when we become friends, we feel like we can– we are equal. (Amrita)

This "being nothing compared to them" at the same time as "being equal to them" highlights the tension between hierarchy and equality in mentoring, but also how the two modes can co-

exist for the mentee, when paired with mentors' emotional work to create comfort, contextualise their experience, and not assert absolute knowledge. As such, from the mentees' stories it also transpires that equality in migrant mentoring is not inherent or inevitable, but a process whereby the mentors, once inside the relationship, actively have to fight and reshape the externally given, hierarchical integration imaginary.

Most participants also saw the voluntary basis for mentoring as important and conducive to their experiences of equality. Especially the mentors were highly sceptical of mentoring models whereby they would need to accept money, as they felt both that this would put more pressure on them to produce tangible results, and that it would be detrimental to the equality and emotional connection between pairs. An experienced mentor, Maria saw this as a fundamental incompatibility: "Just from ethical reasons, [mentors] shouldn't be paid, you know, because you are building relationship on a trust and… you know, a partnership. I don't know how it's possible to build such kind of relationship when one of the pair is paid for it." Some mentees did feel that their own mentors would have deserved monetary compensation for their dedication, and trusted that their mentors would not have acted differently if they had been paid since their motivations were strongly rooted in a moral drive instead of personal (financial) gain. As Anna put it: "I believe that everyone should receive some […] payment for their work, because when people give something, they have to receive something instead." This highlights how still, the main concern is in fact reciprocity. In a fundamental way, all mentees wished the help they received would not go unreturned, which for some even amounted to an unease that they had not provided enough: "for me in this couple, mentor gives more than receives". Thus, mentoring can be uneven and imbalanced, yet, as the mentoring literature argues, such asymmetry concerns content more than the character of the relationship (De Cuyper et al., 2019: 116). Moreover, all interviewed participants understood equality and reciprocity to be an ideal, which even if not completed, they did work towards.

Concretely, the mentoring took a reciprocal form in some specific ways. One type of reciprocity was *peer* mentoring, summoned in pairs where the match was made between two migrants to Finland who in some ways shared experiences of "integrating". In these cases, having an immigrant mentor who helps itself disrupts the helper/helped dichotomy being aligned to migrant/citizen. Moreover, this gave mentees a chance to be directly on par with their mentors,

and both could share experiences of similar struggle. Another form of reciprocity that took place when mentees and mentors was *reverse* mentoring**,** or reverse teaching. As discussed in Section 4.1, an element of this lies the practice of mutually doing culture, which involved cultural learning also from mentees to their mentors. In the case of Märta, it was precisely favouring doing culture over helping directly with job search which enabled her humanitarian desire to help to be supplemented by friendship and mutual exchange, rejecting to some extent the hierarchy between citizen mentor and migrant mentee. Additionally, apart from trying food and experiencing home spaces, *talking culture* was a way of opening up what was not physically experienceable in Finland – things like the cultural position of the family, gender roles, politics, history, the intricacies of their language itself, and other intangible values and customs – a practice which becomes relevant in engaging with difference (Section 4.3).

Yet another way that mentees tried to support their mentors was in situations where they felt they could give reverse professional and emotional support. For example, Aleksandra and Anna tell of "definitely trying" and "really hoping" to do this:

> I was asking from the very beginning, even though I know like it's not supposed to be two-way street, but I really wanted to give something in return. […] I was evaluating some managerial things because I have a very strong managerial background. And I also was providing a lot of, at least, resources and tried to do the support when it came to the mental health. Because I am advocating for […] mental health issues openly and I wanted to always give support to people who need that, so I did that. (…) So it came over the course of mentoring that I was like, 'Oh, I actually know this and maybe this can help'. (Aleksandra)

> I know that she also […] has her own like insecurities or something like this as a person. And, it's really nice that like we also discuss this stuff. She also feels this way that, like, she completely confident in the way how I like, perceive her, how I treat her, […] that she can call me, or ask me about anything. She knows that I will be genuinely happy to help or to support or something like this. […] I really hope that I give her some I don't know, support or something or understanding. […] Yeah, she knows that she has me. (Anna)

Here we see how mentees shared their own professional expertise, emotional support and attention – sometimes even when they perceived it was not required of them. Not every pair had a perfect reciprocal balance, since it remained important that each pair find what works for them. Yet overall, there was a crosscutting strive for reciprocity. This corresponds to the theoretical conception of solidarity as an ongoing negotiation of roles and expectations in a

context of difference, with the goal of a community where all hold responsibility for each other (Dean, 1996; Siim & Meret, 2021: 221). Additionally, the reciprocity evidenced in the participants supports the idea of situated expertise, the intersectional idea that other axes than the migrant-citizen one are relevant to considering who we provide to each other (Yuval-Davis, 2011): age, specific work and life experience, parenthood, hobbies and emotional skills all played a part in letting mentees shift into expert role. As a result, the integration logic of helped and helped, and the humanitarian logic of giving are disrupted, transgressed matter-of-factly by these acts.

Importantly, the mentees' wish for reciprocity also extended beyond their "concrete others", meaning their own mentors, to a "generalised other", meaning the larger community (Dean, 1996: 37-38). Anna reflects:

> I really hope that maybe at some point [my interview] will help someone. When you get something from world, you need to give something, like, circle of support or circle of energy that will provide something good to this world, something positive. And I even thought about [becoming] a mentor maybe, in some of your programs. [...] Sometimes I feel bad that I don't give enough or something like this because I'm so busy at building all of my life. But still, like you know, it seems like- I have enough of success. Now I need to give something. (Anna)

Visible here is a much wider desire among mentees to give back to others, in the wish to volunteer as mentors themselves or somehow else pay forward the support they got – which touches on the spirit in which mentees eagerly agreed to these very interviews. As such, I argue that reciprocal circularity may arise also *after* mentoring or with external persons, since the experience of being helped individually by a mentor can hammer home a societal *ideal* of reciprocity, even if it does not translate to helping one's actual mentor. As Dean argues, reflective solidarity is fundamentally about "the mutual expectation of a responsible orientation to relationship" including in wider society (Dean, 1996: 3). Through her use of the "generalised other", reciprocity becomes a way of considering not only personal relations but fundamental approaches to relationships (ibid: 38).

Finally, regarding the *mutual* expectation for reciprocal relations, it is worth reiterating that mentors in the programme welcomed the idea of circularity. Of the mentor role, Marianne says: "you think you are not only on the giving side, but that you also have to be open to learning

yourself". Märta, in addition to the concrete things she learned about her mentees' countries, cultures and languages, summarises: "it has been incredibly rewarding, it was like, mutual [...] it's never just one way, it goes both ways". The metaphor of a two-way street lies further away from the humanitarian "helping" vocabulary that was used to describe initial motivations. These two ways of thinking certainly do appear together, in mentors and in the world – and mentors may of course influenced by broader public "two-way integration" discourse – but, it is evident that in speaking directly about their relationship, it became much harder for mentors to maintain simply a position of charitable helper, and much more complex, contextually embedded dynamic between sometimes-peers appeared.

4.3 Mentoring as a solidarity practice

This section considers what mentoring is beyond being an integration practice. Since I have showed that the relationships are not fully captured by the hierarchical integration paradigm, I here use the concept of solidarity as a complement to help describe what else the relation becomes. Following Jodi Dean (1996) and more contemporary research on migration and inter-ethnic relations (e.g. della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021a; Siim & Meret, 2021), I have defined solidarity as 1) the active building of relations through practice and engagement with difference, 2) with an implicit or explicit political dimension, 3) based on the ideal as well as enacted principle of mutuality or reciprocity. The previous section showed how reciprocity, a main feature of solidarity, was crucial to participants and the mentoring relation. Now, I turn to the remaining two criteria, namely the active building of relations through difference, and how inviting difference can be considered political.

Active presence and engaging with difference

Engaging with difference must begin, naturally, with there being active engagement at all. In its essence, facilitated mentoring is an active exercise in coming together, asking questions and probing to learn about a stranger and their lifeworld, offering advice, showing vulnerabilities, taking initiative for meeting up, and staying accountable to one's pair. To do all this, one must *choose* to register, read materials, show up to interviews and the introduction meeting, and subsequently keep choosing to be an active part of the programme and one's pair's life. This

meant that all of the participants a priori filled a vital criterion of solidarity relations, namely that it is an *activity* rather than a state of *being* (Schwiertz and Schwenken, 2020: 408).

Moreover, as we in the interviews moved from discussing initial motivations to the mentoring process itself, the language used by mentors (and to some extent by mentees) clearly moved from the discourse of "giving" and "helping" towards the language of "experiencing". Such experiences – entering new spaces, trying new foods, seeing sights and listening to new music – were exactly those discussed above in terms of *doing culture*. This means that *doing culture* – when it involves reciprocal engaging with both the mentor's and mentee's home cultures in a hands-on manner – is a practice that contrasts humanitarian helping and that goes beyond producing integration-results. Instead, experiencing mentoring is thus more about existing in a space that enriches and teaches us about other traditions and ways of doing and being. As such, despite the humanitarian discourse which serves as a backdrop to many desires to mentor, the active, *lived* process of mentoring becomes more solidaristic.

Another way that difference was engaged with was through *talking culture*, a similarly negotiative practice of making sense of our cultural surroundings. One of the most inevitable parts of social intercultural mentoring (Crijns and De Cuyper, 2022), here too every pair had had countless discussions around the traditions, values and cultural ideals of the cultures they had grown up in, including stereotypes and what they saw as negative cultural features. For example, both Molly and Anna reflected on how approaches to rules and hierarchy at work and in educational institutions are different in Finland and in other cultures. For both, less stark hierarchies and the possibility to express one's opinions freely were seen as positive features in Finnish working culture. Maria, on the other hand, had discussed with her mentees how individualism affects private relationships, and empathised with the difficulty of dealing with "the individualistic attitude to everything that 'mine is mine, yours is yours, and we get together when we decide to'". Similarly, Azar had struggled with cultural differences in making friends and dealing with the timekeeping and straight-forwardness of Finns, but with time spent in Finland and through discussing some of these differences with her mentor, she found a place of acceptance and respect:

> she's very on time. I remember one time I was, I think, five or six minutes late. She was sad! ((laughing heartily)) 'Why I arrived late?' All the time she come with a plan

> when we want to meet. It was not like, 'Okay, let's meet... like go for a walk. No. Before she had a plan where we want to and what she want to say and how to describe the place and the history of the place. [...] All the time, I learn new things from her. Our relation is very good and we respect each other a lot. (Azar)

Undeniably, there is a presence of integration discourse when the pairs describe how they talk culture – the assumption being that immigrants eventually should learn from the great Finnish ways. Yet, the spirit of many exchanges was that neither culture was *objectively* better, and the reflections were still exploratory and hesitant, suggesting careful reflection had taken place, but that the values of any cultural practice even for the individual was subject to shifts. And, fundamental to the mentoring relations was especially mutual respect. As such, I arrive again at Dean's (1996) reflective solidarity, which sees difference as inevitable, and engagement with it *constitutive* of solidaristic relations. Instead of invisibilising or glossing over differences in favour of cohesion – like often done in white women's appeal to "sisterhood" (Dean, 1996: 15; D'Arcangelis, 2022, Mohanty, 2002) – reflective solidarity involves "that openness to difference which lets our disagreements provide the basis for connection." (Dean, 1996: 17). What mentor pairs then do through talking culture, when combined with active engagement, listening and respect, is an investigation of differences, wherein the questioning itself becomes a process of bonding (Dean, 1996: 8, 15).

Thus, many friendships were not only based on similarity, but in a building of relations *through* difference and towards commonality. Märta and Monika sum up how experiencing together and listening to the other was key to finding commonality:

> you can get different things out of different kinds of people, and your own understanding of people gets so much better too, and you understand other cultures and things like that, in a completely different way. And other worlds! Because people can be so incredibly different, in themselves. [...] That's not what one *learns*, it's what one *does*, more like listening to people and finding something that you notice that both have in common despite being so different. That's perhaps the most interesting thing, and that's why you stick together afterwards. (Märta)

> We also discussed a lot about culture and cultural preconditions and differences and things like that, and what is still similar behind certain ones. Many people can get hung up on something that seems so separate, but behind that we can still be very similar and, yeah. So we also had very interesting discussions about that. (Monika)

Certainly, the mentor pairs had pre-existing similarities, such as gender (all being women),

education and shared cultural touchpoints (all having at least a bachelor's degree), and age (many having been matched with someone relatively close in age, which itself decreased the likelihood of age-based hierarchy present in traditional mentoring). Yet, country of origin was a highly salient category of difference for interviewees, surely also impacted by the very frame of the "migrant mentoring" programme itself. Considering this difference, it seems clear from Azar's, Märta's and Monika's comments that the shared ground was not pre-given but arrived at through activities, conversations, and establishing common rules like respect. As such, the cross-cultural encounters highlighted certain differences for participants, which all took to constitute richness rather than impediment. In turn, this suggests that mentoring relatively easily facilitated one part of solidaristic relations, namely engaging with cultural difference.

The everyday politics of inviting difference and discomfort

Since cultural differences between participants do not exist in a vacuum outside of the world's power hierarchies, it is also important to consider how difference, seen as diverging positions of power and privilege were engaged with. As D'Arcangelis argues, drawing on the work of Sara Ahmed, the real problem with solidarity as self-making projects and proximity discourse is that it can obscure the historical relation of inequality and oppression (2022: 56). For example, discussion of differences of race and class were noticeably absent in most interviews, and a lot of "difference" was talked about as "cultural", showing how "racial logic is often disguised in the language of cultural differences" (Keskinen, 2021: 202). Still, racism in the form of a more generally termed discrimination against migrants in everyday life and on the labour market was something participants were aware of. Especially since most had a similar class position, if education is understood as a signifier of class and higher social capital, their otherwise different social positions in Finland suggested that it was the intersections of class with race, ethnicity, and religion which produced inequalities.

Nevertheless, in a basic way, joining mentoring programme for mentors was a way of mobilising values against cultural or national hierarchy: all of the mentor interviewees emphasised that the task was a concrete way of employing latent beliefs and values. For example, Marianne described her decision to join as based in

> that general positive thing that I'm not against immigration. Well, this is a way of doing

> it concretely. I think I said to someone in the spring that 'Yeah, I'm this typical liberal woman, nice, nice, but I'm trying to become a person who does more kind of concrete things'. So this was the answer. (Marianne)

Very similarly, Monika also reflected on the active mobilisation of her values:

> You kind of gave your voice to diversity and intercultural communication and to a Finland that is open and does not close its borders. And that's the kind of Finland I want to work for and want to live in. It's the kind of Finland I want my children to grow up in. Not a xenophobic, closed Finland. So... Even if I didn't consciously think that way at the time, I realise that it was probably a very strong position. (Monika)

On Dean's view (1996: 13-14), this is an expression of solidarity beyond the recognition, affirmation, and inclusion of the Other as seen above regarding cultural differences, instead centring on her own sense of community and responsibility in shaping the Finland of future generations. Even if only verbalised after having done it, mentoring for Monika became the active engagement towards the future she wishes to see, which itself can be seen as an individual-level instance of prefigurative politics (Raekstad and Gradin, 2019). Moreover, the change over time in her view on whether mentoring is political itself can be considered an example of how solidarity is a transformative endeavour (Featherstone, 2012): "solidarity" does not need to be the frame with which one enters the fold, but an intersubjective relation which is produced in the very process of *doing* together.

As discussed above, some mentors did favour a humanitarian lens and explicitly rejected the notion that mentoring migrants should be seen as a political stance. On the other end of the spectrum, however, some showed actively being political in a contentious way, toward an explicit "enemy" (Featherstone, 2012: 11-12). Monika continued her thoughts on the politics of mentoring to outline who that "enemy" was:

> When we started our mentorship, we had a different government. Now it has become much more, very right-wing, strongly so, and with a lot of xenophobic views in the government. And there are so many things that I'm afraid will become mainstream, like that it would be okay to say certain things that members of the government say. So today I believe that it's an even bigger political, what should we say, demonstration that you undertake to become a mentor, it can certainly be considered in a different way. (Monika)

In Monika's view, mentoring also *becomes* more political the more explicitly defined the enemy is. This partly corresponds to more conventional theories of solidarity as contentious (albeit not

collective) action towards an explicit enemy (Featherstone, 2012). Still, what relegates the government from Monika's sense of "us" is its own exclusionary politics and failure to include as many as she would like in the solidarity community of Finland – something which again takes us back to Dean's discursively constructed third as a useful political tool, but which does not preclude *in*clusion as the primary motivator for solidarity (1996: 43).

Apart from contentious critique of the larger community, engaging with difference in a solidaristic way also requires looking inwards and considering one's personal privilege. As Klarenbeek argues (2024: 244), "not only do relational integration processes [as opposed to traditional integration] involve people gaining standing, but also others giving up standing". A productive and solidaristic engagement with difference can thus require elements of discomfort (Boudreau Morris, 2017). This contrasts a simplistic programme evaluation standpoint, where discomfort may too easily be dismissed as something to be worked against, in favour of only facilitating experiences that participants describe as positive.

Experiences of discomfort took a few forms. For example, both Molly and Marianne suggested at times that they felt insufficient in the mentor role, as if they had not achieved enough job-related outcomes for their mentee to take home from the programme. Although not explicitly expressed as such, this complicates simplistic, positive narratives of of what mentoring "aid" can lead to, and possibly highlights the structural barriers to employment in a tangible way for mentors, mitigating in turn the appeal of quick fixes and performative or self-oriented "CV-improvement", something Marianne was aware of. Thus, this discomfort can be seen as a prevention of "white feminist smugness" (Keskinen 2021: 208). Another example came from a mentor who described heads blatantly turning on the streets of her majority white, non-Muslim neighbourhood when she, a Finn-Swede, walked past or sat in cafés with her hijab-wearing mentee. She described herself as "disappointed in Finn-Swedes" and "saddened" to see that ostensibly welcoming attitudes met their limit in the belief that while Muslim migrants are allowed in the country, "they are not supposed to come into our living rooms, so to speak". The personal discomfort of racism being exemplified in front of one's own eyes thus began a process of bringing the invisibilised categories of race, class and religion to light. While these experiences do not amount to any concrete relinquishing of power or privilege, it could certainly be a kernel of reckoning with the roles of charitable saviours and apolitical companions.

Yet, this uncomfortable, emotionally risky work does sit somewhat at odds with the need for establishing a sense of safety for participants to let down their guards, open up about their struggles, and ask “stupid questions” to receive or give the insight they came there for. Especially citizen mentors must face different lived realities which may shake their understandings of self and society, all the while providing that safe space of listening and supporting their pairs. The various ways that mentors expressed emotional support or undertook emotional labour was for many mentees an important underpinning dynamic of the mentoring. Sometimes, this was a means for mentees to achieve their goals, for example through encouragement and confidence-boosting. More than that, care and emotional support also became an end in itself. Some make the explicit connection that it was the positive emotional effects that has improved their position and capabilities in Finland the most. What is more, this ongoing emotional support again points to the active mental presence that was constitutive of many relationships, and which facilitated experiences of comfort.

In other words, there exists in migrant mentoring a balancing act between comfort and discomfort, just as between leaning on similarity and diving into difference, in which participants must constantly engage. Genuine self-examination and openness also to uncomfortable difference is not a given feature of mentoring, and the solidarity path must be actively and continuously chosen by listening, taking accountability for one's community as a whole while embracing its internal difference. Yet, the data collected for this thesis suggest that pockets of political, contentious, self-aware solidaristic relations exist, complementing the more wide-spread everyday features of reciprocity, equality and mutual cultural exchange. Thus, both the traditional integration and the solidarity relationalities are incomplete, each shining through at times, yet both presenting themselves as available modes in the pursuit of finding a preferred way of relating among migrants and majority citizens.

5 Concluding discussion

This study finds that the relations between mentors and mentees, or migrants and majority citizens, are complex and irreducible to any one mode of intersubjectivity. Instead, integration, humanitarianism, charity, friendship, reciprocity, and solidarity all appear in the relationships studied. Overall, the rhetoric of charity, following a "dispositif of helping" migrants (Fleischmann and Steinhilper, 2017), is as equally present as genuine friendship and reciprocal exchange. By bringing together the often-separate realms of integration practice and critical migration studies, I have emphasised the complex nuances of lived relations, where the racist and hierarchical implications of "integration" (Rytter, 2019; Schinkel, 2018) are difficult to isolate. Instead, I argue that the results indicate a *hybrid solidarity*, involving both humanitarian and reflective solidarity (Siim & Meret, 2021), with some elements of paternalism and hierarchy, and some elements of equality and self-reflexivity.

To analyse the aspects of migrant-majority relations, I began Section 4.1 by addressing the first research question guiding this thesis: *How does mentoring as a goal-oriented integration practice translate into the lived experiences of participants?* On one hand, the goal was to examine the effects of mentoring conventionally seen as "integration" outcomes, like jobs, networks, and on the other, I also wished to examine how the idea of "integration" is in practice reinterpreted by participants into something personally significant. In the case of the interviewed participants, it was clear that mentoring provided crucial access to local networks, which for many directly led to secure jobs in their own field – a finding that supports the migrant mentoring literature in emphasising the importance of mentors as "bridging capital" (De Cuyper et al., 2019). Moreover, the contacts also led to new hobbies and improved language skills, and as the new access also concerned home spaces, this allowed politically symbolic barriers – like that surrounding the Finnish home – to be breached (Merikoski, 2021). Apparent in the talk around achievements was that mentoring also invites important reflections on agency for both the mentees and mentors: mentees claimed ownership and control over their integration journeys, where they previously had been belittled and depreciated, and mentors downplayed their role in helping, seeing their mentees as agents in their own right. This provided a counter-narrative to that of citizens' humanitarian "saving" of helpless migrants. To

also then account for the agency of mentees, I argue that the importance of mentors is best framed in terms of their ability to provide *access* to local spaces and networks and to *augment* existing skills through encouragement and context-specific information and tools.

Another aspect of translating integration into lived practice involved a shift away from goal-oriented outcomes. For some, having a clear goal helped focus the mentoring and produce results, but for others, a central activity became simply sharing cultural practice and exploring social milieus. Here, I used the idea of "doing culture" and "talking culture" as a way of "doing integration" (Asikainen, 2023), meaning hands-on practice of experiencing and negotiating cultural positions. Simultaneously, this endowed migrants with locally specific socio-cultural capital necessary for "integration", but also invited personal meaning-making and a mutual sharing of practices, which further challenged the paradigm of seeing integration simply as employability-enhancing practice.

The second research question asked *How is hierarchy negotiated and reciprocity enacted within the mentoring relationship?* To address this, I began Section 4.2 by discussing what drives desires to mentor, finding ample evidence of humanitarian lenses involving the idea of "giving" of one's time. However, these initial motivations for joining mentoring shifted into descriptions of genuine friendships when considering the current relationships to their matches. To all the mentoring pairs – who themselves were sampled due to having had an active or "successful" mentoring period – equality was important, indicating that it may be a conducive factor to the longevity or depth of relationships. Finally, reciprocity had been a central ideal and practice for both mentors and mentees, illuminating how their approach to relationship resisted the hierarchical dynamic of a citizen "helper" and a migrant "helped" (Hernández-Carretero, 2023). It took the form of mentees themselves teaching, supporting, or exchanging traditions and skills with their mentors, both through *peer-* and *reverse* mentoring. Crucially, reciprocity was directed both at mentees' "concrete others", meaning their own mentors, and through the wish for becoming mentors themselves, signalling solidaristic responsibility towards a "generalised other" (Dean, 1996: 37-38).

The final research question posed was *To what extent do the relations born out of mentoring provide alternative, solidaristic ways of relating across difference(s)?* In setting out the

theoretical framework, I defined solidarity departing from Dean's (1996) understanding, as: 1) active engagement to build relations across difference 2) with an implicit or explicit political dimension, 3) based on the ideal as well as enacted principle of reciprocity. I argued that solidarity 4) exists in overlapping forms in both contentious struggle and non-contentious encounters (della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021a; Oosterlynck et al., 2016: 5) including in more institutional contexts (Agustín and Jørgensen, 2019). In all, I argue that the studied relations satisfy the criteria. The second criterion, regarding politicality, I hold is inherently present in the decision to mentor across difference, and was also evidenced by many active stance-taking against xenophobia and migration hostile policy. The third criterion, reciprocity, was as discussed above central to the relationships. The inclusion of the fourth and fifth criteria in the definition of solidarity was further justified, as despite there being a lack of collective, contentious struggle, the relations were personally transformative and societally mobilising (Featherstone, 2012).

As for the first criterion of solidarity, active engagement with difference, I argued in 4.3 that mentoring relatively easily facilitated one part of this criterion, through active presence and engaging with *cultural* difference. Less attention was paid to difference in the sense of the structural, historical *inequalities* that would require majority Finns to consider their privileges and even to give up standing in relation to migrants (Klarenbeek, 2024). This hesitance may be seen as way the relations fall short of full solidarity, but it is worth considering it as part of a larger balancing act in mentoring. Namely, while some mentoring practitioners encourage avoiding paternalistic candidates already in recruitment (Crijns and De Cuyper, 2022: 23), there may be value in seeing mentoring as a space for participants to be challenged, as discomfort and dealing with unsettled rationalities are themselves important mechanisms of solidarity (Boudreau Morris, 2017). Yet, there is a fine line to tread to tread so as not to render mentoring solely a training ground for undoing white guilt (D'Arcangelis, 2022) or to remove the safe space of emotional support that evidently have been essential to the value mentoring provided to the mentee participants.

The solidarity in question is of course incomplete, at times flawed, and a process which requires continuous action. In a way, this thesis has collected some highlights of committed, engaged mentoring, rather than mapped all possible outcomes, which is worth keeping in mind when

considering the generalisability of the positively inclined sample regarding migrant mentoring at large. The risk of mentoring producing negative effects for participants, especially in relation to experiences of hierarchy, is not present in the results, but I acknowledge that this is also a possible feature of migrant-citizen mentoring. In reality, practitioners' insights remain that "[e]ven if programs advocate for equality between mentor and mentee, truly achieving such equality is difficult if not impossible" (Crijns and De Cuyper, 2022: 49).

Additionally, the sample of highly educated, largely employed women (mentors aged 23-50, mentees 30-36) living in the capital region of Finland may also have fundamentally structured the results. For one, according to an OECD study (2023: 134), the young, highly educated and employed are more likely to interact with non-EU immigrants, constituting another reason that the relations were already at the outset more likely to be positive and open to difference. Since many pairs also had small age gaps, the risk of age-related hierarchy was diminished, and may thus have led to more easily achieved reciprocity. While this may limit the scope of my arguments' application *across* society, it should not be seen as a limitation to the *force* or *quality* of the findings concerning what solidarity across difference may look like. I make no claims to representativeness or generalisability, and the results should be treated as contextually bound by the specific setting and the intersection of the participants' demographic profile.

Finally, the intersectional commitment here requires some pointers for future research. Here, the interviews focused heavily on difference of culture and country of origin, guided not only by me but based on what participants found interesting. Informed by this interest, I have in my analysis focused on cultural difference, and acknowledge that the very absence of discussion of race and class in volunteer work are testament to processes of depoliticisation (Hernández-Carretero, 2023), which in turn prevent discomfort from being expressed in terms of political inequality (Boudreau Morris, 2017) and obscure race as a central feature of it (Keskinen, 2021: 202). As such, subsequent research would benefit from consciously bringing questions of race, class and even age to the fore in studying the transformative potential of encounters across difference between migrants and majority citizens. Overall, as D'Arcangelis (2022: 8) comments about indigenous-majority relations, "*not* to attempt solidarity", or to avoid studying it, "is in itself a colonizing behaviour. The simple fact is that non-colonizing solidarity will not

happen if people do not enter the fray." Correspondingly, the lesson for mentors, mentees, and researchers in the migration field alike is that reciprocal solidarity will not form without beginning to engage.

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HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
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Sammandrag

Fakultet: Statsvetenskapliga fakulteten

Utbildningsprogram: Magisterprogrammet i moderna samhällen

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Författare: Cecilia Fewster

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Sammandrag:

I ett skiftande migrationslandskap med ständigt växande mångfald har behovet av möten och engagemang över etniska, språk- och kulturgränser blivit alltmer uppenbart. I Finland, ett land som kännetecknas av ett starkt civilsamhälle, är den tredje sektorn en central facilitator av möten mellan majoritetsmedborgare och migranter. Däremot är program inom den tredje sektorn, såsom mentorskap för invandrare, ofta utformade i skuggan av integrationsideologi, vilket riskerar involvera tankesätt och praxis baserad på hierarkier mellan invandrare och medborgare och en förväntan att invandrarna bär ansvaret för att anpassa sig – utan ömsesidighet. I den tredje sektorn finns också den humanitära ideologin, där önskan om att stödja migranter uttrycks som enkelriktad och paternalistisk välgörenhet.

Utgångspunkten för denna magistersavhandling är därför att behandla ”integration” och ”humanitärt arbete” inte som kategorier för teoretisk analys utan som kategorier av problematisk praktik. Målet är att analysera de alternativa intersubjektiva modeller för att relatera som kan framträda i integrationspraktikens sprickor. Här använder jag mig av begreppet solidaritet, såsom formulerats av Jodi Dean för att beskriva relationer som bygger på ömsesidighet och ett aktivt engagemang i olikheter, utan att se kulturell pluralism som en börda att tolerera, samt utan att undvika sanningar om hur social konstruktion av olikhet kan utge grunder för strukturell ojämlikhet. I ett nötskal undersöker den här studien de vardagliga relationerna mellan invandrarkvinnor och deras majoritetsfinländska motparter som faciliterat av ett mentorprogram inom tredje sektorn. Min metodologi är kvalitativ, och materialet består av semistrukturerade individuella intervjuer med tio kvinnor (fem mentorer och fem adepter) som bor i den finska huvudstadsregionen och som vid tidpunkten för datainsamlingen hade avslutat sitt officiella mentorskap. Materialet studerades med hjälp av kvalitativ innehållsanalys.

Analysen visar att de levda relationerna mellan mentorer och adepter, eller invandrare och majoritetsmedborgare, blandar olika sätt att relatera: integration, humanism, välgörenhet, vänskap, ömsesidighet och solidaritet förekommer alla. Mentorskap ger visserligen relevanta sysselsättningsresultat, men jag hävdar att deltagarna också själva ifrågasätter idén om integration

som en hierarkisk, produktivitetshöjande praktik, eftersom de också deltar i ömsesidigt kulturellt utbyte, öppnar sina hem och blir genuina vänner. Även om många mentorer kommer med i programmet på grund av humanitära skäl, hävdar jag att själva mentorskapet kan bli solidariskt. Detta visar sig genom ömsesidigheten, ett engagemang med olikheter, en mobilisering av politiska värderingar och i en början till konstruktiv hantering av obekväma känslor då strukturell ojämlikhet synliggörs. Sammantaget understryker resultaten vad samtida forskning om migration och interetniska relationer har diskuterat som hybridsolidariteter: det vill säga, relationer som arbetar inom en humanitär form för att, om än implicit, motsätta sig status quon av migrationshantering.