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Kaisu Koskela

NEGOTIATING THE 'MIGRANT ELITE'

Boundary making and social identities
among skilled migrants in finland

Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Helsinki

NEGOTIATING THE 'MIGRANT ELITE'
BOUNDARY MAKING AND SOCIAL IDENTITIES AMONG
SKILLED MIGRANTS IN FINLAND

Kaisu Koskela

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation is about everyday life experiences of skilled migrants living in Finland. It focuses on themes of social identities, group boundaries and belonging. In much of research, policy planning as well as in popular image, skilled migrants are imagined as white, Western, well-to-do ‘migrant elite’. My research adopts the perspective that despite their often privileged socio-economic status, they are indeed also migrants, people who have come to live in Finland from other countries. Furthermore, they are social actors, with similar issues concerning integration, adaptation and belonging that ‘traditional’ migration research has been concerned with. The dissertation is based on empirical data gathered over a 4½-year period among skilled migrants living in Helsinki. The data consist of ethnographic fieldwork in the form of observations and informal ethnographic interviews, as well as 15 recorded in-depth interviews. Focusing on skilled migrants’ social life outside of the workplace, the main research question I ask is: *In their process of settling in in Finland, how do skilled migrants find and define a place for themselves within the structures of their new host society?* In addition, I ask questions about the strategies of identity negotiations, the role of class and ethnicity for skilled migrants’ social identities, and how skilled migrants’ group identity is defined in relation to others around them. I approach these questions from the perspective of interactionist identity theories concerned with the ways in which people construct group boundaries and understand their own identities through interaction with others. In addition, an intersectional perspective is adopted to explore varying experiences of being a skilled migrant in Finland in relation to ethnicity, class status and gender.

The findings of the research are presented in four peer-reviewed articles. The articles progress from macro-level structural considerations in the context of Finland (articles I and II) to meso-level interactional processes (articles II and III) to micro-level responses and agency of the skilled migrants (article IV). The main findings presented in the articles are firstly that despite their more privileged socio-economic situation, skilled migrants are experiencing similar issues with integrating, adapting and belonging in Finland as other migrants. As they live their everyday lives within the geographical, political and historico-cultural context of Finland they are subjected to racializing discourses, stereotypes and attitudes in much the same way as other migrants are. Secondly, while white skilled migrants are readily viewed as ‘migrant elite’, racialized skilled migrants feel that they are perceived in the negative image of ‘the migrant’ as a non-western, non-skilled, nonprivileged subject. However, they themselves identify first and foremost as skilled migrants, a social group identity that is based largely on shared

class status, as well as on foreignness. Thirdly, there is a conflict between this internal group identification and how racialized skilled migrants perceive themselves to be categorized. This conflict leads to various boundary making strategies that aim at being seen in a more positive way and included in the 'migrant elite' category that is understood as a positive, valuable social identity in itself.

Together, the findings of the articles point to the continued centrality of the intersection of class and ethnicity in the lives of skilled migrants in Finland: the categorizations and hierarchization they feel imposed on them, their own self-identification and group identity, and the myriad of identity negotiation strategies they employ all centre around class and ethnicity in different ways. Further results drawn from the articles are that skilled migrants' sense of belonging as a group is built through Othering practices that inadvertently reinforce the very hierarchical structures and racialization processes that the research subjects say they object to. In answering my main research question, I conclude that skilled migrants do not feel that they are accepted as full members of Finnish society or seen as equal to Finns. Those skilled migrants who come from Western countries and are white feel that they are not expected to, or even *cannot*, integrate because they are expected to remain as caricatures of their appreciated foreign cultures, representing a positive internationalization of Finnish society. Conversely, those skilled migrants with racialized ethnicities feel a pressure to integrate and even to 'become more Finnish', but at the same time they feel that they will never be accepted as legitimate members of a Finnish society marked by normative whiteness. Belonging is therefore searched from a 'parallel international society of Finland' consisting of other skilled migrants and 'internationally-minded Finns', rather than Finnish society as a whole. As such, the research also demonstrates that ideas about what integration and belonging mean for skilled migrants are based on their own beliefs of their place within the societal whole. Their primary goal merely seems to be to find a comfortable and positive social location for themselves in the country they live in. Therefore, rather than integrating unidirectionally into the host society in the host society's terms, their integration is an ongoing process of negotiations between structure and agency: between the Finns' attitudes towards immigrants and their own understandings of their value as members of an internationalizing society.

Keywords: skilled migrants, social identity, group boundaries, ethnicity, class, belonging, Finland

Tiivistelmä

Tämä väitöskirjatutkimus käsittelee Suomessa asuvien korkeasti koulutettujen maahanmuuttajien sosiaalisia identiteettejä, ryhmien välisiä rajoja ja kuulumisen tunnetta. Korkeasti koulutetut maahanmuuttajat mielletään ensisijaisesti länsimaalaiseksi, korkean sosioekonomisen statuksen omaavaksi 'maahanmuuttajaeliitiksi'. Tutkimukseni lähtökohtana on, että he ovat silti myös maahanmuuttajia ja sosiaalisia toimijoita, joilla on samankaltaisia kotoutumiseen, sopeutumiseen ja osallisuuteen liittyviä ongelmia kuin muillakin maahanmuuttajilla. Väitöskirjan aineisto on kerätty etnografisena kenttätöyönä, jota tein korkeasti koulutettujen maahanmuuttajien parissa Helsingissä. Lisäksi tein 15 syventävää teemahaastattelua. Keskeisin tutkimuskysymykseni on: *Miten korkeasti koulutetut maahanmuuttajat löytävät ja määrittävät itselleen paikkaa yhteiskunnan rakenteissa asettuessaan Suomeen?* Lisäksi esitän kysymyksiä luokkastatuksen, etnisyyden ja sukupuolen merkityksistä, sekä siitä, miten korkeasti koulutetut maahanmuuttajat rakentavat ryhmärajojaan ja sosiaalisia identiteettejään vuorovaikutuksessa muihin.

Tutkimuksen tulokset on esitetty neljässä vertaisarvioidussa artikkelissa. Artikkelit etenevät makro-tason rakenteellisten näkökohtien kuvauksesta (artikkelit I ja II) meso-tason vuorovaikutusprosesseihin (artikkelit II ja III) ja mikro-tason toimijuuden tarkasteluun (artikkeli IV). Artikkeleissa esitetyt tulokset kertovat, että huolimatta korkeasti koulutettujen maahanmuuttajien etuoikeutetummasta sosioekonomisesta asemasta ja usein kansainvälisestä työympäristöstä, he altistuvat rodullistaville diskursseille, stereotyypioille ja maahanmuuttajiin kohdistuville asenteille arkielämässään. Etenkin rodullistetut korkeasti koulutetut maahanmuuttajat kokevat, että heidän oletetaan olevan turvapaikanhakijoita tai pakolaisia ja että heidät kategorisoidaan negatiivisen maahanmuuttajakuvauksen mukaan kouluttamattomiksi alempien yhteiskuntaluokkien edustajiksi. Samalla heidän oma sosiaalinen ryhmäidentiteettinsä perustuu ensisijaisesti jaettuun korkeaan luokkastatukseen, sekä positiivisesti miellettyyn kansainvälisyyteen ja ulkomaalaisuuteen. Tämän itsemäärittelyyn ryhmäidentiteetin ja heidän ulkopuolisilta kokemansa kategorisoinnin välillä on ristiriita, jota yritetään ratkoa rajanvedoilla ja identiteettistrategioilla, jotka tähtäävät heidän näkemiseensä positiivisemmassa valossa. Osa näistä rajanvedoista pohjautuu toiseuttamiseen, joka paradoksaalisesti vahvistaa niitä hierarkkisia rakennelmia ja rodullistamisprosesseja, joita tutkimuksen kohteet sanovat vastustavansa. Kaiken kaikkiaan, tutkimuksen tulokset korostavat sosiaaliluokan ja etnisyyden jatkuvaa

ja keskeistä intersektionaalisuutta korkeasti koulutettujen maahanmuuttajien elämässä Suomessa.

Vastauksena tutkimuskysymykseeni päättelen, että korkeasti koulutetut maahanmuuttajat eivät koe, että he olisivat lähtökohtaisesti tasavertaisia jäseniä suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa. Siksi he etsivät kuuluvuuden tunnetta 'kansainvälisestä rinnakkaisyhteiskunnasta' Suomessa, joka koostuu muista korkeasti koulutetuista maahanmuuttajista ja kansainvälistyneistä suomalaisista. Sen sijaan, että he kotoutuisivat suomalaiseen yhteiskuntaan sen asettamilla ehdoilla, heidän sopeutumisensa on jatkuva neuvotteluprosessi yhteiskunnallisten rakenteiden ja henkilökohtaisen toimijuuden välillä: suomalaisten maahanmuuttajiin kohdistuvien asenteiden ja heidän oman ymmärryksensä välillä siitä, mikä on heidän arvonsa osana kansainvälistyvää yhteiskuntaa.

Avainsanat: korkeasti koulutetut maahanmuuttajat, sosiaalinen identiteetti, ryhmäraajat, etnisuus, luokka, kuuluvuus, Suomi

Acknowledgements

Antarctica. That is the only continent on which I have not worked on this dissertation. Long before COVID-19 made remote working the norm, I decided to take advantage of the freedom of being in charge of my own research project and set on a journey of 'work-from-anywhere'. Therefore, I always imagined I would be writing these acknowledgements from a tropical beach, typing the final words of this decade-long project before walking into the sea for a dip at sunset. I would bask in the warm evening rays and in the knowledge that I had finished the final stages of my dissertation in good time with little of the angst associated with PhD projects.

Instead, I am typing these words from my home office in Helsinki with the same view of the building across the street that was there already in 2007 when I first started working on this dissertation. I am not angst-free, rather suffering from corona news fatigue and acutely aware that I am two weeks past my intended deadline for print. 2020 has not been a year that any of us expected. In my mind, it will forever remain as the end of an era – but also the beginning of something new. I am unsure of what lies ahead at more levels than just individual right now, but I am eager to bring this stage of my professional and personal life to its destined end and readily step into whatever comes next.

Before I close this chapter, I want to thank Professors Lena Näre and Laura Assmuth, who in their roles as my supervisors have provided this project with more guidance, feedback and direction than anyone else. Each of them agreed to start working with me midway through the project. I felt an affinity for their scientific work and a respect for their academic prowess and feel fortunate that they believed my research showed promise. I have no doubt been a less present student than most, but both of them guided me forward, redirected me when I needed it, and persevered with me to the end, for which I am forever grateful. I owe the same gratitude to Dr. Tuula Gordon, who as my first appointed supervisor at University of Helsinki helped me get started all those years ago.

I am also indebted to those who influenced me in the earlier years of my academic career. I think fondly of the late Prof. Paul Clough, whose enthusiastic and at times fervorous lectures ignited my interest in anthropology as a new undergraduate at L'Università ta' Malta. On my first visit to his office, I was met by a dense cloud of cigarette smoke, an offer of a glass of whisky and a personalised lecture on the true meanings of the Kula exchange ring of the Trobriand Islanders. In an instant, and for the better, he shattered any preconceived notions I had ever held about academics. Later, at Universiteit van Amsterdam, Dr. Flip Lindo's gentle and inclusive demeanour towards his

graduate students opened my eyes to the possibility of continuing in academia beyond a master's degree. For the graduation ceremony, he wrote a speech for me that was so encouraging it likely sealed my fate to this moment. From being part of the EDMIDI (European Doctorate on Migration, Diversity and Identities) - project, I acknowledge Dr. Gerard Boucher, whom I first met during the programme at University College Dublin and again at University of Southern Denmark two years later. He not only tirelessly provided me recommendation letters for grant applications throughout the years, but also shared a friendship that exemplifies what international collaboration across the hierarchy of academia should be. In the same vein, I am grateful I met Prof. Vineeta Sinha at University of Sydney during an ISA (International Sociological Association) PhD Laboratory, and then again at the World Congress at Yokohama National University a year later. She generously extended an invite to me to stay at National University of Singapore for a semester, providing not only an office space at a time when my own university would not do so, but also access to an inspiring network of migration researchers. Indeed, much of my academic life has been conducted at universities other than Helsinki, and for that I send thanks to the international academic community I have met during research visits and conferences around the world. In many ways that community has been my most cherished part of this journey. By welcoming me among them as equal they inspired the confidence needed to stand on my own researcher feet alongside some great minds.

I must also acknowledge the funders who provided the economic support for this project throughout the years: University of Helsinki, Finnish Cultural Foundation, National University of Singapore Migration Cluster, Waldemar von Frenckell's Foundation, Oscar Öflund Foundation, Finnish-Danish Cultural Foundation and the City of Helsinki, who was the first to provide the financial support for this research when it was nothing more than a hypothesis.

Lastly, I want to thank my colleagues: all the fellow PhD candidates I met during the international summer programmes as well as the PhD seminar group at University of Helsinki itself. They have given me the professional community and peer support that I needed and were there for much of the *thinking work* for this project. The success of the actual *research work* I owe to the skilled migrants in Helsinki who shared their stories, their lives, and a few beers with me during my many years out 'in the field'. I also want to thank my true co-workers, those with whom I have shared offices, café tables and the occasional beach chair around the world while doing the *writing work* culminating in the printed book: they are my nomad family, spread across the globe physically now more than ever but always just around the corner. I cannot wait to see you all again back on the road! Finally,

I thank my family and friends for their support in the *emotional work* that has been the intangible, but unescapable part in seeing this project to its end. Thank you all from the bottom of my relieved heart. It has been a lot of work, but it has also been a blast. This time in my life is one that I truly cherish and will look back on with longing one day, no doubt. But for now, chapter closed.

At my home base, Helsinki, July 2020
Kaisu Koskela

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List of original publications

- I Koskela, K 2010, 'New explorations in Finnish migration studies: the emerging case of the skilled migrants', *e-Migrinter*, vol. 5, pp. 57-67.
- II Koskela, K 2014, 'The "migrant hierarchy" in Finland: skilled migrants' perceptions of imposed categorizations', *Journal of Finnish Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1-2, pp. 19-41.
- III Koskela, K 2019, 'Intersecting experiences: class, gender, ethnicity and race in the lives of highly skilled migrants in Finland', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 311–328.
- IV Koskela, K (forthcoming), 'Claims to a nation, dressing the part and other boundary making strategies by skilled migrants in response to ethnic categorizations', *Social Identities*.

The publications are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals

I: THE RESEARCH CONTEXTUALIZED

1. Introduction: the ‘migrant elite’?

This dissertation is about everyday life experiences of skilled migrants living in Finland. Skilled migrants are receiving increasing attention in migration research. However, much of the research centres around the economic impact of skilled migration, but relatively little attention is still paid to their individual, local experiences, and everyday life (Kunz 2016; Leonard 2010; van Riemsdijk 2014; van Riemsdijk & Wang 2017; Topinka et al. 2018). Research from the perspective of personal experiences and social life, rather than just the economic impact of skilled migration, is lacking. As Sunata puts it, skilled migrants have largely been approached as ‘homo migrant economicus’ rather than ‘homo migrant sociologicus’ (Sunata 2012). Furthermore, Cranston (2017: 3) points out that research ‘tends to miss understandings of ways in which expatriate identities are produced in relation to other migrants’, who are often depicted as non-white, non-Western, unprivileged characters. Skilled migrants hence need to be addressed as separate, social research subjects in their own right, as well as a specific type of migrant within migration research as a whole. This dissertation will do both.

‘Skilled migrants’ in itself is an abstract term that can encompass a multitude of different types of individuals. In different contexts, ‘the term refers to various forms of transnational elites, transnational knowledge workers, skilled transients, qualified immigrants, or immigrant professionals’¹ (Topinka et al. 2018: 269). Colloquially, skilled migrants are often referred to almost synonymously as ‘expatriates’, both by their host societies as well as by themselves (Kunz 2016; Leonard 2010). However, in the context of research, ‘expatriates’ has received widespread critique for its common usage, far removed from its original meanings² (Cranston 2017; Fechter 2007; Klekowski von Koppenfels 2014; Kunz 2016, 2019). Furthermore, it corresponds with a socially constructed racialized understanding of whiteness, and an often self-promoted air of superiority (Cranston 2017). Yet, much of research conveys a rather homogenic image of skilled migrants in this image of an ‘expatriate’ as white, Western, well-to-do

¹ In addition to the terms mentioned by Topinka et al. (2018), academic literature has referred to skilled migrants, for example, as ‘professional’/‘skilled transients’ (Appleyard 1989; Castles 2000; Findlay 1988), ‘mobile professionals’ (Fechter & Walsh 2010), ‘transnational professionals’ (Nowicka 2006, 2007), as well as more poetic imageries like ‘nomads of global economy’ (Trux 2002: 181) or ‘avatars of globalization’ (Favell et al. 2006).

² In human resource terminology, an ‘expatriate’ denotes an intra-company transferred employee, which only applies to a fraction of skilled migrants in today’s diverse global job markets. Alternatively, in its literal meaning, an ‘expatriate’ is simply someone living outside of their native country, a definition that applies to any migrant (Kunz 2016). For these reasons, I do not use the term ‘expatriate’ in this research to refer to my subjects, even if it is acknowledged that they might sometimes refer to themselves as such.

executives (Fechter & Walsh 2010; Leinonen 2011, 2012b), or as managerial elites on intra-company transfers of predetermined duration (Klekowski von Koppenfels 2014). They are portrayed in a positive light, as ‘frictionless’ mobility (Favell et al. 2006). Some research has suggested that skilled migrants do not need to seek integration to build a successful life in a new country, instead they can go about their migration experience ‘without becoming assimilated or marginalized’ (Kennedy 2007: 364), mostly concerned with enjoying a carefree social life in their ‘expat bubble’ (Fechter 2007), as if they were somehow removed from the concerns of living in a foreign country, going about their lives with a ‘consciousness of the world as a single place’ (Robertson 2000: 132). Politically and economically, skilled migrants are also welcomed, and even actively sought after in the ‘global competition for talent’ (Boeri & Brücker 2012; Helbling & Kriesi 2014; OECD 2008).

In this spirit of optimism, I came up with the initial title of my dissertation research: *‘The migrant elite: experiences of skilled migrants in Finland’*. This migrant elite corresponded to the image of skilled migrants as the white, Western expatriates of popular imagination: privileged, carefree, welcomed migrants. They were preferred both economically due to their employment and educational standing, and culturally for their familiarity and favoured ethnicities. They were individuals in charge of their own choices, enjoying life, having an easy time in their host country for whatever time they planned to stay there. At the onset of this research, this was the image also conjured up in my own head. However, I soon discovered that this image did not account for the majority of skilled migrants I would find in the field.

There are several misconceptions in the description of skilled migrants as a migrant elite. One of the misconceptions is that they are all an economic elite, for example, that they are high-earning executives. The routes to (skilled) migration have diversified, and several scholars are now suggesting that calling them ‘elite migrants’ is misleading, as many of them are instead part of ‘a transnational middle class’: they do not work in highly-paid jobs for large multinational companies, nor do they have expatriate contracts with tax-benefits and free accommodation (Fechter 2007; see also Bielewska 2018; Favell et al. 2006). A new strand of research has started to cover specifically these ‘middling’ skilled migrants (e.g. Conradson & Latham 2005; van Riemsdijk 2014; Scott 2006), who occupy a very different status position than is assumed in research discussing skilled migrants as a ‘transnational capitalist class’ (Sklair 2001, 2016). This research is drawing attention to ‘the existence of a class hierarchy within the category of “Western expatriates”, problematizing any assumption that they are a homogenous group fitting neatly into one position in a city or global class

hierarchy' (Fechter & Walsh 2010: 1200; see also Kunz 2016). The earning levels of the individuals I have included in my research have not been a concern for me, but it suffices to say that they are not all high earners. While I spoke to many individuals in high-earning jobs, there are also teachers on local contracts, freelance software developers, administrative staff at international organizations, sales managers working for local companies, researchers on grants, and so on. They are disparately different from the executive level expatriate working for a large multinational imagined by both laymen and by much of research.

Another misconception of skilled migrants as 'expatriates' and as elite migrants is that they are all white and Western. This is also not true, as can be concluded from decades of literature dealing with 'the brain drain' from the developing world as educated individuals leave their countries to live in the 'developed North' (e.g. Bailey & Mulder 2017; Docquier et al. 2007). There are also numerous case studies dealing directly with racialized skilled migrants from non-Western countries (e.g. Chang 2014; Habti 2014; Jaskulowski & Pawlak 2019; Moroşanu & Fox 2013; Mozetic 2018; Nagel 2005; Niraula & Valentin 2019; Salmonssen & Mella 2013; Sunata 2012; Yanasmayan 2016). In my fieldwork, I have met skilled migrants from different nationalities from all parts of the world. In addition to not being exclusively white and Western, they also include individuals with a multitude of different ethnic, racial, sexual and gender identifications.

The simplified essence of who I considered as skilled migrants in my research is well defined in an OECD report following a 2001 seminar arranged by the organization to examine the emerging policy implications of the international mobility of highly skilled workers (Auriol & Sexton 2002). Though this could be critiqued for trying to include such variation under the single term of 'skilled migrants' (Topinka et al. 2018), I have subscribed to the following definition:

Skilled migrants are:³

- *individuals who have successfully completed an educational degree at the tertiary level (university) in a scientific or technological field of study*
- *individuals not formally qualified as above, but who are employed in an occupation where the above qualifications are normally required*

³ The OECD report discusses skilled migrants primarily as HRST, i.e. 'Human Resources in Science and Technology'. This definition was developed and agreed upon by the OECD and Eurostat, as presented in the report by Auriol and Sexton (2002: 15). I have modified the wording of their definition slightly for my own purposes.

The OECD definition does not specify economic class, nor does it discuss age, nationality, ethnicity, or religion, or even reasons for migrating. In a way, it is the simplest form of what defines skilled migrants, without any of the cognitive assumptions about the other attributes discussed so far. However, there is one qualification that should be added, and in fact stressed: as well as being highly qualified individuals, skilled migrants are indeed also *migrants*, people who have left their home country and have come to live in another. For any migrant, even the initial act of migration itself changes their position vis-à-vis those around them and their role within the relevant societal structures and (value-laden) hierarchies within which they now conduct their everyday lives (Chryssochoou 2004; La Barbera 2015). Therefore, skilled migrants can be expected to have similar issues concerning belonging, integration and adaptation than any migrant arriving in a new country. This became clear to me as soon as I started my fieldwork.

To the field

When I started my initial fieldwork in September 2008, I did indeed meet some individuals who seemed to correspond with the stereotypical image of the carefree expatriate sent by a big multinational company to work in their remote Helsinki office, making a lot of money while also having a hefty expense account, spending their social time in the 'expat bubble' until they would return back overseas to what was still very much considered 'home'. Yet, there were just as many stories of skilled migrants who were more invested in their stay in their new home (rather than just *host*) country. However, not all of them happily slotted into their new lives in Finland: some were struggling to establish the social connections they wanted, and others struggled financially. People I spoke to were complaining about loneliness, of the coldness and social stiffness of Finnish people and an uncrossable separation of making colleagues at work into local friends in their free time (see also Raunio 2002a; Trux 2002). Furthermore, they did not always feel that they were welcomed as the professional, taxpaying individuals they saw themselves as, rather at times they had an uneasy feeling of being treated as unwanted outsiders.

On a cold November night in 2009, I am in a pub with two British skilled migrants. They are friendly guys who have known each other for years. They have both been in Finland for a decade already, living also in cities other than Helsinki. Both work as software developers. We step outside, and an intoxicated Finnish woman approaches us. She starts making comments about British guys coming to Finland to steal all the Finnish women (a specific slur heard a lot in Finland). The guys go along with the drunken conversation of 'But *why are you here?*' to appease the woman, who is more aggressive than joking by now, until we make our escape

from the situation (fieldnotes 21.11.2009). On another occasion, a British-Iranian researcher recalls a time he went to have lunch at a pizzeria with a Finnish female colleague and got verbally abused by another male client in the restaurant. Again, he is accused of not only stealing the Finnish women but also the Finnish taxpayers' money.⁴ They leave in silence as he feels this is the best course of action (interview 24.11.2010). I was always surprised to see such blatantly open hostility towards these international, supposedly wanted migrants that were needed not only for Finland's economy to compete in the global market, but also whom the public opinion in Finland supposedly saw as desired international flavour flair (Jaakkola 2005, 2009; Suurpää 2002).

My interest in the research started to turn more and more towards these individual experiences and to how many of the skilled migrants I was seeing and talking to felt that they were not treated as individuals but as assumed, stereotyped, often racialized versions of themselves. The Americans were fighting against the image that they were someone who had voted for the Bush administration (and later the Trump administration), the Kenyans were fighting the stigma of being seen as Somali refugees, and British males were attempting to challenge the idea that they were just one of those men that had come to Finland on 'the love boat' because of a Finnish woman.⁵ Even when seen in a positive light, many still felt that they were treated as caricatures of their nationality, or as 'token foreigners' to quote an American skilled migrant (see article II of this dissertation). It was like they had to fight for their right to self-recognition, like a stereotype of them (or someone who merely looked like them) was being assumed by people in Finland before even being given a chance to introduce themselves.

There was a further moment in my research when I truly started to gain an understanding of how much the stereotypes and assumptions held about foreigners in Finland were affecting the everyday lives of some of my research participants. I was in one of my usual fieldwork locations, at a weekly gathering of an international social club, held at a bar in downtown Helsinki every Wednesday night. I was talking to a Kenyan skilled migrant when he was approached by two intoxicated Finnish men who started abusing him verbally in Finnish. The Kenyan skilled migrant speaks fluent Finnish, albeit with an accent, but good, fluent, understandable Finnish nonetheless. Yet on this occasion, he

⁴ Koikkalainen et al. (2011) discuss immigrants in Finland (and elsewhere) facing a double dilemma: those working are accused of stealing jobs, and those not working are accused of taking advantage of the welfare system. In this instance, the assumption of the British-Iranian skilled migrant was that he was not a working migrant, presumably due to his non-Western looks.

⁵ For a long time, Britain has been one of the most common countries for Finnish women to marry foreign partners from (Heikkilä 2017). This stereotype of British, as well as other, men coming to Finland on account of Finnish women is also well known among the skilled migrants, to the extent that the phenomenon is referred to as coming to Finland 'on a love boat'.

responded to the men in English, trying to be cheery and pretending that he did not understand what the men were saying. Slightly taken aback by the nonchalant response and the fact that they now felt obliged to respond in English, the men asked him where he was from. He told them Kenya, and continued immediately with an explanation of what he is working on and where (IT, in a Finnish company), explaining why he was in the country. He mentioned that he had a Master's degree from a Finnish university. In essence, he was stating that he was a professional person, and perhaps (at least) at the same economic class as the Finnish men.

After the situation had defused and the Finnish men carried on with their evening, I asked him why he did not simply respond to them in Finnish (which to me would be proof that he was a well-read, well-adjusted immigrant). He told me that there are situations where he does not show that he speaks fluent Finnish, because *'if you're black and you speak Finnish, it's more likely that you came as a refugee. If the person speaks fluent Finnish, the person has gone into the integration plan'* (fieldnotes 25.11.2010; interview 1.12.2010⁶). Nothing like this had ever occurred to me as something that any individual would have to consider. It is generally thought that it is good for all migrants to learn Finnish. However, migrants coming to Finland directly for employment are not subject to an integration plan and therefore not offered free language lessons, and indeed many skilled migrants do not learn the language. It is perfectly possible to go through life in Finland without learning the language, especially if you are content with living your social life in a largely non-Finnish, multicultural surroundings. I know an Indian skilled migrant, who, after 10 years of living in Finland, could not put together 10 simple greetings or sentences in Finnish. However, the point is that when dealing with members of their host society, and when wanting to be seen in a good light or even just left alone, learning specific cultural codes is paramount for effectively communicating a more positive image of one's identity to those with opposing views. Learning that in the Finnish system only migrants who are unemployed and receiving social assistance are subject to an integration plan, and therefore get free language lessons, or that indeed in the host society's views only those migrants who came to the country as refugees are assumed to have learned Finnish, is very specific cultural knowledge. And to then use it to one's advantage in order not to be seen as this type of migrant is a very specific identity strategy using boundary making (Wimmer 2008a, 2008b, 2013) to negotiate one's social identity amidst imposed categorizations (Jenkins 1994, 2008).

⁶ The description of this event is from my fieldnotes, but the direct quote at the end is from a transcript of a subsequent interview with the same individual. This interview was conducted the following week and in it we revisited the event while talking about other issues.

This instance, and others like it, drew my attention deeper into figuring out what actually was being done and achieved in such interactions between skilled migrants and members of their host society, and how that was affecting the skilled migrants' self-defined ideas about who they were, who their peer group was, and eventually their sense of belonging in Finland.

What's in a name?

The focus of this research is on the personal, everyday experiences of skilled migrants. Very soon I noticed that these experiences were highly dependent on how the skilled migrants perceived the attitudes and assumptions imposed on them by members of their host society. Value judgements are placed on immigrants universally. Host societies categorize and value immigrants based on economic standards, class markers, ethnicities, nationalities, cultural familiarity, and historical and other reasons, making certain (types of) migrants more valued than others. While the economic impact of skilled migrants is appreciated, political discussions seep worries into the popular imagination about 'failed multiculturalism',⁷ placing cultural and ethnic differences in a negative light. This duality of attitudes towards class status versus ethnic appreciation and depreciation of migrants could be seen in the field very clearly, especially when it came to the experiences of skilled migrants with racialized ethnicities. Little by little, referring to skilled migrants as one entity became more problematic.

By the time I had finished my initial data gathering, I was using the term 'migrant elite' in quotation marks to connote a level of problematization that I had started to find in discussing skilled migrants with a term that focuses on privilege and a simplified view of their migration experience. The term highlights the stereotyped, homogeneous popular image people have of skilled migrants, and the misconceptions and assumptions of the easiness and privilege of being one. Moreover, my research was expanding my understanding of how heterogeneous skilled migrants as a group actually are. They are distinct from each other not only in their nationalities and ethnicities but also in terms of age, family circumstances, motivations, economic standing, earning potential, career focus/unfocus, gender, levels of voluntariness of migration and so on. They were female, they were gay, they were parents, they were from developing countries, and many other unthought things that this image as a simplification does not even touch upon.

This new, 'inverted commas' formulation of the concept of 'migrant elite' refers first and foremost to how members of a (Finnish) *host society see and value white Western skilled migrants in relation to the rest of the immigrant population*, as the

⁷ In reference to Chancellor Angela Merkel famously stating in 2010 that multiculturalism in Germany had 'utterly failed' (e.g. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-11559451>).

most preferred, wanted type of migrants, *as the ideal type of migrant*. I refer here to 'ideal type' in two separate, but interlinking, meanings. Firstly, it can be understood as Weber's terminology (e.g. Weber et al. 1947) whereby an ideal type is an abstract construct and a standard of comparison that identifies the essential characteristics that enable us to recognize phenomena or behaviour systematically. Like Weber's ideal type, the 'migrant elite' is not an actual measurable entity, rather in the context of my research it represents all the characteristics that could be found in the most preferred migrant: white, Western, highly skilled, educated, tax paying, not disruptive culturally, not threatening. This 'migrant elite' is a situational and relative term that varies according to the societal context.⁸ Secondly, it is also an ideal type, something that the skilled migrants in Finland themselves recognize and aim for as an ideal, as in a preferred type of immigrant, as something to strive to be.

For me, it was this crumbling of the image of skilled migrants as the imaginary 'migrant elite', and the subsequent reformulation of the term as a constructed ideal rather than as something 'real', that made this research interesting. It is also what this dissertation essentially tells a story about: the story behind the image of the 'migrant elite'.

Research questions

Slowly discovering the real experiences behind the assumptions, I started to become increasingly interested in the micro-level experiences of skilled migrants as individuals. I became especially interested in how their class status as professionals was playing against their often privileged, but sometimes racialized, ethnicities. Many scholars have remarked on the need for a more micro-level study into skilled migration, the 'human face' (Favell et al. 2006), if you will, that looks at the everyday reality of individuals to see beyond the faceless migration flows or economic considerations as an object of study. Favell et al. (2006) also call for research that takes into account both structural and agent-centred views: 'macro-level analyses [...] should always be carried through meso-level institutional mediation to micro-level insights into an appreciation of the very real consequences of these structures on the lives of actual individuals and groups' (2006: 6).

My research is built in agreement with this view, as I consider that the interplay of structural considerations and individual action is at the very heart of

⁸ There are culturally specific value judgements attached to the conception of who are the most valued migrants in any given place and situation. Here I refer to the standards leading to the definition of a 'migrant elite' in the Finnish context, even though similar qualifications might apply in other Western contexts as well.

the experience of migration. Out of an interest in social structure versus individual agency, in class status versus racialization, and in the role of categorization, stereotyping and assumptions for people's perceptions of themselves, my research started to gather focus. My preceding academic interest in the interactionist perspective of social identities (e.g. Barth 1969; Jenkins 1994, 2008) pointed me to focus on group boundaries as the battlefield of action where identities truly are created and re-created (rather than within which collective identities merely exist). In addition, I introduced intersectionality theories (e.g. Anthias 2008, 2013a; McCall 2005; Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011) to understand the myriad of experiences among the vast variety of individuals I was finding within the collectivity of skilled migrants. Most noticeably ethnicity (and racialized understandings of it), but also gender, age, nationality, class and even migrancy as a social categorization (Näre 2013b) were all mixing to create an infinite number of different experiences of being a skilled migrant in Finland. And when it really got to the baffling examples of everyday interaction such as the Kenyan skilled migrant pretending not to speak Finnish, I looked to theories of boundary making and identity negotiation strategies (Wimmer e.g. 2008a, 2013). These helped me to understand what was being done and why, and how agency was being asserted within the confines of a particular structure.

I began the research with just one general, overarching research question that aimed at investigating the experiences of skilled migrants in Finland. This is in keeping with the interpretive research design that tries to avoid assumptions about what is relevant to the research subjects before starting the research. My main research question is:

In their process of settling in in Finland, how do skilled migrants find and define a place for themselves within the structures of their new host society?

During initial fieldwork, as I started to gain a better understanding of the field and of my subjects, I began to form further sub-questions that were also more influenced by my choice of theories. Following an interpretive research approach, I moved back and forth between the field, writing and literature, and the sub-questions were hence the product of more informed ideas. In time, they also provided a framework for the four articles that are included as parts of this dissertation. My sub-questions are:

- How do skilled migrants feel perceived and categorized by their host society, the Finns?*
- How do they themselves define their in-group and its boundaries? Who is their Other that their definition is constructed against?*

- *In what ways do social categories of gender, ethnicity, class and nationality intersect in the definition and feeling of belonging to 'skilled migrants' as a group?*
- *Do skilled migrants feel a need to (re)negotiate their social identities within their host society and its existing categorizations? What are the strategies used by them in these identity negotiations and what forms do the negotiations take?*

I will now move on to establishing the context within which these questions are set. In chapter 2, I first look at Finland as a country of (skilled) immigration and then introduce the reference points within which I see the skilled migrants constructing their lives. Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical approaches that have influenced my research and guided my investigation, and chapter 4 presents my empirical case study and the methodological considerations behind it. Subsequently, in the second part of this dissertation summary report, I move on to the findings of my research by first introducing the conclusions presented in the included articles in chapter 5, and then proceed to further analyse these findings in chapter 6. I present my concluding remarks in the final chapter, chapter 7.

2. Research context: situating the skilled migrant

The main purpose of this chapter is to situate the reader within the contextual framework that the subjects live their lives in. While doing this, I will also introduce the reader to a review of relevant literature.

I position the everyday lives of skilled migrants in Finland within two contrasting reference points (modified from Haikkola's [2011] 'competing reference points'⁹) that structure their actions, and influence their identities and sense of belonging. Firstly, I position skilled migrants within the global reference point of international labour markets and cosmopolitan cultural flows that define them as valued, sought-after individuals (e.g. Favell et al. 2006; Kunz 2016; McDowell 2009). From this reference point, they are viewed in the image of the 'migrant elite': as independent, privileged actors with globally available choices in the competition for international talent (Boeri & Brücker 2012; Helbling & Kriesi 2014; OECD 2008). Secondly, and more tangibly, they live their everyday lives within the geographical, political and historico-cultural context of Finland. From this reference point, I see their lives as influenced especially by the relatively short history of migration in Finland that coincides with normative whiteness and unfamiliarity with migrants by some Finns. These processes subject them to visibilities, categorizations and assumptions through which many of them feel they are made into 'the migrant', a racialized migrant subject (Lundström 2017). I start with a brief introduction to migrants and migration in Finland before discussing the two contrasting reference points of global labour markets and Finland as their host country.

2.1 Finland as an immigration country

When I started research for this dissertation in 2007, Finland had an immigrant population of around 203,000 individuals,¹⁰ making up 3.9% of the population (Statistics Finland 2008). Article I of this dissertation, set in that timeframe, deals in more detail with the emergence of Finland as a country of immigration after decades of outmigration, and how skilled migrants had started to emerge as a new type of migrant in Finland. However, the history of migration to Finland goes

⁹ Haikkola (2011) discusses the 'competing reference points' of second-generation migrant children in Finland that she sees lead to and define the scope of their identity negotiations. For her subjects, this societal context is constructed in the intersections of transnational and family practices, and the ethnic hierarchies in Finland (2011: 156).

¹⁰ As a statistical definition of 'immigrant' I will primarily use statistics of individuals born abroad. Some of these individuals have acquired Finnish citizenship, and therefore the number is higher than if one looked at foreign citizenship as a definition.

back several hundred years before that, especially as this relates to the migration of more privileged people (as opposed to the ‘waves’ of refugees that discussion about immigration generally springs to mind nowadays). During the time of Russian rule in the 1800s, army officers, aristocrats, clergy and businessmen from Russia moved to the Grand Duchy of Finland. In their wake, Jewish and Tatar communities also established a presence in Finland that can be traced all the way to the present day (Shenshin 2008). Due to this history, as well as geographical proximity, Russians have always been one of the largest foreign communities in Finland. Other established ethnic minorities in Finland are the Roma people, who arrived mainly from Sweden in the 1600s, and the indigenous Sámi people, who have inhabited the land of present-day Finland for thousands of years. In addition, there is a sizeable linguistic minority of Swedish-speaking Finns that make up about 5% of the population (Statistics Finland 2018).

After the turmoil of the two World Wars, the number of foreign nationals in Finland hit its lowest point in the early 1970s at around 10-12,000 individuals (Leitzinger 2008). Apart from a small group of Chilean refugees in the 1970s followed by Vietnamese refugees in the 1980s and ex-Yugoslavs in the early 1990s, the first notable contemporary groups of migrants did not start to arrive until the earliest groups of Iraqi and Somali refugees in the mid-1990s (Martikainen et al. 2013). At the start of this research in 2007, migration was characterized by the arrival of small groups of asylum seekers and refugees, and the ‘return’ of ethnic Finns from Ingria in present-day Russia.¹¹ The most common reasons for migrating to Finland were familial relations/existing relationships, return migration, asylum seeking and studying (Heikkilä & Pikkarainen 2008; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2002a). Estimates state that only 5-10% of immigrants in the early part of the 2000s came to Finland for employment as the primary reason (Forsander et al. 2008: 102; Työministeriö 2005).¹² A moment in history relevant specifically to skilled migration was when Finland joined the European Union (and the Schengen free movement area) in 1995, which also coincided with the growth of Nokia into a global mobile phone manufacturer and the rise of information technologies in general. These together created an economy in

¹¹ This ‘return’ migration of people of Finnish descent from Ingria was based on a governmental programme granting repatriation status to those meeting the conditions. The programme was implemented between the years 1990-2011, within which time an estimated 30-40,000 ethnic Finns from Ingria moved to Finland (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2002b).

¹² Some discrepancies, however, exist in the estimates at the time: Finnish immigration service statistics show that in 2007, 32% of applied residence permits were made on the basis of work (Migri 2008). This, however, was an increase of 59% from the applications in 2006. Therefore, one could conclude that 2007 marked an upsurge in labour-based immigration to Finland not yet accounted for by the mentioned research. Further discrepancies can be explained by Migri’s (2008) figures not including residence permits on the basis of family ties for those individuals already in the country, or EU citizens who do not need to apply for a separate permit.

Finland that could benefit from foreign talent and was now starting to compete for that talent in the global marketplace (Forsander & Raunio 2009; Kananen 2006). By the beginning of my research, the Finnish government was pushing an agenda to encourage more skilled migration and to be able to make better use of the skills of the migrants already in the country (Työministeriö 2007). The aim was to welcome an educated workforce from outside the country's borders to boost innovation and economic competitiveness, but foreign workers were also sought after to maintain levels of the welfare state with a falling support ratio (Forsander & Raunio 2009; Työministeriö 2005).

Now, more than a decade later, there are 387,000 foreign-born residents living in Finland (Statistics Finland 2018). This number is relatively small, making up 7% of the Finnish population, one of the lowest percentages in the EU countries (Eurostat 2018). The largest national groups currently are Russians and Estonians, followed by Iraqis and Somalians (Statistics Finland 2018). Apart from these few larger national groups, the immigrant population consists of small clusters of various nationalities from all parts of the world. About a third of those who are foreign-born come from other EU states (Eurostat 2018). The reasons for coming to Finland are currently (from the most common to the least common, based on issued permits): third-country nationals arriving on the basis of family ties, followed by the EU nationals mentioned above (who are registered as staying in Finland without a specified reason for arrival), those coming for study, for employment, and finally for international protection (Migri 2018). As elsewhere in Europe, the number of asylum applications peaked in 2015 but has since returned back to one of the least common reasons for residency (ibid). Applications on the bases of study and employment are continuously increasing (ibid; Sutela & Larja 2015b). Estimates from the past decade account for around 20% (Sutela & Larja 2015b) to 30% (Söderling 2011) of immigration flows to Finland as work related.

Finland does not have a merit-based points system for skilled migration. On the other hand, Finland does not apply protective labour market tests to third-country nationals for employment requiring specialized skills (Ministry of the Interior 2018). Therefore, skilled migrants enter the labour market on a par with the native population, provided they can obtain a residence permit. EU migrants are subject to free movement laws, while other skilled migrants must apply for residency and employment permits via one of the immigration routes. Many migrants who are skilled may therefore enter the country with residence applications based on family ties or existing relationships, rather than employment (Kyhä 2011). Some skilled migrants are sent or invited by a multinational or a Finnish company with what are now becoming rare expatriate

contracts. Furthermore, the Finnish Immigration Service implements the EU Blue Card scheme, which is essentially a skilled migration visa for non-EU citizens, issued by 25 EU countries since its implementation in 2012. It is meant for ‘a person who comes to Finland to work with expert tasks that require special expertise (highly skilled worker)’.¹³ The applicants must have a higher education degree at least at the Bachelor’s level. However, the scheme has been deemed a failure in most participating countries (Giesing & Laurentsyeva 2017), and in fact, only 212 Blue Card visas have to date been issued by Finland (Eurostat 2019). Steps have been taken to make it easier for international degree students to obtain permits to stay for employment after their studies in the hopes that they will become future highly skilled workers.¹⁴

From the available resources, it is difficult to establish how much of the migration to Finland is ‘skilled migration’, and even harder to calculate how many migrants who are skilled are actually employed in occupations requiring that educational level.¹⁵ Some key figures that can help us gain an understanding of skilled migration to Finland are offered by a Statistics Finland-led ‘*Survey on work and well-being among persons of foreign origin*’ (Nieminen et al. 2015). The aim of the survey was to acquire an understanding of the population of people of foreign background (defined as both parents born abroad), aged between 15 and 64 living currently in Finland (Nieminen et al. 2015). According to this data, 18% of immigrants had originally come to Finland for employment reasons (Sutela & Larja 2015b). Of those who had come for employment, 38% had higher degrees at the time of the research (which does not necessarily correspond with the situation at the time of immigration). Disregarding the initial reason for coming to Finland, 40% of people of foreign background between the ages of 25 and 54 had higher education degrees (in comparison to 44% of the native population) (Sutela & Larja 2015a: 31-32). As most of them would have arrived in Finland for other reasons, making further estimates on the number of people who have high qualifications *and* also work in jobs requiring these qualifications is difficult.¹⁶

What the Statistics Finland report *does* tell, is that the percentage of highly educated people of foreign background is slightly higher in the greater Helsinki

¹³ <https://migri.fi/en/eu-blue-card>

¹⁴ <https://migri.fi/en/degree-completed-in-finland>

¹⁵ See Kyhä 2011 for a more extensive discussion on the shortcomings of the relevant data. For example, in her dissertation on skilled migrants in Finland, a third of her informants were not in jobs equal to their qualifications. Kyhä’s numbers may not be representative on a larger scale but provide some idea of the extent of this issue. Kyhä also mentions OECD data from 2007 that states that 19–22% of migrants in Finland were overqualified for their jobs (OECD 2007, as quoted in Kyhä 2011: 55).

¹⁶ For example, of the largest group (those that came for family reasons), 39% have higher degrees but the statistics do not show how many end up working in professions requiring these degrees.

region: 45% of people of foreign background in Helsinki have a higher degree. 34% of all degrees by people of foreign background are in the technical field, which is by far the largest field (Sutela & Larja 2015a: 33). Most foreign national/regional groups exceed or reach similar figures with the native population when looking at the percentage of higher degree holders¹⁷ (ibid). Foreign nationals from Western countries have the highest percentage in this regard (58%). Only the immigrant groups from the Middle-East and North Africa region and the rest of the African continent, as well as the single national group data from Estonians, fall well below the 44% of native Finns (ibid: 33).

However, apart from living in the geographical space of Finland, skilled migrants are also embedded within other reference points that I earlier described as contradictory. The first of these is the international climate of global discourses on labour markets and migrations that paint skilled migrants in a rather positive light. The second is the ethos of Finland as a normatively white, not always welcoming, host country where many people are still unfamiliar with immigrants.

2.2 Global reference point: situating the skilled migrant within global discourses

Despite my introductory chapter arguing that skilled migrants are much more than the stereotype of the Western male expatriate representing the image of the ‘migrant elite’, many of them live in at least the conceptual imagescape of global positive internationality that sees them as privileged, wanted migrants. In an era of rising anti-immigration talk, skilled migrants have become ‘the least controversial form of international relocation in Europe’ (Scott 2006: 1106), and this casualness concerning their status as migrants, and the political and economic climate that this stems from, is one of the realities they live in.

In a socio-economic class sense, skilled migrants have been described as ‘the privileged tiers of movement’ (Fechter & Walsh 2010: 1198) and as ‘privileged migration’ (Amit 2011). Literature also refers to them as a ‘transnational elite’ (Beaverstock 2002; Cranston 2017; Friedman 1999), a ‘managerial elite’ (Castles 2000) and ‘elite talents’ (Farrer 2010). In many ways, they are indeed privileged or ‘elite’. They are wanted employees, a precious commodity in the global labour market. Especially global managerial level individuals are in a powerful position in the world of transnational companies whose employment allows them to maintain a position somewhat above and beyond the constraints of local structures (Beaverstock 2002). It has been suggested that in a ‘new form of transnational racism’, skilled migrants are at the top of a ‘hierarchisation of the

¹⁷ Percentages of higher degrees according to nationalities (Sutela & Larja 2015a: 33): EU, EFTA, North America: 58%; Russia, Soviet Union: 49%; native Finns: 44%; Asia: 43%; Latin America, Eastern Europe, other: 42%; ‘rest of Africa’ (Sub-Saharan): 33%; MENA: 25%, Estonia: 19%.

right to migrate' (Castles 2007: 360). Their mobility is typically by choice rather than necessity. By and large, they are migrants who face the least amount of exclusion, domination or economic exploitation (Favell et al. 2006). They are not burdened by many of the political barriers to migration (Kofman & Raghuram 2015) and are also able to bypass monetary restraints to movement (Kunz 2016). Some scholars link this back to being on the benefitting side of the historical power (im)balances of colonial world orders that allow them freer movement at their own will (Leonard 2010). It is as if they 'melt through borders, untouched by the state, their uncapped numbers reflecting only market demand, commercial interests and the dictates of economic and human capital accumulation' (Favell et al. 2006: 14). In this ethos, they are said to live in a 'global space of flows' (Castells 2011), where even their ideas of home and belonging are de-territorialized.

Apart from a financially privileged starting position in the migration process, skilled migrants also have transnational symbolic, social and cultural capital that work in their favour (Favell et al. 2006; Wahlbeck 2005). They can be said to possess a 'middle-class toolkit' of these capitals that together with global knowledge and individualism make adaptation to a new country easier for them (Kennedy 2007: 357). Their educational qualifications and international work experience depreciate very little even when crossing borders, giving them 'transnational versatility' that follows them to their countries of migration (Weiss 2005, 2006). Financial reasoning and a focus on the needs of the labour market stipulate that economic migrants are typically more valued than humanitarian migrants (e.g. Hainmueller & Hiscox 2007; Helbling & Kriesi 2014; Kofman & Raghuram 2015). Hence, they face less discrimination than the 'unwanted' migrants lower down the 'hierarchy of suitability and appropriateness' do (McDowell 2009: 34). Due to this appreciation and a similar class status to host nationals, (symbolic) power imbalances are not felt as strongly, and skilled migrants may be freer to define their own lives and their position in a new social structure post-migration (Castells 2011; Clarke 2014; Favell et al. 2006; Koikkalainen 2013).

Ethnicity, racialization and gendered discourses

However, even in the ethos of the neo-liberal global economy and labour markets, gender and ethnicity play a role in how well individual skilled migrants can live resembling the above-mentioned sentiments. Migration itself involves gendered and racialized processes that intersect with class to construct hierarchies of evaluation and opportunity. Skilled migrants are often defined against 'unskilled'/'non-skilled' migrants (Cranston 2017). Such a distinction is arguably man-made and does not serve any other function than to contrast different types

of labour migrants, all of whom could be considered ‘essential workers’ (GCIM 2005: 7). Even though economic justifications and capitalist logic largely determine which professions are considered highly skilled and which are not, a wealth of studies show that understandings of skill and professional value are further constructed in gendered and racialized ways (e.g. Andreassen & Myong 2017; Jaskulowski & Pawlak 2019; Laurén & Wrede 2008; Liebkind et al. 2016; Lulle & Balode 2014; Kofman & Raghuram 2015; Niraula & Valentin 2019; van Riemsdijk 2010, 2013). Jobs attracting immigrants become devalued, and migrants are racialized into lower-skilled, less-paid positions (Kurki et al. 2019; van Riemsdijk 2010, 2013). For female migrants, this often works in duplicate disadvantaged ways due to the added intersection of gender and migrancy (understood as a social category, Näre 2013b). Studies of deskilling and devaluation of nursing and other care professions are a good example of this (e.g. Cuban 2013; Kurki et al. 2019; Laurén & Wrede 2008; Näre 2013a; Wrede & Näre 2013). This research points to how a whole industry can come to be considered not just to consist of low-skilled ‘migrant jobs’, but also ‘women’s jobs’ because of the number of female migrants these professions attract (and that are actively recruited for them) from the Global South and less developed countries. The cause-consequence sequence of the deskilling of migrants, of women and of female migrants in particular works in multiple intersecting directions: (female) migrants are deskilled by being pushed towards unskilled occupations (Niraula & Valentin 2019), but also professions occupied predominantly by women and/or migrants come to be considered unskilled and reserved for women (Cuban 2013).

Even though mechanisms by which the deskilling of migrant women in particular (as opposed to migrant men) occurs are relatively unclear, ‘it is common knowledge that migrant women become downwardly mobile’ (Cuban 2013: 4). This often applies even to those female migrants who have previously worked in skilled professions but migrate, for example, because of their husbands’ or partners’ jobs. Labour migration is still predominantly male (ILO 2018), and with men as the primary lead migrants, women are appointed roles as ‘trailing spouses’ (Coles & Fechter 2008; Kunz 2016). This has been shown to lead back to, and even reproduce, more traditional gender roles and dissatisfaction for the women in question, especially in those cases where pre-migration they were working professionals (Clarke 2014; Coles & Fechter 2008; Fechter 2007; Habti 2014; Kunz 2016). Furthermore, access to the labour market and jobs in general is linked to gender and race; “‘difference’ has entered into the reorganization of capitalism in several crucial ways’ (Verdery 1994: 52), whereby official classifications, policies and even supposedly neutral economic considerations are gendered and racialized, placing migrants in different positions from the start. Thereby global

and local divisions of labour easily lend themselves to further stratification into 'migrant division of labour' (Wills et al. 2010). Immigration policies and controls reflect definitions of the acceptability and desirability of migrants (McDowell 2009), relating closely to the division of skilled-unskilled or 'essential'-'non-essential' workers, granting access to those whose skills are convertible into economic gain (Helbling & Kriesi 2014). Whereas the 'deserving' skilled migrant is a presumed white ideal type (Fechter & Walsh 2010; Leonard 2010; Kunz 2016), those skilled migrants that do not fit this image are often made into racialized and classed, non-white, unskilled, and, inevitably, 'undeserving' migrant subjects (Kunz 2019; Lundström 2017). These processes are situational, relative and tied to socio-cultural contexts. I will therefore now discuss these processes more specifically in relation to Finland as a location for skilled migrants.

2.3 The Finnish reference point: situating the skilled migrant in the context of Finland

Many studies have claimed that skilled migrants choose to live in a partial self-segregation of sorts from their host society (Beaverstock 2002; Castells 2011; Fechter & Walsh 2012; Kunz 2016; Nowicka 2007, 2012), keeping their national identification (Koikkalainen 2013), living in an 'expat bubble' (Fechter 2007), or even conducting their lives within a colonialist continuity through the 'repetition of colonial routines' of expatriate social clubs (Lester 2012: 6). However, I found that my informants live their lives to a large extent embedded in the context of their host country, Finland. They associate with Finnish people, they take an interest in the events of their neighbourhoods and city, they read about current affairs in Finland, and in general are intent on establishing a life for themselves in the country. This noticeable 'place-embeddedness' (van Riemsdijk & Wang 2017) may partially be due to the relatively small size of the skilled migrant population that, for many, does not provide a large enough social world on its own (see e.g. Yijälä et al. 2009). Helsinki as the geographical location where my informants live can be described as a beta-level city; compared to big global alpha-cities, it lacks some of the international networks, opportunities and services readily available for globally mobile skilled migrants in bigger, more multicultural cities. The need for more proactivity in establishing a social life in such a beta-city may lead to more locally integrated social circles and sense of belonging (van Riemsdijk 2014; see also Kepsu et al. 2009).

Furthermore, I found the skilled migrants I met to be very interested in how they are seen by members of Finnish society and how they are placed within the societal structures of their host country. Therefore, it should be pointed out here that the discussion of the Finnish reference point in the context of my

research is also about the skilled migrants' *own perceptions* of how they are seen in Finland.¹⁸ Nevertheless, previous research about the Finnish public's attitudes towards immigrants seem to correlate with skilled migrants' perceptions. For the most part, an appreciation for the type of transnational elite migrants described by the global discourse is seen in Finland too; according to survey data, migrants with high educational qualifications and relevant occupational skills and earning levels are seen as the most desired migrants (Avonius & Kestilä-Kekkonen 2018; Bail 2008; Jaakkola 2005, 2009). Research has found that higher educated migrants themselves also perceive themselves to be less discriminated against than other migrants (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2006; Kobak 2013; Raunio 2002a). This can be explained by the general preference towards them as a valued type of migrant, but also by the type of intergroup contact they have: skilled migrants tend to have more contact with highly educated natives, who in turn discriminate less than lower educated natives (Jaakkola 2009). Furthermore, most skilled migrants live in Helsinki, and residents of bigger cities are more accepting of immigrants in general (ibid; Saartenoja et al. 2009). It is indeed important to remember that when discussing attitudes towards immigrants by 'Finnish society', I am in fact referring to a multitude of differing attitudes by different Finns. According to survey data, women and younger people are more receptive to immigration than men and members of the older generation (Jaakkola 2009). Individuals who identify politically as leftist or Green Party supporters are similarly more lenient in their attitudes towards immigrants (Avonius & Kestilä-Kekkonena 2018; Haavisto 2019). Even personal considerations, such as being unhappy with one's own life or economic situation, coincide with more negative views (Haavisto 2012). However, one of the most decisive factors determining attitudes towards immigrants is personal contact with people of immigrant background: those individuals who have immigrant friends are more lenient and positive in their attitudes towards both ethnic difference and immigration in general (Avonius & Kestilä-Kekkonena 2018).

Skilled migrants' working environments and often also their social environments tend to be multicultural and cosmopolitan in their attitudes towards foreigners (Raunio 2002b). They also typically live life at the same class standards and neighbourhoods as well-to-do native Finns (Eskelä 2011; Kepsu et al. 2009). According to Raunio (ibid: 154-5), skilled migrants experience less discrimination especially because they can afford to live in affluent neighbourhoods among affluent local people, and they therefore escape being seen as part of the problems associated with the wider immigrant community and immigrant concentrated

¹⁸ I will discuss this perspective on 'meta-stereotyping' later in section 3.1.

residential areas. Furthermore, they typically have secure employment status (which is a central concern of government integration policies) and they subsidize the Finnish welfare system in the form of taxation (which is a common complaint by the general public about ‘non-contributing’, ‘non-deserving’ immigrants, Koikkalainen 2013). All these reasons contribute to more equal power relations in the contact between them and members of their host society, and hence less discrimination from those they encounter. All this is in line with what was said about the views of skilled migrants in the positive ethos of global labour markets in the last section.

However, there are additional specificities of the Finnish context that affect the lives of skilled migrants living in the country. As a contrasting frame of reference to the positive globalized flows that they live their lives in, they are also influenced by a Finnish socio-national ethos tied to Western whiteness and a historical, racialized understanding of ingroup homogeneity and superiority.

Normative whiteness and visibility

Despite the long history of national ethnic minorities such as the Swedish-speaking Finns, the Sámi and the Roma, Finnish national identity has developed around notions of cultural and ethnic homogeneity, which still dominate people’s perceptions of the nation (Tervonen 2014). The narrative of a homogeneous, white nation is constructed by processes of Othering against these minorities (Keskinen 2019), thereby excluding difference from the image of who belongs to the nation.¹⁹ Christensen has pointed to ethnicity as ‘the most striking marker of belonging in the Nordic countries’ (Christensen 2009: 22). Whiteness (Garner 2014; Lundström 2014, 2017) and visibility (Leinonen 2012a; Leinonen & Toivanen 2014) are markers that carry much meaning with them in both the Nordic and the Finnish context. They place migrants, regardless of skill or class considerations, in different positions according to ethnicity and somatic features; because of their non-whiteness in a society where non-whiteness is visible, those highly skilled migrants that have visible, racialized ethnicities are typically branded ‘immigrants’ in the negative sense (Leinonen 2012a; Lundström 2017). Lundström notes how ‘the migrant’ is constructed as a ‘nonprivileged, non-white, non-western (refugee) subject in search of a better future in “our” country’ (2017:

¹⁹ Presenting Finland in research as a homogeneous nation has been criticised and for good reason (e.g. Keskinen et al. 2019). However, I still maintain that Finland in relation to e.g. most other EU states has a shorter history of migration especially from countries outside of Europe, a smaller migrant population with a small second generation, and hence a comparatively homogeneous, majority white population. Even if it is partially based on ‘a myth’ (Tervonen 2014), a similar narrative of a homogeneous nation of Finns is what the skilled migrants often portray in my data. Therefore, it is part of the construction of the referent point they live their lives in in Finland.

79). Similarly, the social category of migrancy is applied ‘as the constructed subjectivity of the migrant as a stranger and a foreigner’ (Näre 2013b: 619). Visibly ethnic skilled migrants are therefore subjected to all the unprivileged, unskilled, undeserving connotations their visibility and somatic features carry with them.

Even though Finland lacks a colonialist past, it ‘does not emerge as an innocent outsider in the colonialist divide between the “West” and “others”’ (Koskinen 2015: 171). This division is still very much visible in the way immigrants in Finland are discriminated against according to their ethnicity (FRA 2018; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2006; Keskinen et al. 2018; Larja et al. 2012; Puuronen 2011; Salonen & Villa 2006). Jaakkola’s studies of ‘ethnic hierarchies’ in Finland show that Finnish public attitudes are the least accepting of those migrants that are seen as culturally and somatically different from them (2005, 2009). Being discriminated against seems to be in line with this ethnic hierarchy (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2006; Liebkind et al. 2016) and studies showing a general prejudice towards especially black people are plentiful (e.g. FRA 2018; Keskinen et al. 2018; Ndukwe 2017). This also applies to skilled migrants, as can be deduced, for example, from studies about employment practices favouring native Finns or Western migrants over those qualified applicants coming from African countries (Ndukwe 2017), Russia (Larja et al. 2012), Taiwan (Chang & Holm 2017), Pakistan (Ahmad 2005), or even Poland (Liebkind et al. 2016).

Conversely, some studies have started to examine critically how the privilege of whiteness functions for skilled migrants in Finland (Clarke 2014; Leinonen 2012a, 2012b; Lulle & Balode 2014). These critical looks at the apparent ‘easiness’ of being a white, skilled migrant show that integration is not just about choice and that there are various levels to exclusion and non-belonging. Being appreciated as a migrant, skilled or not, is not simply a matter of blending in physically or having an economically secure situation (Clarke 2014; Lulle & Balode 2014). There are hierarchies also within whiteness (Lulle & Balode 2014; Krivonos 2019a). Specific to the Finnish context is the case of Russians, whose whiteness is overshadowed by negative connotations based on historical and political factors, even in the case of highly skilled individuals (Lahti 2013; Kobak 2013; Krivonos 2019a).

Migration studies have often been accused of having an ‘ethnic lens’: a bias to an assumption of the primacy of ethnicity as a basis for group identification (Baumann 1997; Glick Schiller 2010; Glick Schiller et al. 2006). In research on skilled migrants, however, this bias functions in reverse: as ‘skilled migrants’ as a group are not formed based on an ethnicity or even a nationality, research has as it were bypassed the very idea that ethnicity might be meaningful in skilled migrants’ lives. In other words, ‘ethnic’ skilled migrants are lost in the economic

interest in skilled migration, and often not even acknowledged. Research from the early days of skilled migration research in Finland seems to be largely about white, Western migration (e.g. Forsander & Raunio 2005; Kepsu et al. 2009; Trux 2002; Yijälä et al. 2009). Apart from one single (rather unsubstantiated) mention of the possibility of ‘selective racism’ among skilled labour migrants by Raunio (2002b: 154),²⁰ there is no mention of the relevance of ethnicity. However, as migration to Finland has multiplied and diversified, so has research. In the last decade, researchers have also started to show interest in skilled migrants that come from countries outside the Western world and/or are not white. This research includes studies of skilled migrants from Asia (e.g. Chang 2014; Eskelä 2018; Haukilahti et al 2012; Merimaa & Kiviniemi 2010; Merimaa & Oilinki 2010; Yijälä & Nyman 2017) and from Africa (e.g. Habti 2014; Sabour & Habti 2010, Ndukwe 2017). Common themes in this literature include racism (Ndukwe 2017; Yijälä & Nyman 2017), struggling with combining professional and ethnic identities in one’s life (e.g. Chang 2014; Habti 2014; Yijälä & Nyman 2017), and ethnic discrimination in the labour market (e.g. Chang & Holm 2017; Larja et al. 2012; Kyhä 2011; Krivonos 2017; Ndukwe 2017). Based on these studies, there is no denying that ethnicity has a strong defining role in the lives of skilled migrants in Finland, just like it has been shown to affect the lives of immigrants in general.

Gender equality and welfare state rhetoric

It has also been argued that gender equality is a central concept in Nordic cultural constructions of nationhood (Mulinari et al. 2016). As such, it is also used as a standard against which immigrants are measured. ‘European values’ and an implied moral superiority (Christensen 2009; Keskinen 2012, 2014) are worded in a narrative of gender equality as something representing a Finnish, Western worldview that separates people in the country into an ‘equal majority’ and ‘patriarchal minorities’ (Keskinen 2016: 269). Many gendered ethnic stereotypes (e.g. viewing Muslim men as oppressive patriarchs or Thai women as passive and subservient) do not fit the ethos of Nordic gender equality and, therefore, subject certain individuals to exclusion from Finnishness (Keskinen 2014; Krivonos 2019a; Vuori 2016). Studies discussing the effects of gendered ethnicities and stereotypes on skilled migrants have found that female skilled migrants with negatively regarded ethnicities feel judged both by their gender and by their

²⁰ Raunio’s study mainly consists of informants from Europe and North America but also includes some individuals from India and China. By ‘selective racism’ Raunio is referring to attitudes among Finnish people being more negative towards those who look less like them, especially in regard to skin colour. He does not elaborate on this further, but states that his informants in Finland come across racism ‘very little or only on occasion’ (2002b: 153).

ethnicity (Chang 2014; Kobak 2013; Lahti 2013; Lulle & Balode 2014). This perception comes from, for example, not being recognized professionally for one's qualifications (Chang 2014; Habti 2014; Steel & Jyrkinen 2017; Yijälä & Nyman 2017), or from having difficulties in establishing a gender-equal role for oneself outside the workplace (Chang 2014; Clarke 2014; Habti 2014).

Returning to the discussion of (global) deskilling processes, research shows that deskilling of migrants in racialized and gendered ways also happens in the Finnish context. In addition to employers in job seeking situations, labour immigration policies, border regimes, educational authorities and unemployment services have all been found to contribute to the racialized and gendered processes of deskilling of migrants (Krivonos 2019a, 2019b; Kurki et al. 2019; Könönen 2018). These processes first make individuals into 'migrant workers' who are then further constituted as ideal subjects for, for example, care work due to what are assumed to be their 'natural caring skills' (Kurki et al. 2019). According to Kurki et al.'s (2019) study, both education and career guidance services in Finland function with a racialized logic pushing students of immigrant background into various low-paid care work jobs, regardless of their own interests and skills. Krivonos (2019b), on the other hand, discusses how state immigration policies and border controls push educated Russian women onto a continuing path of lower-skilled employment and care work. Further intersections of racialized processes with gender, and even age, can constitute multiple disadvantages; gendered ageism in the Finnish labour market and employment services has been found to intersect with foreign origin, impacting the chances of skilled female migrants of a certain age to find employment at the level of their education (Steel & Jyrkinen 2017; also Lehtovaara 2017).

Therefore, in regard to gendered and racialized deskilling, the same global inequalities and processes of racialization discussed earlier are also in action in the Finnish context. Although there are location-specific structural constraints, immigrants are classified in powerful ways universally. This happens on many levels, from cognitive categorizations and stereotyping to institutional level practices (such as the implementation of immigration controls and other official state policies). Even the level of the economic justification of capitalist ideology divides immigrants into 'deserving' and 'undeserving' subjects (Jaskulowski & Pawlak 2019). In the Finnish context, this is relevant especially as it relates to the ideas of the welfare state and the allocation of resources. Forsander (2004) discusses how the legitimacy of the Finnish welfare state system is built on a continuum of nationalistic ideals of similarity that are worded as equality and inclusion. Immigrants as something out of the norm 'rattle' the foundations of this welfare state, as they challenge the limits of inclusion in their dis-similarity (ibid:

3). The aim of immigrant integration measures is to ‘increase Finnishness’ (ibid: 9), especially through a focus on wage employment, which is seen as ‘the key to full social participation: only by doing “decent” work is it possible to become a full citizen’ (ibid). However, racialized and gendered classificatory practices reflect official immigration policies that determine immigrants’ access to the labour market and even to the country in the form of border controls and visa regulations (Krivonos 2015; Könönen 2018). Official classifications of migrants for policy purposes are not objective, rather they are based on political and economic goals, as well as public attitudes. These processes, therefore, further contribute to a ‘widespread social hierarchization of migrants’ on a global scale (Klekowski von Koppenfels 2014: 139).

As I have discussed in this chapter, the evaluation of skilled migrants as a sought-after global workforce presents a positive reference point that structures their experiences as valued and appreciated migrants. However, other, more local reference points reflecting gendered and racialized processes may contradict this positive evaluation. They also frame the skilled migrants’ experiences in Finland, which should therefore be observed with both contexts in mind; both are laden with categorizing processes, be they stereotyping, racialization or official administrative classifications that are about difference-making and evaluation. As such, ‘these processes open and close opportunities, and enable and constrain individuals’ life-course trajectories’ (Lamont 2014: 817). Furthermore, they play an important role in the processes of identity construction, as well as in a sense of belonging. In the next chapter, I delve further into this focus on categorization, social identities and belonging by introducing the theoretical context underlining my research.

3. Theoretical context: researching skilled migrants through a focus on social identities

The main focus of this research is on social identity construction and the negotiations that happen between the structural considerations described in the previous chapter and the migrants' individual agency. As I have pointed out in the first two chapters, despite the relative privilege of skilled migrants as sought after international talent in the global labour market, they are indeed also migrants: they have left their home countries and come to live in Finland. Any migration experience, whether permanent or temporary, forced or voluntary, leads to changes in the lived social reality of the individual because they come to be considered 'the Other' within the social structure of their new host country (Chrysochoou 2004: 6-7). The act of migration changes migrants' positions vis-à-vis those around them, and hence 'migrants encounter new mirror images ascribed by the receiving society and become reflexive about how to situate their personal and collective identities' (Lan & Wu 2016: 754). Therefore, in migration, perhaps more so than in other life events, 'the perception, representation, and definition of identity also change' (La Barbera 2015: 3). How skilled migrants in Finland experience this collectively and as individuals, how this affects their social identities and their feelings of belonging, and how they see themselves within this new whole is what interests me.

This chapter presents the two main theoretical approaches and concepts that have guided the research: interactionism and intersectionality.²¹ Both of these approaches are concerned with identities as social, as changing and as affected by the societal structures around us. While a look at interactionist identity theories of Barthian heritage turns our focus on the negotiations that surround identity formation and the formation of group boundaries, an intersectional focus points to the heterogeneity that exists *within* the formed boundaries. Both are essentially about the interplay of structure and agency, about social identities, and about belonging. I will therefore also discuss these central concepts as they relate to the theories and the objectives of my research in more detail.

3.1 Social identities as negotiated: the interactionist approach

As opposed to individual, personal understandings of one's identity, a social identity is that part of an individual's understanding of themselves that is

²¹ As my approach is rooted in interpretive research, these theoretical notions were used more as concepts to guide the investigation and as ways to focus in on what the skilled migrants were experiencing after their move to Finland, rather than as a theoretical template to follow.

connected to their membership in, or feeling of belonging to, a social group (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel & Turner 1986). Such social groups can be based on any identity markers, such as gender, age, ethnicity or class status. As identification for the individuals themselves they are subjective. However, they also include an imposed element in the form of social categorizations that are more dependent on how others see us; social identities are dependent on people around us, and are created, and re-created in interaction with others (e.g. Barth 1969; Jenkins 2008; Cohen 2000; Wimmer 2013). This last point is the essence of how those subscribing to an interactionist approach view identities. Their approaches offer an explanation for what happens in the experience of migration as described in the introduction to this chapter: a new social setting leads to interaction and Othering between the groups and individuals involved in order to establish who everyone is in the coherent whole.

Interactionism is not so much a theoretical school, rather scholars are connected by an analytical point of view and a long tradition of mutual critique and discussion back and forth (Barth 1966, 1969, 1994, 2000, 2007; Brubaker 2014, 2018; Cohen 1994, 2000, 2018; Eriksen 1993, 1995; Eriksen & Jakoubek 2018a; Jenkins 1994, 2000, 2010, 2014; Lamont 2000, 2014; Wimmer 2008a, 2008b, 2013, 2014).²² Personified by anthropologist Frederick Barth, his earlier 'transactional' model of social life (Barth 1966, 1969) stated that group boundaries are constructed through processes of social transactions and exchanges both within the group itself and across different groups. Somewhere down the line theories following his ideas diverted their attention from 'transactions' to 'interaction' (e.g. Jenkins 2000), and the original focus on 'exchanges' became a concern for 'strategies' (e.g. Wimmer 2008a). In my work, I refer to these theorists of a Barthian heritage as 'interactionists'²³ for a lack of a more established common name (see Jakoubek 2018 for an extensive review on this issue). They all share an impetus for looking at boundaries and the interactions around them as building blocks of social collectives, rather than the 'cultural stuff' those

²² My research has been inspired especially by the writings of Barth, Jenkins and Wimmer, but also by Cohen, Brubaker, Eriksen and Lamont, specifically as they have taken part in the lively debates and exchanges of opinion that have carried the Barthian tradition to the present day. The collection of papers from Barth's 1969 symposium 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries' has been revisited on several occasions: a book edited by Vermeulen and Govers (1994) marked the 25th anniversary of the symposium, and another edited collection was recently released for the 50th anniversary (Eriksen & Jakoubek 2018). Furthermore, Cohen's collection of essays (Cohen 2000) and a special issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies* dedicated to ethnic boundary making (see Wimmer 2014) have added to a steady stream of published academic discussion and critique back and forth that has remained lively throughout, and beyond, Barth's life.

²³ 'Interactionism' and 'interactionists' here are not to be confused with the school of thought referred to as 'symbolic interactionism', which focuses on interaction as it is communicated through language and symbols (see e.g. Denzin 1992), nor with the study of interaction itself (or 'talk-in-interaction'), for example through the means of conversation analysis (e.g. Peräkylä 2012).

boundaries contain, as Barth famously worded it (Barth 1969: 15; see e.g. Jenkins 2008: 44; Verdery 1994: 35; Wimmer 2008b: 971 for a reformulation of this central thought).

In interactionism, social identities are seen as something people “do” rather than something that they “have”, as a process rather than as a property’ (La Barbera 2015: 3, in reference to Jenkins 2008). This type of ‘constructionist’, ‘instrumentalist’ or ‘situationalist’ approach to identities is not unique to these theorists. Many others agree that an identity ‘is not an accomplished end point of a people’s history, but a constant process of becoming’ (Lewellen 2002: 90), and that identities cannot be deduced to a primordial notion of a ‘collective true self’ (Hall 1996), rather they should be viewed as a collection of simultaneous, overlapping identifications, both group and individual, that may be hierarchically arranged and re-arranged according to the situation and those around one (Campbell and Rew 1999). What an interactionist approach adds is the more intense focus firstly on the construction of the boundaries of social groups, and secondly on how individuals can negotiate these boundaries and their own individual belonging within them.

Categories, groups and negotiations

In interactionist thought, identity is not only an internalization of a person’s self-definition, but also includes a definition imposed by others. Jenkins, particularly, takes as the locus of his work Barth’s original point that identifications are based on both ascription and self-ascription (Barth 1969). For this purpose, Jenkins makes a distinction between ‘categories’ and ‘groups’, according to which a category is a definition imposed on us by others whereas a group is our own (collective) internal definition (Jenkins 1994, 2000). There are constant negotiations between the categorization and the group identification, and it is in the interplay of these that one’s identity is created. Identity is therefore seen as ‘a practical accomplishment, a process’ (Jenkins 2008: 46), achieved through a ‘dialectical interplay’ of ‘processes of internal and external definition’ (ibid), whereby we internalize (some of) the imposed categorizations into our own definition of ourselves, and then, in turn, present this modified idea to others for further negotiation between the definitions.

Looking at the action of categorization more closely is important for understanding Jenkins’ argument. In interactionism, the group that holds the (symbolic or otherwise) power through being representatives of the dominant ‘referent culture’ (Lewellen 2002: 106) is in a position to impose categorizations on others. In the context of my research, this group is represented by those Finns that the skilled migrants encounter. They are seen as the representatives of the

referent culture, and therefore in a position to impose categorizations on others. These categorizations are often based on mere mental images, or typifications, of different types of migrants by different types of Finns. Categorizations are simplifications, and, as such, they rely on stereotyping (Liebkind 1992). However, how an individual feels about and is affected by categorizations and the related stereotypes can be more descriptively discussed as 'meta-stereotyping'. Meta-stereotyping refers to how people perceive themselves to be perceived by others (Vorauer et al. 1998). In other words, a meta-stereotype is about 'a person's beliefs regarding the stereotype that out-group members hold about his or her own group' (ibid: 917).

Although I have not used this term in the articles presented as parts of my dissertation, it is essentially what is being discussed when I talk about how skilled migrants feel they are perceived in Finland. The global and Finnish reference points discussed earlier in chapter 2 are also best approached through the idea of the meta-stereotype: what members of the host society think about migrants and migration is not the main consideration here. Rather the focus of the investigation is on the skilled migrants' own perceptions of how they are seen in these contexts, as experienced and narrated by themselves. Meta-stereotypes, along with stereotypes and self-stereotypes, have functions for defining social identities and for group differentiation (Tajfel 1981). As both the stereotypes, as well as the perception of them as meta-stereotypes, can be either positive or negative (or neutral), they may also have positive or negative effects for a group's social identity (Klein & Azzi 2001). A negative meta-stereotype (i.e. perceiving that others see you in a negative, often inaccurate, way) causes a threat to one's identity. To overcome this, those threatened by the perceived meta-stereotype try to 'communicate a favourable description of their group when in the presence of an out-group audience' (ibid: 280-1).

This is very much in keeping with interactionist ideas of how others' categorizations, or even *perceived* categorizations, of oneself will affect one's self-described identity (Barth 1969; Jenkins 1994, 2000). When individuals or groups are subjected to new categorizations they begin to (re)negotiate their internal definitions of themselves, as these definitions are inevitably affected by the imposed categorizations. Their own perception of the value, or positivity or negativity, of the categorization will influence the form that these (re)negotiations take. This form will also depend on how consensual or conflictual the external definition (categorization) is felt to be to one's self-defined group identity, and on power relations that define the possibilities for resistance against the categorization. Jenkins sees these as taking the form of different levels of internalization (1994: 217). In an ideal case, people feel that they are seen in the

same way as they see themselves, in which case they may simply approve, and internalize, the imposed categorization as who they are. In other cases, the categorized resist or reject the imposed definition, and attempt to bring forth an alternative self-definition in its place. However, for Jenkins, ‘striving for autonomy of self-identification, is, however, every bit an effect of categorization’ (2000: 21). Therefore, even in the case of a conflictual categorization that is fully rejected by those subjected to it, ‘the rejected external definition *is* internalized, but paradoxically, as the focus of denial’ (1994: 217).

While Jenkins sees the negotiations as always leading to internalization in some form, Wimmer’s work on the subject of ethnic boundary making focuses more deeply on the forms that these negotiations, and the interactions surrounding them, take. It is a continuation from Jenkins’ dialectic of internal and external identifications: the conflicts between how people perceive themselves to be categorized and how they themselves define their group identity lead to various identity and boundary making strategies being used in order to fight for self-determination (as well as for a more positive identity). Wimmer builds in his vast body of work a detailed typology of ‘strategies of boundary making’ (Wimmer 2005, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2013, 2014). He deems that his typology covers all the possible ways in which people can influence how they are seen by others, ranging from collective strategies aiming at redrawing the boundaries of social groups all together, to individual strategies that modify boundaries and meanings in more subtle ways or blur the standards on which the categories are constructed in the first place.²⁴ These strategies, like Jenkins’ (re)negotiations and internalizations, are directed at an ‘audience’. The language of the strategies is hence defined by the prevalent referent culture so that they can be ‘understood by the audience’ (Jenkins 2008) to ‘reach a consensus’ (Wimmer 2013) and to eventually ‘gain recognition’ (Lamont 2014). Only after this recognition is achieved can an identity negotiation be considered (for the time being) complete.

Jenkins’ ideas highlight how identities are not unilaterally decided upon, rather they are inherently social. Wimmer’s work further draws our attention to how identities are also malleable, situational, forever changing, and up for negotiation. As a whole, interactionist theories stress the importance of individual agency in the process of identity making, while acknowledging that identities are also dependent on the prevalent social structures and their constraints. I will now look at this relationship between structure and agency more closely.

²⁴ I have used Wimmer’s typology in article IV included in this dissertation to analyse skilled migrants’ strategies against the categorizations they feel are imposed on them. I will therefore refrain from a more detailed description of the typology here.

On structure and agency

Interactionism's primary investigative focus is on individual, micro-level, actions. These actions are directed and shaped by societal structures at the macro-level that in turn through meso-level interactions shape the societal structures (Layton 1997). This point of view is very much related to the decades-long debate over structure versus agency in the social sciences (e.g. Martin & Dennis 2013; Layton 1997; Jenkins 2010). The debate concerns the ways in which individuals exist and act within the constraints of societal structures, and how the repeated dialogue between the two eventually forges changes in both. Similarly, the boundary making processes of interactionism are also based on an interplay between agency (as self-definitions, and as strategies advocating those self-definitions) and structure (as imposed categorizations, and as the referent culture). Identities are played out 'within the confines of culture and structure' (Turner 2012: 114), which therefore constrain the available choices for identities. Those identities that are acceptable within the culture and structure become verified and, consequently, part of the culture and structure themselves; the processes that construct (social) identities therefore reciprocally 'operate to sustain and reinforce social structures' (ibid). Following this same reciprocal logic, Wimmer sees his theories as offering an explanation that 'goes from structural constraints of action to how actors operate within these constraints to how their actions aggregate back into the structural constraints that influence the next sequence of action' (2013: 837). This may sound like semantics, but consideration of the relationship between structure and agency is important to how I see my research. Although my interest as a researcher is on the micro- and meso-level actions and agency of skilled migrants as individuals, I feel that they can only be observed and understood as parts of the structure within which these actions occur. Actions have no meaning in a void, and hence they must be studied with acknowledgement to the reference points relevant to the lives of skilled migrants, as described in chapter 2.

Barth's original view strongly emphasized individual agency. He was convinced that people are strategic about their actions; that they are rational, self-interested actors (Barth 1959; Layton 1997). He argued that 'the parties in the course of their interactions systematically try to assure that the value gained for them is greater or equal to the value lost' (Barth 1966: 4). For me this is an important point; that individuals do things because they have something to gain from trying to get to a certain outcome. In relation to identities, this is about the right not just to a self-definition, but also to being seen in a positive way by others. Choices to this end are made through a 'conscious cost-benefit manipulation' (Lewellen 2002: 120) whereby people emphasize the parts of their identity that are the most beneficial to the situation. However, even though this perspective implies

that individuals have rather substantial control over their identities, identity is by no means merely a matter of choice. Although Barth generally believed in choice and the decision making of actors, especially in his later work he qualified that they are still dependent on the prevalent structure: 'choice is not synonymous with freedom, and men and women rarely make choices under circumstances chosen by themselves' (1981: 89). Even though Wimmer's model is also heavily focused on agency, he does acknowledge that 'actors are obviously not free to choose whatever strategy they like best' (Wimmer 2008b: 990), rather they are affected by the prevalent structure, and therefore any 'free' choice of individuals is reliant on relations of power embedded within that structure.

Why a theory on ethnicity?

Most of the research taking an interactionist approach has concentrated on ethnic groups and the construction of ethnic identities. Some of the issues I focus on are directly to do with ethnicity, although skilled migrants themselves are not a group defined by ethnic standards. However, most interactionists attest that their theories can be adapted to the research of 'non-ethnic' or multi-ethnic groups, such as skilled migrants, because of their focus on the interactions that construct such boundaries, and not the 'cultural stuff' they entail. To Barth, as the title of his book suggests, the boundary making between ethnic groups was about 'the social organization of cultural difference' (1969), rather than ethnicity as an inherent attribute of individuals. In later work, Barth added class and professional differences as well as gender to be considered as such social organization of cultural difference, thereby expanding his ideas to all social categorizations (1983, 2007). Jenkins also attests that his theories are applicable to other types of groups as well as other social identities (Jenkins 1994: 210, 2008: 130-1; see also Eriksen & Jakoubek 2018b). Wimmer notes that his model 'could easily be applied to other social cleavages as well, to class, gender, professions, subcultures, age groups, and the like' (2013: 213). Brubaker further comments on Wimmer's theories going 'beyond ethnicity to a broader theory of the making and unmaking of groups' (2014: 807) as the processes under investigation are essentially the same with other social identifications. In fact, many theorists in this genre warn against the 'ethnic lens' mentioned before in relation to the critique of migration studies in general (Glick Schiller et al. 2006), i.e. seeing ethnic groups as the obvious unit of analysis (Wimmer 2013). Brubaker (2004) discusses this in wider terms as 'groupism', which can be applied to any social categorization, stating that seeing any group as a given undermines the centrality of the boundary making processes in constructing and moulding groups in the first place.

The adaptation of primarily ethnic theories to the study of social identities in general begs for a definition of what is meant by ethnicity in this research. I have preferred using ‘ethnicity’ to subsume also the term ‘race’ in this research whenever possible to discuss both somatic differences as well as cultural and national identifications.²⁵ For Brubaker, race, ethnicity and nationhood belong to ‘a single integrated family of forms of cultural understanding, social organization and political contestation’ (Brubaker 2009: 25), that, from a cognitive perspective, are about ‘recognizing, identifying, and classifying other people, of construing sameness and difference, and of “coding” and making sense of their actions’ (ibid: 34). Wimmer takes this view a step further and delivers a definition of ethnicity that I have, in its entirety, subscribed to in this research:

‘In this broad understanding of ethnicity, “race” is treated as a subtype of ethnicity, as is nationhood: if phenotypical features are used as indicators of group membership, we speak of ethnosomatic groups; if members of an ethnic community have developed nationalist aspirations and demand (or control) a state of their own, we describe such categories and groups as nations [...]. Further subtypes of ethnicity can be distinguished depending on the type of markers that are used to substantiate the belief in shared culture and ancestry, most importantly ethnoreligious, ethnoregional, and ethnolinguistic categories and groups’. (2008b: 973-4)

It should also be stressed that ethnicity is socially constructed: it does not exist on its own as a ‘thing’ (Eriksen 1993). It is constructed through interaction and through processes of categorizations by those who represent the dominant discourse. Furthermore, ‘since the dominant group considers itself universal or the essential group, the referent culture for all others, it is above ethnicity’ (Lewellen 2002: 106). In the discussed context of the normative whiteness and the narrative of homogeneity in Finland, somatic markers (such as skin colour) make a person easily visible. However, being visible, or even ‘visibly ethnic’, on its own is merely a differentiation, a neutral categorization if you will. As a differentiation, it does not imply anything about the value of that ethnicity. The *social significance of ethnicities, including that of whiteness*, is reliant on power differentials, value judgements, and stigmatization or racialization processes (Keskinen & Andreassen 2017). When an ethnicity (or visibility) becomes stigmatized or racialized (meaning that the somatic features are infused with negative meaning and value) it will have socially significant consequences (Leinonen & Toivanen 2014).

²⁵ Some leeway has been given in the articles either due to the journals’ policies or the literature referred to, most notably in regard to article III included in the dissertation.

However, ethnicity is just one of many social categorizations that people can be defined by. Boundaries and identities are multiple because they are defined in relation to (multiple) Others (Eriksen 1995). Furthermore, they are situational, and their salience may vary (Werbner 2018). This idea of the situationality, salience and relativity of multiple, sometimes overlapping, identities leads us to another theoretical consideration: the intersectionality of social identities, and its connection to belonging(s).

3.2 Social identities as situational and multiple

People are affected by, subjected to and identify with many social categories other than just ethnicity (e.g. gender, age or class). These further intersect to form combined effects, such as was referred to in section 2.3 in relation to, for example, gendered ageism in the labour market (Steel & Jyrkinen 2017), racialized gender stereotypes (Chang 2014; Krivonos 2015, 2019a), or migrancy as a social category of ethnicized class (Näre 2013b). This awareness of the intersections of different elements in the skilled migrants' experiences follows throughout the research, drawing attention especially to the roles of ethnicity and class (as will be further discussed in the findings).

Intersectionality

In my approach to intersectionality, I have been inspired especially by Anthias' vast work (2008, 2009, 2012, 2013a, 2013b), but also by Yuval-Davis (2007, 2011), Levine-Rasky (2011) and Nordic sociologists, such as Lundström (2010, 2017) and Christensen (2009, 2015). In essence, intersectionality sees that class, ethnicity, race, gender and so on cannot be understood in isolation or separate from each other. Identities and belonging are constructed in the interrelationship of these categories (Christensen 2009). This adds another dimension to identities as being formed in interaction between people and between groups; they are further formed in interplay between different *parts* of one's identity, i.e. different social categorizations that individuals (may or may not) subscribe to, as well as their own self-defined ideas of themselves. An intersectional awareness, therefore, steers us away from the 'ethnic lens' or any other groupist primordial notion that would assume that members included in the same social category essentially share the same experiences²⁶ (Grzanka 2014; Yuval-Davis 2011). In my research, this means a further distancing from the idea of skilled migrants as the 'migrant elite',

²⁶ Intersectional research has itself been accused of primordialism as well as it often focuses on a predefined category as the locus of analysis (see e.g. McCall 2005 for a discussion on managing complexity in intersectional research).

or as stereotypical expatriates, and looking into the heterogeneity of the experiences among them.

Another central point of intersectional theory is that the intersections of class, ethnicity, gender and so on are not constant, rather their context, meaning and saliency will change situationally, depending on both structural constraints as well as individuals' own understanding of their social locations (Anthias 2008, 2013c; Werbner 2018). Because my research discusses identities and processes induced by changes brought about by migration, this situationalism is evident in the lives of the subjects as they (re)negotiate their identities within the structures of their new host society. This draws attention back to the discussion of structure versus agency. As social identities and their intersections are influenced by the prevalent social structure they are also subject to its 'macro-level biases' and hence 'informed by the power, privilege, oppression experiences, social dictates, constraints, values, strengths, and perceived deficits of those identities' (Gargi 2016: 2). Traditionally, the focus of intersectional research has been on intersections that mutually constitute disadvantages, oppression and subordination, as in the case of the 'triple disadvantage' of women of colour from the lower classes that early feminist intersectionality was focused on (e.g. Crenshaw 1989). In this approach to intersectionality, the focus is therefore on how the intersections of different social categories limit the power of individuals. However, newer studies have explored the ways and situations in which intersections may work in more positively reinforcing ways, conferring privilege and power on those in question (Basti 2014; Levine-Rasky 2011; Sacks & Lindholm 2002).

The last important point for my research regarding intersectional thought is that social categories are not only imposed classifications on individuals: they can function in two further, separate ways 'as representations and as identity claims' (Anthias 2013c: 7). Even though social categories are often internalized as identifications for oneself, they can also be appropriated as 'categories of discursive practice' for identity claims against those categorizations that are felt to be imposed and untrue (ibid). In combination with the multiplicity and simultaneousness of each person's social identities, individuals have an arsenal of different discursive material at their disposal with which to communicate their identities.

Belonging

Intersectionality in this research, however, is not only about how skilled migrants are perceived and how they experience their identities based on categories such as gender, class or ethnicity. It also relates to how they form a sense of belonging. I

conceive belonging in this research in relation to social identities, as a subjectively felt sense of being like other people in a particular social collective. Because of similarities, one feels as if they 'belong' to that group (Wimmer 2008b).

Belonging is relational, in that it is formed 'in relation to something outside the self' (Anthias 2013b: 7). For Anthias, 'belongingness' is therefore the opposite of Otherness, corresponding to feelings of similarity and difference (Anthias 2012). These similarities and differences are, again, relative and situational to the different intersections of social identities. For example, an immigrant woman of lower social class may find similarities with women from the majority background, as well as other similarities with immigrant men. However, they may find more differences than similarities with other immigrant women who are of a higher social class. People may connect, engage and have a sense of belonging with each other through any or all of the social categories they identify with or through factors such as political beliefs and values, or lifestyle, or across ethnic groups (Anthias 2012). Skilled migrants are an intersectional group of many nationalities, genders, ethnicities, ages, as well as many other less visible categorizations. Therefore, any belonging they may feel together will not be tied to one particular social categorization, rather it is to be found in situational and relative ways. Furthermore, as identities and their intersections are multiple and situational, belonging is also multiple and situational; we can feel like we belong to more than just one group or collectivity.

Belonging in this sense is an emotive issue, it is about a feeling. In another sense, it is about belonging to a geographical place as 'place-belongingness': 'a personal, intimate, feeling of being "at home" in a place' (Antonsich 2010: 645). In addition, it also has a more active, instrumental side, referred to as the 'politics of belonging' (Geddes & Favell 1999; Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011). The politics of belonging is about how belonging is constructed and negotiated, rather than what belonging *is*. It points to the social, relative side of belonging as something negotiated between those who claim to belong and those that are in a position to 'grant' this belonging (Yuval-Davis 2010; see also Antonsich 2010). It is, again, produced in interaction with others, and within societal constraints (Halse 2018). Therefore, there may be contestations about the right to belong (Yuval-Davis 2006, 2010), especially for immigrants who have to negotiate their belonging in their new host society, for example through different 'narratives of belonging' (Anthias 2002, 2009) in order to 'find and define a place for themselves' as my research question defines it (see p.9).

This view on belonging as an active, social project reliant on negotiations brings us back to the beginning of this theoretical chapter, to interactionist identity theories. Although this chapter has introduced two seemingly separate theoretical

views, I see them as complementary to each other. The interactionist focus is directed firmly at the processes of identity negotiations by actively turning its gaze away from what the constructed boundaries contain. Conversely, intersectionality is specifically about the variation and differences *within* such boundaries. Looking at social identities both as bounded yet multiple, and as negotiated yet situational helps us to see the possibilities for endless heterogeneity. For me, all of the theories reviewed come together in the concept of social identity. Social identities are constructed in interaction with others (Barth 1969; Jenkins 1994); social identities can be negotiated against unwanted categorizations (Jenkins 2000; Wimmer 2008a, 2008b); social identities are intersectional, consisting of several parts (Anthias 2008; McCall 2005; Yuval-Davis 2011); social identities are situational (Anthias 2013a; Eriksen 1995; Werbner 2018); and subscribing to and identifying with a social identity connects to belonging (Anthias 2002, 2012; Eriksen 1993), often negotiated through ‘the politics of belonging’ (Yuval-Davis 2006, 2007, 2011). Keeping in mind this interest in social identities and belonging, I now continue to chapter 4, where I discuss how these theoretical approaches fit into the research design for my empirical study.

4. The empirical study: methods and methodology

This chapter introduces the empirical study in more detail, including the what, where, when and how of the data collection and analysis. It also includes a methodological section on the focus on narratives, as well as my own reflexive and ethical considerations in the field as a researcher. I would like to start, however, with a brief description of the design of the study from an interpretive research perspective, as these considerations have affected the whole research design and how I more concretely approached the process of gathering data in the field.

4.1 Research design: the interpretive approach

The theoretical approaches introduced in chapter 3, especially interactionist identity theories, stem from a social constructionist view that is more focused on the (admittedly subjective) experiences and agency of the people under study, rather than on (supposedly objective) structures. An interpretive approach to research is complementary to this view, as it is primarily concerned with the 'meaning-making practices of human subjects' (Bhattacharjee 2012: 104). These practices happen in a particular social context, and hence interpretive research advocates research methods that focus on the social reality and experiences of the subjects as they appear in their social context. This essentially eliminates the use of questionnaires, moderated focus groups, or in fact statistical data, as the meaning-making of subjects is better approached by methods engaging the researcher in the field and among the subjects themselves. To me, this has meant a primarily ethnographic approach, although I diversified my methods as the research progressed, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

The first important point raised by interpretive research is therefore that the concepts should (much like in grounded research) emerge from the field and from the research subjects themselves (Bhattacharjee 2012). As a methodological approach, it steers the research design away from primordialism and groupism by not assuming that a particular category exists as an object of study in the first place. It is the subjects' own perspective on what matters that points to what is central to their lives and experiences, and hence is what the research should focus on. This is also why the perspective of meta-stereotyping in the data is emphasised. I have tried to be sensitive to many interactionists' (as well as intersectionalists', see Glick-Schiller et al. 2011; McCall 2005) warnings against starting with a category of analysis that might not exist for the subjects themselves. Lamont discusses her own use of such an approach in her research: 'I asked

professionals, managers and workers to produce boundary work in the context of interviews – that is, to describe who they feel similar and different from, inferior and superior, and so on – so as to tap where they draw lines and what criteria they use to draw such lines’ (Lamont 2014: 814, referring to Lamont 1992, 2000). Boundaries between groups and even ethnicity as the focus of research should be treated as ‘an etic category belonging to the conceptual toolkit of the researcher’ (Jakoubek 2018: 174), rather than a concept that actually exists in the emic perspective of actors. Therefore, starting from a focus on boundary *making* can be a way to research the self-identifications of the subjects themselves. In my research, I started with the understanding that there are individuals that are indeed skilled migrants. However, firstly I let the people define if they identified themselves as such, and secondly I enquired what collective identity for them consists of, i.e. where their boundaries of belonging lie. These considerations led to findings that will be presented in articles II and III specifically, though they have been an element in the research throughout.

Interpretive research does acknowledge that no research exists in a void and no researcher is a *tabula rasa* without preconceived ideas (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012: 38). I started my research with a theoretical focus on interaction in identity building. I had a tentative hypothesis that there are indeed categorizations that skilled migrants feel are imposed upon them based on their interactions with members of their host society and that this would be a legitimate place to begin an inquiry into their experiences. My primary research question was hence based on my prior knowledge of interactionist theories as well as my experiences in the field.²⁷ The subsequent research questions, as they arose from the research, were developed through ‘abductive ways of knowing’ (ibid: 26). This refers to going back and forth between empirical material, the field, and relevant literature in order to seek ‘sense-making’ and explanations rather than answers to pre-existing hypotheses (Bhattacharjee 2012).

This is also a central point of interpretive research: the relationship between data, analyses, theory and explanation building is based on an ongoing process throughout the research (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012). Furthermore, this ongoing process is cyclical in that it can be started from any point and worked on through the different stages as many times as are needed in order to achieve ‘sense-making’. Research is therefore not envisaged as a straight path from theory to hypothesis or from data gathering to findings. Rather, different phases of a research project (‘fieldwork’, ‘deskwork’ and ‘textwork’, Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012: 7) are intertwined and even repeated. From the beginning, I was lucky

²⁷ See Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012: 25-6 for the role of personal, ‘local’ knowledge in research.

enough to have continuous, flexible access to the field and to subjects. Therefore, the research design followed this approach of simultaneously doing research in the field, analysing, going back to adapt research questions, making comparisons with existing literature, and then returning to the field for more data with more specific questions in mind.

4.2 Methods and data

The field

In order to get an understanding of what the field really consists of, I started my study with an initial review of print media and online resources that are written, read and/or followed by skilled migrants in Finland. This included English-language newspapers, blogs, Internet discussion forums and other content developed with skilled migrants in mind.²⁸ My aim with this secondary, exploratory data was to familiarize myself with the field, identify relevant issues, and eventually find research participants by locating the places where they gathered in their free time. I did not use this data for analyses or findings.

I conducted ethnographic field research intermittently over a 4½-year period between September 2008 and December 2012. Geographically, the field of study was the greater Helsinki area because there is a stronger concentration of both immigrants in general and skilled migrants in particular than elsewhere in Finland (Sutela & Larja 2015a). The field in more specific terms comprised the meetings of various social organizations that have as their members a concentration of both skilled migrants and Finns. Their activities provided an excellent opportunity to observe Finn-foreigner interaction, the formation of group boundaries, as well as to engage in discussions with people in the relevant social context. These social organizations and their meetings therefore offered a window to both the agency of people as well as the structures within which this agency is exercised. They also offered a good variety of interviewees to choose from.

During my fieldwork, I attended the activities of six social organizations that met on a weekly or monthly basis. Furthermore, I also attended selected events at an international cultural centre run by the city of Helsinki and other events organized by a societal policy think tank with an interest in skilled migrants as a resource for an internationalizing Finland. The social clubs, the cultural centre and the events of the think tank all have a different emphasis and style. Some are more directed at people in the business world and their activities are

²⁸ At the end of the reference section I provide a curated list intended to give a general idea about the type of online sources included. See p.94.

showier and take place in trendier bars, while others attract a more casual, budget-conscious crowd. All of them, however, are multicultural and multinational without restriction (as opposed to the single-ethnic organizations more typical of migrants, Sagne, Saksela & Wilhelmsson 2005). Members are typically skilled migrants of various nationalities and ethnicities, along with Finns who are interested in socializing with foreigners. Apart from networking events and casual meetups or themed meetings (such as sports events), many of the clubs also organize activities that celebrate internationalized, appropriated holidays, such as Halloween, St. Patrick's Day and Carnival time. Many also follow the Helsinki cultural scene and actively take part in events such as international movie festivals. Meetings are often organized in cafés, restaurants and bars that tend to be frequented by skilled migrants. Although previous research has pointed out that migrant networks and social life in Helsinki are seen as somewhat lacking by skilled migrants (especially in comparison to previous migration experiences in 'global cities') (Kepsu et al. 2009; Yijälä et al. 2009), I found that these multicultural social clubs were very active and regularly frequented. The majority of the skilled migrants I met wanted to build a life for themselves in Finland, rather than merely live in an 'expat bubble' detached from their geographical location. For them, these clubs offer social connections both to other foreigners who understand their concerns and to Finnish people who can provide relevant cultural knowledge and connections to the wider host society. For those in the country for a shorter time, the events at the very least offered a meaningful social life during their stay in Finland.

The group

For the purposes of the research, I have used the OECD definition of skilled migrants as mentioned earlier in chapter 1. The important factors according to this definition are that the individuals have university-level qualifications and/or that they work in employment requiring such qualifications. To this, I have added that they are immigrants, people of foreign origin.²⁹ Most of the individuals under study had a higher education degree and all worked in professions typically requiring a degree (apart from a few who were unemployed or momentarily between jobs). Some individuals included on an ad hoc basis were compatible with a wider definition of what Richard Florida has famously called 'the creative class': designers, writers, artists, musicians, entertainers, and innovators (Florida

²⁹ One of the interviewees and a few of the people encountered in the field acquired Finnish citizenship during the research process. They continued, however, to identify themselves as 'skilled migrants' even after obtaining citizenship, and I have treated them as such throughout the study.

2002). These included three professional musicians (albeit two of them also had academic degrees in other fields) and a trained artist. As well as the OECD definition used, I have considered the skilled migrants' own self-definitions. All of those included identified as skilled migrants, even though they would also use other terminology, such as 'internationals', 'expats', 'cosmopolitans', or just 'working migrants' when talking about themselves, and in the case of white, Western skilled migrants, also 'Europeans' or 'Western migrants'. I have not included international degree students (or at least full-time students) in my research even though they are considered in some literature to be (potential) highly skilled migrants (Cai & Kivistö 2013; Eskelä 2013).³⁰ From my view out in the field, international students' social life activities and organizations are quite separate from those of skilled migrants, even though there is some overlap.

I have no quantitative data on the gender, nationality, age, language or religion of the people I encountered in the field. It suffices to say that there is great variation in all these respects. I did, however, take note of the myriad of reasons why individuals had come to be specifically in Finland. The previous literature suggests that Finland is not an obvious location for skilled migrants in the 'global field of choices' (Forsander & Raunio 2009; Raunio & Sotarauta 2005). From the people I encountered during my fieldwork, the vast majority did not come to Finland as employees sent by a multinational company as assumed by much of the literature on 'expatriates'. As statistics about reasons for migrating to Finland in general have shown, many skilled migrants also come because of an existing relationship to a Finn (Heikkilä 2017; Kyhä 2011; Migri 2018). The stereotype of a British male 'love migrant' moving to Finland for a Finnish girl he has met abroad proved to be the case many times during my fieldwork. I even know two British male skilled migrants who found out that they had both moved to Finland to be with their Finnish girlfriends on the same exact date. The two celebrated that date with a couple of pints together every year, even ten years later. For others, the love-link to Finland looked different: one German skilled migrant came to Finland because she was (in her own words) 'obsessed' with Ville Valo from the Finnish band HIM, and an Australian who chose Finland because of his life-long love for Finnish heavy metal music. Both only looked for employment once in the country. Many choose Helsinki because they are searching for something outside

³⁰ My research also does not include skilled individuals who came to Finland originally as refugees, asylum seekers or through family reunification. This was not a deliberate decision, rather I did not meet any skilled migrants of this description in the field. There are some existing studies of highly skilled refugees in the Nordic countries that show how their experiences are tied to their ethnicity and their refugee status, rather than to their skills or class status (Mozetic 2018; Yijälä & Nyman 2017). As such, these studies support my argument concerning the centrality of ethnicity and racialization in Nordic societies, even if politically correct rhetoric says differently (i.e. that migrants with skills are wanted and appreciated).

the big global cities. For some, Finland became an option because they could get by with knowing only English and they did not want to have to study another foreign language, as they would be expected to do in more established immigration countries such as France or Spain. Yet many did indeed come for interesting job opportunities, led by career considerations.

The data and their collection

The body of knowledge for this research consists of data collected through several complementary methods: participant observation, fieldwork conversations, ethnographic interviews and more focused semi-structured narrative interviews. In addition, I collected the already mentioned early, exploratory data consisting of a media and online review before starting actual fieldwork. This secondary data were not used for the findings of the research. However, some interesting thoughts from the blogs and discussion forums ended up in notes for myself as suggestions for what to look out for in the field, and as inspiration for questions to bring up both during ethnographic interviews and the later one-on-one interviews. Once I had identified the relevant social organizations and events where I could meet skilled migrants, I started collecting ethnographic data at these events.

Following the principles of interpretive research, I avoided directing conversation topics based on hypotheses. Initially, I focused on identifying repeated themes and categories in order to focus on what is important in the lives of the subjects themselves. I was careful to have the core categories arise out of innately occurring conversation topics. I would, however, engage in the conversations myself, and hence be a *participant* observer as I moved in and out of the discussions. In more formal settings, such as an event organized by a think tank bringing together policymakers and NGOs with skilled migrants, I would take on the role of a *direct* observer without disclosing my researcher status. In these types of events (with less personal face-to-face contact) I rarely conversed with individuals directly, rather I was focused on finding themes from which to continue my investigation. After I had identified some central themes, I started more focused observations on the interactions that were happening around these subjects and would sometimes engage in informal, short ethnographic interviews while having conversations at my primary fieldwork locations. I carried pen and paper with me in fieldwork situations, but I felt it unnecessary to record all interactions word-for-word. However, on occasions when I did want to transcribe an interaction that I felt was especially meaningful, I would do so out of sight of the informants so as not to disturb the natural social situation.

In my fieldwork, I met hundreds of skilled migrants and gathered a vast amount of interesting data that make up the majority of my primary data for the

empirical study. In many ways, the ethnographic data are the richest part of my data. Apart from the first-hand accounts of skilled migrants themselves, they offer a window into the development of my research ideas. From them, I have also been able to detect interesting elements of time and change, both in the societal structures within which the skilled migrants live and in the individual migrants' lives, as I regularly conversed with many of them for the whole 4½ years that my fieldwork expanded, and even beyond.

I wrote the first article included in this dissertation while in the beginning stages of my fieldwork. By the time I was drafting the second article, I started to feel the need for more direct, and perhaps more consciously formulated, answers to the questions that were arising. I was already two years into the fieldwork before deciding to conduct interviews to complement and build on the central themes identified from my observational data. I conducted 15 one-on-one, semi-structured, narrative interviews between November 2010 and March 2012. I wanted the individuals chosen for these interviews to represent the variety of people I was meeting in the field. In the end, they are from 13 nationalities from five continents. Three have dual nationality, and one considers themselves 'mixed-raced'. The gender ratio of the interviewees is six females to nine males. All have university-level education, ranging from Bachelor's to Doctoral degrees. They represent many professional fields varying from administrative staff to IT, education, sales and research. All but one were working in employment related to their education at the time of the interviews. Only three were in the technical field (which is less than statistics say about skilled migrants in Finland in general, Sutela & Larja 2015a). The interviewees had been in Finland between 1 and 12 years. They were between 23 and 43 years old. Their Finnish-language skills vary from non-existent to fluent. One had come to Finland for an existing relationship with a Finn, three more had found a Finnish partner since arriving. The vast majority had no familial or romantic ties to Finns. Ten were single. Two stated a religious affiliation. In many ways, they offer a representative cross-section of the variety of different skilled migrants I met in the field. A sub-set of the interviews was later separated for analysis for article IV of this dissertation. This sub-set includes eight of the interviews with individuals who have racialized ethnicities in the Finnish context. They are (according to their ethnic heritage) from China, India (2), Iran, Kenya, Panama, Togo and Vietnam. The interviewees identified these as (one of) their ethnicities, even if some of them had other nationalities.

Interviews were conducted in order to get more focused data on issues identified during previous fieldwork. There was no need for gatekeepers, as people were eager to be interviewed. Especially those that were of European ethnic heritage were very happy that 'finally' someone was 'considering them as

immigrants' who might have issues worth researching. I approached most of those chosen for interviews during fieldwork, with the aim of investigating a wide enough variation of nationality, ethnicity, professional field, length of stay in Finland and gender. Some snowballing was used to find a few individuals from specific demographics. For example, I had not met many female skilled migrants from Asian or African countries during my fieldwork, and the first two I approached refused to be interviewed. Therefore, I reached out to a wider audience through other research participants to find interviewees with this specific profile.

The interviews were semi-structured to include central themes I had identified during my initial fieldwork. The questions I asked were not always exactly the same, but the themes covered in every interview were. The first set of questions was about themselves as individuals: basic information about coming to Finland, what they did in their free time and with whom, and how they defined themselves as immigrants, as nationals of a particular country, and as educated, professional individuals. The second part was about themselves as a part of Finnish society: how they felt (as meta-stereotypes) they were seen by the Finnish people they meet, their experiences and changes in themselves since being in Finland and their views about the different types of immigrant communities in general in Finland. All questions were open ended to encourage narrative answers, and I allowed for any elaborations and side-tracks that the conversations took. At the end of each interview, I also used a 'structure laying technique' (Flick 2006: 157), whereby I would ask the interviewees to comment on my formulation of the 'migrant hierarchy' in Finland, and where they saw themselves in this in relation to other types of immigrants, but also in relation to the native Finnish population. I would always leave this part to the end of the interview in order not to lead the interviewees' thoughts into thinking about themselves or other migrants in this hierarchical sense from the beginning. The interviews were conducted in familiar but neutral settings in different cafés frequented by many of the skilled migrants in their free time. They were recorded in their entirety. Most of them were between one and two hours long, although some extended longer after the recorder was switched off to discussions that were not directly about my questions but were often very enlightening, nonetheless.

Recording, transcription and coding

In written, typed out form my data consist of two sets of material: full transcripts of the recordings of the one-on-one interviews and descriptions of the conversations, events and situations I observed during the ethnographic part of the fieldwork in narrative text form. Most of the fieldwork data are recorded as

post-event description rather than in-the-moment inscription³¹ (Clifford 1990). Apart from some detailed entries made during fieldwork, I wrote the ethnographic fieldnotes from memory on the computer after the events I attended. I organized them for coding according to recognized themes rather than timewise (although keeping the date marking of course). In analyses, the typed and coded fieldwork notes were treated as equal, simultaneous data together with the transcribed and coded interviews.

I used Atlas, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), to organize the data. With the help of the Atlas software, it was easier to organize such large quantities of data and to pull up those narratives that converged with each other. I analysed both the interview transcripts and the written accounts of fieldwork data by code words and themes. These were identified from initial fieldwork observations as central themes and concepts that came up repeatedly and unpromptedly in conversations with my subjects. My first sets of codes were as simple as 'class', 'ethnicity', 'group identity', 'imposed categories', and 'belonging'. From these, I started to focus on the social, interactional side of such concepts, and also coded by wider themes, such as 'recognition of categories', 'reactions to categories', 'self-description of group', 'hierarchy translating to lived experience' and 'ways to become aware/not aware'. I further searched for narratives and excerpts dealing with social categorizations of gender, class, ethnicity and nationality, which were used for a further set of codes.

I created analytical categories of individuals based on ethnicity, gender, length of stay in Finland and Finnish-language ability to compare findings divided along these lines. For what proved to be the most fruitful comparisons, I grouped the data according to ethnicity and/or nationality along the lines of the Finnish ethnic hierarchy to see if the experiences of the subjects correlated with the hierarchy. In this categorization, EU citizens, Americans and Antipodeans were treated as one group, African and Asia migrants as another group, and Eastern European and Latin Americans grouped together to represent the middle of the hierarchy (as loosely interpreted from Jaakkola 2005, 2009). The comparisons of the data based on this ethnic hierarchy led to the writing of article IV, based only on the sub-set of data of individuals with racialized ethnicities.

In the articles, no pseudonyms have been applied in the used quotes or ethnographic descriptions, as I did not want to identify specific quotes with specific individuals. By using quotes in the articles, I have merely wanted to

³¹ Clifford (1990) discussed ethnographic writing as three separate practices: taking notes during observation situations (inscription), repeating word-to-word accounts of something said in the field (transcription), and the actual writing work of the academic text (description).

illustrate varying experiences of skilled migrants in general, not of *a particular* skilled migrant. The individuals are referred to by gender, nationality, ethnicity, length of stay in Finland, marital status, or other qualifying data that I, as the interpreter, have deemed important to the argument. Hence, this choice is in keeping with both the interactionist and the intersectional understanding that only those social categorizations *that the individuals themselves deem important* in that situation are relevant (Barth 1969; Anthias 2008). I have interpreted this understanding to the best of my abilities as an ‘insider-outsider’ of the research situations, a point which I will discuss at the end of the following methodological section.

4.3 Methodological considerations

The primary focus of the data collection and subsequent analysis has been on group identifications, imposed categorizations, and the interplay of these two in constructing one’s social identities. Rather than exploring these issues from the perspective of the workplace, I have been more interested in finding out how skilled migrants define and organize themselves socially in their free time. Furthermore, my interest is at the level of the meta-stereotyping introduced earlier in looking at how skilled migrants *themselves perceive to be categorized* (Klein & Azzi 2001; Vorauer et al. 1998) and what the relevance of the felt external definitions are to them. There is an underlying understanding that regardless of the ‘truth’ of the perceived categorizations, the categorizations are an element in the lived social reality of skilled migrants in Finland, and hence are tangible enough for study. This emic perspective is also about not imposing my own preconceived ideas on the interpretations, but rather letting the subjects introduce the themes and terminology that is meaningful to them instead. However, a more etic perspective has been applied in the analyses of the findings to interpret whether the skilled migrants as the subjects agreed with *my* interpretation of *their* interpretation of their social reality in a Geertzian sense of seeing the writing of ethnography as ‘interpretations of interpretations’ (Schensul et al. 1999: 25). On occasion, I would even ask some of those interviewed and observed to comment on verbalized arguments of my hypothesis and findings to check aspects of interpretations while they were being developed. This was again usage of the ‘structure laying technique’ (Flick 2006), as it is seen that those under study have the insights (whether conscious or not) into the phenomena under study.

The methodological division between the structure-agency spectrum and the macro-meso-micro levels is that macro-level structures are brought in mainly through background research and literature review of relevant studies, while the empirical research focused on obtaining data of the meso-level negotiations and

micro-level agency. In the interpretive tradition, observational and ethnographic methods are used for research that discusses social processes and constructions (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012). Relevant information is more likely to come up in naturally occurring social situations where people interact with each other. I also agree that the use of structured formal interviews, focus groups or questionnaires would have been too far removed from the actual social relationships and interactions in which the processes under study are located for them to provide the right type of data. The primary interest in meso- and micro-levels was to examine the interactions between people and to observe and locate the agency of the skilled migrants. Therefore, the focus of my fieldwork is on the skilled migrants themselves. However, as Finnish persons are participants in the social interactions under study, they were observed as part of the fieldwork in those situations where skilled migrants interact with them.

Identities as narrative

Analytically, my focus is on narratives. I agree, that ‘the social world studied through fieldwork is inherently narrative-bound’ (Tavory & Timmermans 2009: 15). Through ethnography, a researcher can derive data that holds the keys to explanations about who people are and how they experience the world. This information is embedded in their narratives, especially as those narratives are presented to others in interaction. It is also through the analysis of narratives that the researcher starts to make sense of lived experiences as a coherent social life to further delve into. Therefore, my analysis also follows the interpretive approach in aiming at not only identifying narratives that tell us about the skilled migrants’ identities, but also at explanation building (Yin 2014) with regard to the research questions.

Some researchers argue for a direct link between narrative and the self, by which ‘the narrative *is* our identity’ or conversely that an ‘identity *is* a narrative’ (as commented on by Smith & Sparkes 2006: 173). From the perspective of my research, I do not believe that my subjects are conscious to that extent about the things they say or about who they are. Furthermore, as identities are forever changing, fragmented, context-specific and flexible, so must be the narratives that portray them (Werbner 2018). My view on the function of narratives is more constructivist, looking at narratives as ‘storied resources’, by which ‘the self is actually formed *in* the telling of stories’ (Smith & Sparkes 2006: 174) as ‘something people *create, do* and *perform* in relation to a particular audience and in different contexts’ (ibid: 180). From this perspective, narratives are consciously constructed to put forward an image of oneself that one wants that particular audience to have. Therefore, in analyses of narratives, attention also needs to be paid to whom the

narrative is aimed at. Furthermore, narratives are not just verbal: ‘embodied narration’ (MacIntyre 1981) can also be deduced from ways of acting and dressing, consumer habits (Boccagni 2014), or their use as forms of practice (Fortier 2000). As a performed story, narrations are likely to consist of references of, and back to, the referent culture itself (Anthias 2002; Klein & Azzi 2001). That is why it is also important to concentrate on observing the actions of people in relation to who they associate with, where they go, and how they use culturally relevant information in their narratives. The full extent of narrations of self cannot be deduced from what people say alone, because narratives are essentially social (Anthias 2002; Yuval-Davis 2011).

Narratives are central to the intersectional considerations of my research. McCall also considers that the narrative approach supports an intersectional focus well: ‘narratives take as their subject an individual or an individual’s experience and extrapolate illustratively to the broader social location embodied by the individual’ (2005: 1781). Indeed, narratives are set within a social structure (Werbner 2018). To portray the multitude of identities within the social locations and categories that individuals may subscribe to, Anthias approaches narratives as ‘narratives of belonging’ (Anthias 2002, 2009, 2013c). In her work, narratives do not appear as direct ‘identity talk’, rather they are often based on relationality, a sense of difference and comparison, and worded in terms of *not* belonging (rather than belonging) (Anthias 2009). In other words, narratives are also intersubjective; they are in part constructed in reference to others’ perceptions and representations of us, and therefore often involve processes of Othering. Therefore, they are not only stories about who we are, but also stories of who we are not (Yuval-Davis 2011).

Reflexivity and ethicality

The first two years of my fieldwork were very consistent, and I attended at least one meeting or event every week. After that initial time, my time in the field became more sporadic and more blurred with social life as I had, inevitably, become friends with many of my subjects and would see them outside of the meetings of the social associations, as well. I believe this provided me with a better understanding of them and their lives, as the conversations became more open and personal. Nonetheless, I feel obliged to ask myself further questions about my role in this research.

For example, am I an ‘insider’ or an ‘outsider’ researcher (Carling et al. 2013)? Many of my informants said their social circles consisted of other skilled migrants, but also ‘internationally-minded Finns’ (i.e. Finnish people who had themselves also lived abroad and/or were interested in meeting foreigners in their

own country, spoke good English and were more social than Finns are typically described³²). As a past member of similar international communities in other countries myself, I was certainly considered such an ‘internationally-minded Finn’ and therefore occupied an insider position in the group I was studying. However, I am also an outsider not only as a researcher but also because I am a member of the host society majority population. In the context of migration research and for the migrant subjects, a researcher from the majority population is unavoidably a representative of the Other against whom they are mirrored. For the purposes of the identity negotiations under investigation, I was also often in the position of the audience. Carling et al. (2013) suggest various hybrid versions of this insider-outsider division, and personally, I can see that I was perhaps an ‘honorary insider’ in that I could ‘transcend the boundaries’ (ibid: 50) through my language skills, cultural competence and sustained commitment.

As well as considerations about my status in the research field as a Finn, questions should be asked about the role of gender. Gender was not a consideration for gaining access to the field, as it often can be, because the field itself includes participants of all genders. However, both me as a female researcher, as well as me as a female representative of the majority society had some bearing on the research process and the type of data I obtained. For example, I would notice how male informants would bring up ‘manly’ issues (such as how much money they earned, or how frequently they were dating) in the interviews, presumably because I am a (Finnish) woman. On a few occasions I was asked out on a date. I do not, however, see this only as a gendered issue, rather I see it also as a testament to my equal standing in the field as far as any power differentials are concerned largely due to my ‘honorary insider’ position in the eyes of the informants. As a whole, I felt my gender had relatively little effect on my role as a researcher.

Other questions can be asked about the nature of my ethnography: was it overt or covert (Strudwick 2019)? Furthermore, is any degree of covert ethnography ethical? By not actively and visibly ‘doing research’ (for example by taking notes while interacting with people in the field), I secured my ‘honorary insider’ position. However, does such a position guide the informants into a false sense of a more private, secure environment where they speak freely? On the other hand, does overt ethnography (for example, disclosing in detail what I am interested in in my research) provoke people to discuss predetermined subjects, and therefore function contrary to the premise of interpretive research? In the field, I told the people in organizing roles in social meetups or in social organizations about my researcher status. I also mentioned in conversations with new people

³² ‘Typical’ Finnish people were described by my informants as anti-social, shy and quiet.

who I met that I was doing research, although not explicitly that I might consider something they were doing or saying to be data. In interviews, I always disclosed that what was being discussed was going to be my data, and I have this explanation and their agreement on tape, but not in writing. All the participants, in whatever type of data they appear, have been anonymized. At times material that I considered interesting for my analyses, if not necessarily of direct use in my findings, did crop up when I was socializing for my own enjoyment rather than conducting research. An example of such a situation would be the incident described in the introduction of a Finnish woman who verbally attacked the two British IT experts. The two men in question are friends of mine, and that particular occasion was purely a social evening out. I have included incidents such as these in my development of ideas and for interpretation of what is going on without too much hesitation; I believe that my data is enhanced by witnessing such incidents outside 'official' research hours, and my description is unrecognizable to anyone aside from perhaps those people present. I consider my ethnographic fieldwork notes, ethnographic conversational interviews and subsequent in-depth recorded interviews to be my actual, primary data, and treat them more precisely in my analysis than this type of secondary data that I have stumbled upon almost accidentally. Still, I believe being able to exist in this social world also as a participant, and not just as a researcher, has led me to focus on what is important, and what is really going on, and to analyse the data in a more informed manner (even though it is still my interpretation of their interpretation). Furthermore, being able to use the 'structure laying technique' by discussing my interpretations with the subjects themselves after formulating my initial findings, has helped me to acquire more insight and has guided me to the right track based on their feedback.

I do not have definitive answers to these questions on subjectivity and ethicality, but my role in the field, in the subjects' lives and in interpreting what they do, say and, most importantly, mean, is something to keep in mind when proceeding to the second part of this summary report, namely the findings. However, before that, I want to summarize what has been presented thus far about the research design and all its parts, and how each part has contributed to constructing the four articles about to be presented. I illustrate this journey from the research questions to articles in a synopsis table.

Synopsis of part I: from research questions to articles

Before continuing to the findings presented in the second part of this dissertation summary report, I would like to bring together what has been said so far and place it in the framework of the four articles included in my dissertation. The articles were written in the same order as they are presented in this summary, and they follow a continuous line of thought. They start from a wider look at the structural level based primarily on the literature, and step by step proceed deeper into the lived experiences of individuals as I gathered the empirical data. Theoretically, as an investigation into skilled migrants' social identities, the articles move first from the hierarchizations and categorizations of the migrant population in Finland (articles I and II) to the self-defined group identifications of the skilled migrants themselves (articles III and IV). Articles III and IV further deal with the conflict between the felt categorizations and the self-defined group identity, and the consequent identity negotiations through strategies of boundary making. An intersectional approach is additionally employed in the later articles after the idea of the 'migrant elite' had truly started to crack and reveal the heterogeneity of the skilled migrants and their experiences in Finland.

As I was answering the first research questions and moving deeper into the subject through further questions, I was also progressing from macro-level structure to meso-level processes and then to micro-level responses. At the same time, the discussion focuses in from structural constraints to how individual agency is exercised within these constraints, and how they both play off each other in the interactionist processes of categorization, group formation and identity negotiation.

The table on the following spread shows how each of the original articles included in this dissertation corresponds with the data used in their analysis, with the theoretical focus, and with the research sub-questions that my articles answer. It also illustrates the progression from macro- to meta- to micro-level analyses, and from structural concerns to individual agency.

Table of articles and their corresponding elements

Article	Level of Analysis	Data Used	
I	Macro-level STRUCTURE	Exploratory (not empirical)	
II	Meso-level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnographic data (<i>Sept 2008 - Dec 2010</i>) • 15 in-depth interviews 	
III	Meso-level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnographic data (<i>Sept 2008 - Dec 2012</i>) • 15 in-depth interviews 	
IV	Micro-level AGENCY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sub-set* of ethnographic data (<i>Sept 2008 - Dec 2012</i>), incl. 3 ethnographic interviews • 8 in-depth interviews 	

* This sub-set from the data includes only those skilled migrants who have racialized ethnicities. The sub-set consists of 8 in-depth recorded interviews, 3 unstructured ethnographic interviews and ethnographic data for the applicable parts. Individuals included in the sub-set are from China, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Iran, Kenya, Mexico, Nepal, Panama, Togo, Uganda and Vietnam. The informants identified these as one of their ethnic origins, even if some of their nationalities were different.

	Theoretical focus	Research Questions
	Exploratory (not theoretical)	
	<p style="text-align: center;">CATEGORIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ascription (Barth) • Imposed categorizations (Jenkins) • Interactionist social identities 	<p>How do skilled migrants feel perceived and categorized by their host society, the Finns?</p> <p>Who is their Other that their definition is constructed against?</p> <p>How do they themselves define their in-group and</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">GROUP IDENTITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-ascription (Barth) • Self-definition (Jenkins) • Intersectionality of social identities • Translocational positionality (Anthias) 	<p>In what ways do social categories intersect in the definition and feeling of belonging to 'skilled migrants' as a group?</p> <p>Who is their Other that their definition is constructed against?</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">IDENTITY NEGOTIATIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialectic of identification (Jenkins) • Strategies of boundary making (Wimmer) 	<p>Do skilled migrants feel the need to (re) negotiate their social identities within their host society and its existing categorizations?</p> <p>What are the strategies used by them in these identity negotiations and what forms do the negotiations take?</p>



In their process of settling in in Finland, how do skilled migrants find and define a place for themselves within the structures of their new host society?

II: THE FINDINGS

The remainder of this summary report is dedicated to the findings of my research. In chapter 5, I present the main findings of the four articles included in my dissertation. I then move on to discuss these findings further in chapter 6 by examining their collective insight and analytical relevance for the experiences of skilled migrants in Finland. Lastly, in my concluding chapter, I offer answers for the overarching research question: *in their process of settling in in Finland, how do skilled migrants find and define a place for themselves within the structures of their new host society?*

5. Main findings of the articles

Article I: 'New explorations in Finnish migration studies: the emerging case of the skilled migrants'

The first article sets the scene for the research through a literature review. Much like chapter 2 of this summary report, it introduces Finland as a country of immigration, and reviews existing research to explore what was known about skilled migration in the Finnish context at the time of the start of the research, and what were the areas that were being overlooked. Since the article's publication in 2010, research into skilled migration has diversified and multiplied, as illustrated by the literature reviewed in the earlier chapters of this summary and the later articles. However, many of the same issues have remained as central concerns. There is a need for a foreign workforce, but resistance to increasing migration by the Finnish public. Foreign labour is needed to uphold the support ratio and the welfare state model, both of which have shown signs of deterioration for several decades now. However, Finland was not at that time (Forsander 2004; OECD 2008), and still not (OECD 2017), attracting perceptible numbers of skilled migrant workers.

The literature reviewed in the article shows that, in the first instance, Finland is not a well-known or particularly sought-after location in the 'global field of choices' for skilled migrants (Raunio 2002a; Raunio & Sotarauta 2005; Trux 2002). However, once here, they most of all appreciate the humane and flexible work culture, and the safety and nature of the country (Raunio 2003; Forsander and Raunio 2005). The list of factors that skilled migrants struggle with when living in Finland, however, is longer: social interaction with Finnish people is felt to be difficult due to limited conversational skills and a general unfamiliarity with foreigners by many Finns (Raunio 2002a); lack of services in English, the climate and geographical and cultural distance in Finland are also mentioned as

distancing factors (Trux 2002); economically, salaries are considered too low, taxation too high, and the chances for career advancement limited (Raunio 2003); paying for the Finnish welfare system and its services is felt to be unnecessary, especially when considering possible futures somewhere else (Trux 2002).

One of the main findings of the article is that there is a lack of concern, both in research and in policy, for the soft factors of skilled migration. The interest in research was largely economic, lacking the micro-level studies, or the ‘human face’, which has already been remarked on earlier. The article’s main argument is therefore that the right type of research is needed to guide the type of policies that would attract and motivate skilled migrants to choose Finland as a place of residence. However, perhaps even more importantly, policies should also work towards retaining and committing this talent. For this purpose, research into the soft factors of skilled migration is needed to facilitate this process. I state in the article that ‘reading between the lines of these studies shows that Finland’s supposed trump cards of high quality of living standards, safety and nature are not strong enough pull-factors for attracting, and certainly not for committing, skilled migrants to Finland. Furthermore, they imply that the social sphere is where most problems are felt and that it is considered very important when deciding whether to stay on in Finland or not’ (Koskela 2010: 60). All in all, soft factors seem important especially to retain skilled migrants in Finland: the existing literature pointed to the importance of social factors in making decisions to stay, even though the decisions to come to Finland were largely influenced by career and economic considerations.

Article II: ‘The “migrant hierarchy” in Finland: skilled migrants’ perceptions of imposed categorizations’

Against this backdrop of dissatisfaction with certain factors in social life, article II explores the issue further based on my empirical data. Once in the field, I found many first-hand experiences of the distancing and negative factors of life in Finland that are described in article I. I subsequently started to examine how skilled migrants felt they were perceived in Finland and what they felt their place in Finnish society really was. Therefore, the second article takes a step closer to the lived experiences of skilled migrants themselves, while explaining further the structural constraints within which they live their lives. At a theoretical level, the article deals with the first part of Jenkins’ (2008) ‘dialectic of identification’, namely categorizations as imposed identities.

In the discussion, I combine existing literature on attitudes towards migrants in Finland to form an idea of an overall ‘migrant hierarchy’ that brings together various aspects of evaluation into an overarching scale of acceptability

towards different types of migrants. The article also introduces the idea of the 'migrant elite' as those migrants who are at the top of this hierarchy. In the context of Finland, the research shows that migrants are primarily valued based on class markers, such as employment and educational status, and on their ethnicity and/or nationality. The more culturally familiar a group is felt to be, the less prejudice there is towards them (Bail 2008; Jaakkola 2005, 2009). Finnish public opinion is also most accepting towards those groups whose members are seen to hold jobs and (high) qualifications (Bail 2008; Salonen & Villa 2006; Suurpää 2002). Nuances connected to historical reasons, religion, linguistic abilities, gendered ethnic stereotypes, social links to Finns, immigration status, media coverage and so on can further be added to define the overall hierarchy. The 'migrant hierarchy' constructed in this article incorporates a variety of different attitudes by different Finns. As explained in section 2.3, women, higher educated individuals, people living in cities, and younger people generally present more lenient attitudes towards immigrants and towards migration than, for example, men and older generations. As such, it is a fluid, elusive, and relative scale. Put simply, 'at the top of the Finns' migrant hierarchy is a category of "wanted", highly-skilled, and preferably Western migrants while at the bottom end of the hierarchy are the "unwanted" humanitarian migrants from less familiar cultures with visible ethnicities' (Koskela 2014: 21). Furthermore, the literature reviewed points to how skilled migrants are seen as 'well-educated, professional people representing the positive side of globalization and multiculturalism, rather than the negative view of immigration flows as a threat to national culture and economy induced by the same globalization' (ibid: 25).

Against this backdrop, I then discuss how skilled migrants themselves perceive the categorizations and the subsequent hierarchy. Firstly, I argue that they are aware of the Finnish public's attitudes towards migrants in general and hence the value judgements of the migrant hierarchy. Secondly, even though they may internalize (and/or agree with) some of the value statements inherent in the hierarchy, they object to the *hierarchizing* as well as the *homogenizing* aspects of these categorizations. Those skilled migrants that have negatively valued ethnicities typically object to the hierarchizing aspect of the categorizations. They are negatively affected by the standards of the ethnic part of the hierarchy (rather than seen in a positive light based on their socio-economic status) and they feel that they are assumed to be asylum seekers or refugees simply because of their somatic features and stereotypes attached to them. Those skilled migrants who are white and Western also object to the hierarchy and the categorizations, but more on account of their homogenizing aspect; they feel that they are not appreciated as individuals, rather are just seen as stereotyped representatives of

their nationalities. They often feel involuntarily stuck in an ‘expat bubble’ (Fechter 2007) as their ‘valued Otherness’ hinders them from being able to or allowed to integrate into Finnish society.

Both white and racialized skilled migrants therefore feel that they are wrongly viewed in Finland, either too simplistically, or as ‘ethnic migrants’. They refer to themselves collectively as ‘foreigners’, which is an identification constructed against an image of other ‘immigrants’ that corresponds with the separation made by Finnish people between those immigrants at the lower end of the hierarchy and those at the top. Furthermore, skilled migrants also discuss themselves and their belonging as another group of Others, contrasting themselves with ‘the Finns’ living their lives on the other side of an invisible boundary that cannot be crossed. Linking this to Barth’s and Jenkins’ interactionist identity theories, the categorizations making up the hierarchy inevitably also have an effect on internalized social identities. Especially those skilled migrants with racialized ethnicities feel that the general view of them in Finland conflicts with their self-defined group identity as ‘foreigners’, rather than ‘immigrants’. This finding inspired me to explore further the ways in which skilled migrants themselves define their social identity(ies), and how their experiences in Finland vary based on other social categories that intersect in their lives. To this end, I took an intersectional approach to my data for article III.

Article III: ‘Intersecting experiences: class, gender, ethnicity and race in the lives of highly skilled migrants in Finland’

Article III moves more into the interactional meta-level by looking at the skilled migrants’ identity negotiations with the societal structures of their host country. Theoretically, it proceeds to explore the internal side of Jenkins’ ‘dialectic of identification’, namely skilled migrants’ self-defined identity as a group. As such, it also continues the exploration of the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion started in article II. The article takes a further focus on the intersectionality of the skilled migrant experience by accounting for the role of class, ethnicity and gender in their lives. I employ Anthias’ idea of ‘translocational positionality’ (Anthias 2008, 2009, 2012, 2013a) to account for both the structural location of Finland and the situational positionality and individual agency of skilled migrants. This approach brings attention to how the intersecting identity categorizations can create a variety of different experiences of being a skilled migrant in Finland.

From this article, a more heterogeneous view of skilled migrants emerges. In introducing the multitude of social identities that skilled migrants may hold, it becomes clear that many of them do not fit the stereotypical assumption of ‘the expatriate’ as white, male and Western. As such, it also starts to debunk the image

of the ‘migrant elite’ introduced in the previous article. The article is organized into three themed discussions around the intersections of class, gender and ethnicity. Of these, gender has a more indirect role in the lives of skilled migrants, as it derives its relevance mainly through intersections with other categorizations. For example, the stigmatization of gendered ethnicities, such as derogative views of Russian and Asian women in Finland, can lead to assumptions of subordination for skilled migrant women from these countries (e.g. Chang 2014; Habti 2014). Furthermore, my empirical findings show that gendered ethnicities play a role in the desirability of skilled migrants in the Finnish dating market. However, I conclude that gender by itself is not a central social marker affecting the lives of skilled migrants.

Class and ethnicity, on the other hand, seem to play more substantial roles. In article II, I discussed how the valuation of immigrants in Finland is based both on class standards and on ethnicity. In article III, class and ethnicity further come to the fore as central categories in the self-defined group identity of skilled migrants, which is already in itself intersectional, consisting of high socio-economic class status, and foreign ethnicity and/or nationality. Class by definition is both a social and an economic concept. It functions in the form of a shared lifestyle and culture, providing a connection among skilled migrants that is not dependent on ethnic or national boundaries. However, in the context of normative whiteness and visibility in Finland, skilled migrants with unfavourable racialized ethnicities are at the mercy of stereotypes based on their somatic features, regardless of their class or professional status. Therefore, class and ethnicity intersect in ways that also affect the *perception* of class and assumptions about educational or professional status, subjecting racialized skilled migrants to the image of ‘the migrant’ as a non-Western, non-skilled, non-deserving subject (Lundström 2017).

However, as I remind readers at the end of the article, this is a question of only *relative* disadvantage within a group that is not itself felt to be a disadvantaged group to be associated with. In the context of Finland, being a skilled migrant is in general both a positive group identity, as well as a positive, even valorizing, categorization by others. Intersectionality in the lives of ethnic skilled migrants in Finland is therefore not a question of multiple overlapping disadvantages that produce subordination, rather it is a negative (ethnicity) and a positive (class status) classification intersecting in a conflictual way. In article IV, I therefore move on to discuss how individuals negotiate the boundaries of their multiple identities in the face of such conflictual categorization.

Article IV: 'Claims to a nation, dressing the part and other boundary making strategies by skilled migrants in response to ethnic categorizations'

The final article comes back full circle to the Barthian focus on group boundaries and their making. It further focuses on the micro-level experiences of skilled migrants and looks at the possibilities for agency among structural constraints. The analysis is especially concerned with individual experiences and individual agency, looking specifically through the eyes of those skilled migrants who have visible, racialized ethnicities in the Finnish context. Based on a sub-set of my empirical data (see table on pp. 52-3), the article looks at the strategies they use in their everyday lives in order to be seen in a more positive way.

Skilled migrants with racialized ethnicities exist between two migrant experiences: as appreciated elite migrants due to their class and educational and employment status, and as culturally and visibly distant ethnic migrants (Mozetic 2018; Yanasmayan 2016). Especially in their free time, outside of their professional circles, they are often categorized (mistakenly) as un-skilled humanitarian migrants. However, their own self-defined group identity is based on class status as professional, well-to-do individuals and as skilled migrants. In this article, this conflictual relationship between the categorization of the 'migrant elite' as white and Western (article II) and the self-defined, ethnically more inclusive skilled migrant group identity (article III) takes centre stage. I look at how racialized skilled migrants try to express their self-defined identity as well-to-do, skilled professionals through Wimmer's typology of strategies of boundary making (e.g. Wimmer 2008a, 2008b, 2013). I identify two types of complementary approaches to these identity strategies: those de-emphasizing ethnicity (or its importance), and those emphasizing class status. These approaches are two sides of the same coin; coming from different perspectives, they both aim at a more positively viewed identity, and for individuals to be seen as well-to-do, educated, working individuals, rather than as ethnic migrant subjects.

Disassociating from one's co-ethnics, claiming a more positive national belonging or a cosmopolitan identity, making jokes about felt racism, and denouncing or belittling the importance of race as well as racism are all strategies that try to lessen the impact of an ethnicity that is seen as a negative aspect of one's identity. Many of the strategies from Wimmer's typology are used in this approach, but especially those referred to as 'positional moves' that emphasize one's individual difference to a stereotype. Emphasizing class status to gain a more positively viewed identity, however, is more about what Wimmer terms 'boundary blurring' strategies, based on promoting other available identity markers over the importance of ethnic categorizations. Class is one such marker, often employed as a 'non-ethnicised response' to ethnicized categorizations

(Moroşanu & Fox 2013: 448). Skilled migrants have class-related symbolic capital, and often also economic and social capital, that together with a ‘middle class tool kit’ (Kennedy 2007: 357) of culturally relevant knowledge allow them to use class as material in their identity negotiations. They use the available means to emphasize their class status through direct discourse, but also through ways of dressing or consumer choices. What is notably different about the strategies emphasizing class, as opposed to those de-emphasizing ethnicity, is that they rely on comparisons to other, lower status migrants; in class terms, the skilled migrants often present themselves as ‘good’ skilled migrants against the ‘bad’ un-skilled migrants. Paradoxically, by this Othering, they strengthen and even clarify further the image of ‘the migrant’ subject that the ethnic skilled migrants are trying to fight being seen as. They also end up reinforcing the ideas of a ‘migrant hierarchy’ and the categorizations that it is built on, because they employ the narratives and language of the categories themselves. I will discuss the reasons why this is in more detail in the next chapter.

In situations where I have observed the subjects, there does not seem to be any solidarity with one’s ethnic group as a whole,³³ rather the strategies are very much individual and often even rely on the person to be seen as a non-typical member of their ethnic group (e.g. through talking negatively about other members of their ethnic group). The goal is about individual gain rather than solidarity with one’s ethnic group, or about trying to benefit all migrants. Especially the strategies that de-emphasize (the relevance of) ethnicity seem to be about personal identity and therefore personal gain, even though many are achieved through boundary work that uses collective narratives (of mutually acknowledged collectivities, such as ‘skilled migrants’). In the article, I conclude that the skilled migrants do not use collective strategies because they are not a cohesive enough group in that sense. This leads to further questions about what kind of ‘group’ the skilled migrants really are, or if skilled migrants should be seen as a ‘group’ at all. With the multitude of social identities intersecting within the group, it is hard to imagine such heterogeneity as a mutually acknowledged social collectivity.

³³ I specify ‘in the situations where I have observed the subjects’, because this is not likely the whole truth; in other situations, their solidarity and sense of belonging might be based primarily on ethnic connections. Outside the multicultural social organizations, many skilled migrants socialize also with members of their ethnic group that they do not share the same class, education or professional status with. In these cases, the connection at a group level is about ethnicity, nationality, or about religion. For example, several of the African skilled migrants said they attended church groups made up of other members of their national group. However, many of them would initially not mention this side of their social life when talking to me. I assume that this is because our interviews and other conversations were to a certain extent also situations where they wanted to portray an image of themselves specifically as ‘skilled migrants’, rather than as representatives of their ethnic or national group.

Another question the last article directs us to look at is not just the interconnection, but the *continued centrality* of the intersection of class and ethnicity in the lives of skilled migrants in Finland. From the ‘migrant hierarchy’ to the skilled migrants’ self-definition, and further to the strategies of boundary making, every step in their story is based on considerations of class and ethnicity. I will now discuss these last two thoughts further, beyond the findings of my articles, in chapter 6.

6. Discussion of findings

In this chapter, I take the findings of the four articles forward with a discussion of the two central questions that need further exploration: firstly, how the continued centrality (and intersectionality) of class and ethnicity affects all levels of the skilled migrants' experiences in Finland as they navigate their lives and establish a place for themselves in their new host country. Secondly, the characteristics of the 'group' the skilled migrants claim as a social identity should be looked at more specifically, especially in relation to belonging. For this aim, I will continue the discussion of the findings by applying both interactionist identity theories and the intersectional approach.

The centrality of class and ethnicity

I see the interplay of class and ethnicity to be a centrally defining intersection in the lives of skilled migrants in Finland. Firstly, skilled migrants are subjected to categorizations and hierarchizations that define their value as immigrants based on standards of class status and ethnicity (article II). Secondly, they themselves define their group at the intersection of class (as related to educational and employment levels) and foreignness (i.e. having any other ethnicity and/or nationality than Finnish)³⁴ (article III). Thirdly, there is a conflict between the perceived imposed categorizations and the skilled migrants' self-defined group identity that concerns the primacy of class versus ethnic evaluations. When confronted with this conflict, they embark on identity negotiations by using strategies of boundary making that are again conducted in the intersection of class and ethnic markers (article IV). In these identity negotiations, they use tools that are derived from class symbolism, ethnic stereotypes and other narratives familiar from the already contested and rejected 'migrant hierarchy', itself a scale based on class and ethnic considerations.

The why and how of this repetition is not coincidental, as can be seen from analysing what has been learned about the skilled migrants' identity construction in the light of the theoretical propositions of the interactionist tradition. Starting from the basic premise of the theories established in section 3.1, identities are created, and recreated, in interaction between relevant parties. As I quote Jenkins (2000: 8) in article IV, '*social identity is never unilateral*'. People cannot just declare who they are. Their assertion of their identity must also be validated by the people around them for it to become accepted. In interactionist thought, identity claims

³⁴ Here I am referring to foreignness as a type of ethnicity, following the wide definition by Wimmer (2008b: 973-4) introduced in section 3.1.

are communicated to an audience. In order for this audience to understand the narrated claims, they must be presented in terms that are understood by all parties present. One of the prerequisites of successful identity claims is therefore a mutual understanding of the referent culture and the negative-positive connotations of the social categorizations and structures that it entails. As the prevalent referent culture within which these negotiations take place is set in the Finnish context, skilled migrants use the same identity markers by which they feel they are categorized by members of the Finnish public (i.e. class and ethnicity) as their tools for strategies of boundary negotiations themselves.³⁵ However, the fact that they use the same language as Finns in their negotiations does not indicate acceptance of the categorizations, stereotypes or any value judgements attached to them. As all the articles show, the skilled migrants object to the stereotyping, homogenizing and the hierarchizing aspects of the categorizations they feel imposed upon them. However, categorizations are always internalized to a certain extent, in this case as the objects of denial.

Apart from the strategies introduced in article IV that either distract from ethnicity or emphasize class status, the categorizations themselves can also be used in the negotiations by those subjected to them. Identity categories have functions both 'as representations and as identity claims' (Anthias, 2013b:7). In other words, they can be (even simultaneously) *the goal* and *the tools* of identity negotiations. Because skilled migrants are aware of the existence of the contrasting categories of 'the migrant' as the undeserving subject and the 'migrant elite' as the ideal type in the imagined societal construction of Finland, they can use this knowledge to place themselves on the right side of the boundary, whether the boundary is considered real or not. The same applies to knowing that there is a conceptual difference between 'an immigrant' and 'a foreigner' in the Finnish context (article II) and that a foreigner is valued more highly than an immigrant. The use of class and ethnicity markers, imposed categorizations and boundaries between groups in the skilled migrants' identity negotiations further points to their awareness of the discursive structures of their host society. It also points to them having enough culturally specific knowledge of the referent culture to communicate their claims to their audience to be understood and acknowledged. It is for this purpose, namely to be understood and acknowledged, that they use the same categorizations and the same references to class and ethnicity that they themselves feel hierarchized by. Inadvertently, they thus end up *reproducing* and

³⁵ Similarly, meta-stereotyping studies have also found that identity claims can be communicated *in the language of the meta-stereotype itself*, rather than through one's own narrative (Klein & Azzi 2001: 280-1; see also Honkasalo 2003 on immigrant youth identity negotiations in Finland).

even *strengthening* the very same categories, stereotypes and stigmatizations they are opposing.

This may seem counterintuitive, but there are several reasons for this. Firstly, as discussed in article IV, the strategies of boundary negotiations are individual actions with individual goals. They are not about fighting for the collective stereotype of a whole ethnic nor any other group to be seen in a better light. Secondly, the existence of the categorizations and the hierarchization needs to be upheld in order for Othering to be used as a further strategy of boundary making. Othering is an important part of the process of both group formation and the formation of self-identity (Eriksen 1995). On the other side of the boundary from us is our conceptual Other, which is needed for definition through comparison. For the skilled migrants, this Other is found from the unappreciated, lower class, ethnic migrant at the bottom of the migrant hierarchy. However, their group boundaries are not only defined in opposition to other immigrants, but also in relation to the Finns. Both of these Others can be found in the skilled migrants' narratives. Furthermore, both Others also serve a role in the class versus ethnicity discussion. Othering towards the conceptual image of 'the migrant' is done primarily in a class sense. The fact that skilled migrants are educated, employed, earning money and paying their taxes (i.e. beneficial to Finland economically) is what makes them different from and 'better' than other migrants. 'The Finns', on the other hand, represent an ethnic Other. As part of the self-definition of skilled migrants, in all its variations from calling oneself 'European', 'skilled migrant', 'expat' or simply 'foreigner', Othering is about being of different ethnicity and/or any other nationality than Finnish. Furthermore, not only are there boundaries between these three groups, but they are also seen hierarchically, at least as far as inclusion and acceptance to Finnish society is concerned.

Skilled migrants as a group

This discussion of boundaries and Othering brings us to the other open-ended question left by the articles: what does it really mean to say that skilled migrants are a social group? Through Othering practices, in defining who they are *not*, they are also defining *who they are*. However, with all the possible intersections and heterogeneity among skilled migrants discussed in the articles, what type of collectivity are they?

In section 3.2, I pointed to three central ideas of intersectionality that resonate with my research. I will now return to them to clarify my perspective on skilled migrant identity as a group identity. The first main point introduced was that identities are formed in the interplay between different *parts* of one's identity, i.e. all the different social groupings that an individual subscribes to. Therefore,

being a skilled migrant should be considered only one part of their identity. This connects to the second point, which is that the context, meaning and saliency of these different parts of identity change situationally and in relation to others (Anthias 2008, 2013c; Werbner 2018). Skilled migrants are an intersectional group of many nationalities, genders, ethnicities, ages, as well as other less visible categorizations (such as being parents, or doctors, or heterosexual). Apart from seeing themselves as skilled migrants, they also subscribe to other social identities, in other locations, circumstances and with other people, and even for other audiences. The salience and centrality of these identities vary, and therefore I would argue that to locate skilled migrants as a collective, one has to look at them in situational and relative ways. Firstly, they come to exist in the global and Finnish discourses of migration that identify skilled migrants as a type of migrant in the first place. Furthermore, they only come to belong to this group after they move to Finland, and hence come to be (seen as) migrants in the first place. Therefore, being a skilled migrant is a situational identity in a particular point in their lives when they are living in Finland, and when they are associating with other skilled migrants in the same social circles. The situational saliency of identifying as a skilled migrant also changes. For example, being a skilled migrant might be a central identity for them at their workplace but has no meaning to them when they are spending a Sunday at home with their family. Furthermore, skilled migrants as a group are relational in the ways the group is constructed: in relation to 'unskilled' migrants they are skilled, and in relation to Finns, they are migrants. This is why much of their identity negotiations are achieved through narratives of Othering.

One last point to be made about skilled migrants as a collectivity is related to the third central intersectional idea presented earlier. That is that the social categorizations intersecting in one's life can also be used as identity claims and claims for belonging by those that they are imposed on (Anthias 2013b). Through processes of internalization and denial, one can claim identifications with those social categorizations that are the most beneficial to them in that situation. 'Skilled migrants' is such a categorization. I argue that one of the reasons why this group exists is the positive valorization to be obtained from being seen as a wanted type of migrant. Even though it is only an ideal, something along the lines of the 'migrant elite' becomes a sought after identification that gives individual skilled migrants further symbolic capital and distances them from being seen as the more negative image of 'the migrant'. This is a consideration especially for skilled migrants with racialized ethnicities, for whom being seen as a skilled migrant gives a more valued position within the social and discursive structures of Finland. The ideals of a 'migrant elite' are therefore appropriated to be used as conceptual tools

for one's identity negotiations. These negotiations are individual, but they are worded in collective terms as their narratives derive from identification with a group. As appropriations, both the group identification and the imposed categorization are therefore also *instrumental*, and used as narrative, as discourse, as symbolic capital, as well as strategies of boundary making, in much the same way as class and ethnicity are.

I believe that this further look into the findings with an intersectional lens highlights the complexity of 'skilled migrants' in both its forms as a group and as a categorization. Jenkins reminds us that 'any actual collectivity will always possess attributes of each [...]. In order to avoid reifying assumptions about the "reality" of groups and categories, it thus makes sense [...] to talk about collectivities as permanently in process: processes of *group identification* and *social categorization*' (Jenkins 2000: 9). Therefore, in order to contextualize this question about skilled migrants as a group, the exploratory focus has to be on the interactions and the boundaries that those interactions create, not on trying to establish how real the entities that they create are. It is not their similarities or even their sense of belonging together that makes the skilled migrants a group, rather the fact that they perceive there to be boundaries between themselves and Others (and even more so, that social processes, such as categorization, Othering and negotiations, erecting these boundaries *are taking place* in the first instance). Skilled migrants, therefore, come to exist as a group as the outcome of the negotiations between the (perceived) structures and categorizations of their host society and their own self-defined ideas of themselves.

7. Conclusions: answering the overarching research question

The overarching research question that marked the beginning of my exploration into skilled migrants' lives in Finland was: In their process of settling in in Finland, how do skilled migrants find and define a place for themselves within the structures of their new host society? I would like to conclude my findings by offering answers to this question and by elaborating further on their consequences for the skilled migrants' sense of belonging and integration. I will also connect my theoretical findings to policy implications.

For immigrants to be considered well-integrated, accepted and perhaps even to belong in Finland, they are expected to overcome what Forsander discusses as the 'deficit of Finnishness' (2004). This can be achieved through 'a long series of welfare technology methods' that mainly aim at employment, which is seen as crucial for full social participation (ibid: 9). Given that this idea of deficiency is so closely tied to a migrant's potential as an economically valuable part of society, skilled working migrants largely escape being seen as 'deficient' in their Finnishness or any other way. In article II, I concluded that skilled migrants from 'appreciated' countries and ethnicities find that they are not expected to, or in fact even cannot, integrate as they represent the wanted side of globalization through their valued Otherness. As 'harmless fellows' (Suurpää 2002), they are not subjected to the same pressures to integrate into Finnish society culturally as racialized ethnic migrants, rather they are expected to remain as caricatures of their countrymen, adding wanted multicultural flavour to life in Finland.

This perspective on an immigrant's role in the host country's society does not allow much room for feelings of belonging, or for integration to take place. Firstly, a sense of belonging is essential for the integration of immigrants (Hellgren 2015). Secondly, successful integration is a 'two-way process' including reciprocity, adaptation and acceptance by both parties (Saukkonen 2016). Therefore, as the side that is claiming belonging, immigrants are reliant on the reciprocity of the side that has the power of 'granting' belonging (Yuval-Davis 2010). Simply put, immigrants cannot experience belonging if they feel that they are not allowed to belong by members of the host society (Hellgren 2015). In the context of my research, although skilled migrants are more appreciated than other types of migrants, they do not feel that they are considered to be on a par with native Finns. Comparison to other migrants tells only of relative privilege; skilled migrants are included in some dimensions but excluded in others. They are already educated, working migrants, and therefore largely left outside of the government integration policies that are concerned primarily with economic

integration. Culturally, they are to large extent accepted as positively internationalizing Finland, and therefore they are not pressured to integrate. They are, however, often excluded linguistically (in situations where the Finnish language is predominant), socially (to a varying extent) and politically (by not having e.g. voting rights).

Furthermore, they feel that they are made aware that they will never be accepted as equal to Finnish people. The impenetrable boundary between themselves and 'the Finns' is something that has surfaced repeatedly both in the interviews, as well as conversations in the field. A Kenyan IT expert described to me his position in Finnish society like this: 'if you are two Finnish people, one from the South and one from the North, you of course have this hierarchy thing of who's better than the other, but the minute a Chinese man walks in, you would be like: "ok, we are Finns, and you are the foreigner"' (interview 1.12.2010). The problem is not always that one is thought of in a negative way, rather that one is treated differently. A Chinese informant referred to how he felt he was treated in Finland as 'positive discrimination', whereby he felt he was getting a lot from Finland as a country (such as excellent health care) because of his class status and employment in a multinational company, but he would never be treated the same as a Finn. For this reason, he was refusing to apply for Finnish citizenship even though he had already been in the country for more than 10 years. 'A country should treat you like your own mother! In good and in bad, like "take out the trash!"', he explained to me when I asked him why he minded getting an easy ride in Finland (fieldnotes 22.04.2009). Finland was never going to be his mother. All he was expected to do was work, pay his taxes, not cause trouble, and he would never be asked for anything else.

Such 'positive discrimination' does not, again, leave much room for integration, or for belonging as an equal member of society. Of all the integrational hurdles, the social boundary between Finnish people and immigrants seems to be the hardest to cross. Many feel that they do not have any choice but to seek company from international social circles, as they will not be accepted as a legitimate part of any Finnish social group. However, with the conversations concerning (the impossibility of) integration into Finland, I also came to see what belonging could mean in a different way. I started asking the skilled migrants if they felt they belonged to Finnish society, or if they maybe even felt Finnish in some way. Most would say that they felt they belonged to 'an international community of Finland' that is somewhat removed from the majority society. Many said that they did in fact feel Finnish to quite a high extent, even though they acknowledged that they were not seen as such by Finnish people. Very few had managed to learn fluent Finnish, although they did acknowledge

that it would probably benefit their chances of making more Finnish friends. Some liked being singled out as the exotic other, the stranger, as long as this was presented in a positive light. For others, this was a source of frustration and made them feel like perpetual outsiders. On the whole, their answers expanded beyond the understanding of what is typically considered successful immigrant integration (i.e. integration into the host country's cultural norms and language, becoming part of the society as well as the economy). Their reformulation of their social location in Finland offers the first answers to my research question through the idea that integration and belonging can be considered separate issues. The skilled migrants' sense of belonging in Finland is not dependent on being integrated into Finnish society in the sense of 'increasing their Finnishness', rather they can belong to a more narrowly defined part of the society without necessarily feeling that they are not integrated. Their primary goal merely seems to be to find a comfortable and positive social location – a self-defined place – for themselves in the country they live in, rather than strive to integrate into Finnish culture, society or the nation.

Their approach to belonging can be explained by looking at what this 'place' as a comfortable social location might be in the wider societal structure. Whereas immigrants as strangers have been mainly considered to be outsiders and something unfamiliar, Ahmed (2000) discusses how 'the stranger' is in fact needed for our view of the world, and for the 'imagined community of the nation' (as paraphrased by Lundström 2017: 82). Ahmed suggests that the image of the stranger has a function as a constitutive element of ourselves as parts of the societal whole that (only) exists as a combination of all its parts. This stranger is not necessarily a negative image; in the case of many white, Western skilled migrants, their value as parts of the coherent whole is to be the 'harmless fellows' with their positive multiculturalism, 'because they allow the nation to imagine itself as heterogeneous (to claim their differences as "our difference")' (Ahmed 2000: 96). However, at the same time, especially with regard to the conceptual image of 'the nation', strangers are needed for it to even exist. As the 'constitutive outside' (Mäkinen 2017) they are pointing to where the boundaries of us lie, as our Others against whom we define ourselves. This Othering is reciprocal, as the skilled migrants also define themselves and their boundaries against a categorized image of 'the Finns', as well as other migrants. In fact, as argued in the previous chapter, they reinforce this structure and separation by upholding the existence of a 'migrant hierarchy' so that they can themselves be set apart from other migrants, thereby elevating themselves as the good, wanted, appreciated type of migrant. Furthermore, they believe themselves to be good, and in fact valuable, migrants, worthy of being seen as the ideal type of migrant, even as the 'migrant elite'. This

line of thought offers my second answer to the overarching research question: skilled migrants do not feel they belong to the Finnish nation, and they often feel socially separated from the members of the majority society. However, they are parts of an imagined social structure of Finland that includes 'the Finns', themselves as the 'migrant elite' and a third Other in the image of 'the migrant'. This structure is where they fit in in a way that is accepted, and through which their sense of belonging is mediated. This is the 'place' they have found and defined for themselves.

The described social structure relies on boundary constructions that reinforce differences and Othering. Always being defined against Others, and as an Other, no doubt has its own implications on feelings of inclusion, acceptance, and belonging. As can be read from the articles, many of the skilled migrants are not happy with being merely slotted into a social structure as an anonymous part of a whole that they seemingly have no control over. Indeed, I see the bulk of what I have observed to take place in (and be reliant on) the interplay between structure and agency, as if a fight not for dominance but for equilibrium between these 'forces' was taking place. Similarly, in the continuous back and forth process of identity formation, structure and agency are continuously playing against each other in ways that unavoidably affect the form of each other. As skilled migrants are continuously pushing the boundaries of belonging with their strategies, they are also creating a more inclusive image of who should be thought of as a 'migrant elite' by including their own definition. This definition is more inclusive concerning ideas of ethnicity and nationality than the initial categorization that they feel imposed upon them is. To me, the boundary making (and -breaking) strategies described in article IV are about the triumph of agency over structure. Skilled migrants are using categorizations of the structure that at first sight seem constraining, but through agency these categorizations are transformed into an instrumental tool, a new way of being seen, a more valued identity, and eventually into social and symbolic capital. This agency seeks to change the structure and to have its new form accepted by those guarding the structure, who in this case are seen to be the audience of Finns with their referent culture. Therefore, the strategies and identity claims from the side of the skilled migrants may affect stereotypes and categorizations prevalent in the host society. Perhaps there will be a shift by which the primary assumption of a black African immigrant is no longer that they are a refugee. Or that it is plausible that an Asian female migrant came to the country to work as an IT expert on her own accord, rather than assuming that she has been recruited as a nurse or was brought to the country by her Finnish husband. Nevertheless, the very fact that these negotiations are still happening means that many skilled migrants do not feel that they have yet been

accepted, or that they have found their place, within the structures of Finnish society. The third potential answer to my research question is therefore that finding and defining a place for themselves in their host society is an ongoing process for skilled migrants. It is a process that relies on negotiations between structure and agency, and therefore between members of the host society and the migrants themselves.

At its core, the reciprocal notion of integration as a two-way process relies on the same principles of negotiation that are present in the interplay of structure and agency, and therefore offers a way for progress. There are signs of this happening. Despite the polarization of political attitudes in relation to migration, Finnish people on average are now more used to foreigners, which has translated into more lenient attitudes (Haavisto 2019). Finland, and specifically Helsinki, has become more multicultural. I recently ran into an Indian skilled migrant I had not seen since my years of active fieldwork. We stopped briefly to discuss what was going on in our lives, and my ongoing research. He remarked on how things had changed in the 15 years that he had lived in Finland, and how being ‘a brown guy’ was not such a big deal anymore. He referred to himself and other skilled migrants who arrived in the late 1990s as the ‘pioneers’ paving the way for Finns to get used to this type of migrant. For him, the increasing number of migrants from different parts of the world could be easily detected in the streetscape of Helsinki and had translated to him as not feeling ‘so different anymore’. He stated that he no longer got stared at as much as he used to (casual conversation 15.05.2018).

During the time I have been working on this research, ‘the field’ has grown, multiplied and diversified: there are more skilled migrants, in more diverse occupational fields, and from more countries. Furthermore, there are more social organizations catering to their needs, as well as publicly funded projects addressing skilled migrants specifically. All of the social organizations I did my fieldwork in are still not only active but more popular than ever. Their focus as multicultural spaces that provide social contacts and peer support to their members has not changed. What has changed, however, is the interest of policymakers and other actors, such as cities and municipalities, for getting involved. A few of the organizations have secured large public funding, which has allowed them to become more than just hobby projects. This public recognition has also started to draw attention to skilled migrants’ integration as a relevant concern for companies, for municipalities, and for Finnish society at large. The need for skilled migrants to have access to Finnish-language education, previously reserved only as a labour market integration measure, also seems to be gaining momentum (Lehtimaja 2017; Ministry of the Interior 2018). To go back to

Sunata's (2012) argument, skilled migrants are indeed starting to be approached by official integration efforts as 'homo migrant sociologicus', rather than just 'homo migrant economicus'. These are signs of the beginnings of bilateral, two-way integration that will help in establishing a place for skilled migrants in Finland as full members of society. They will no doubt also have a positive effect on attracting and retaining this foreign labour force in ways that I was already calling for in article I. It is in the social aspects of life that Finland becomes a less desirable option for skilled migrants, and these are the issues that integration measures therefore need to address. Furthermore, as social life is indeed social, there is also a need for Finnish people to meet skilled migrants half-way in order for integration and belonging to become options.

One final reminder: there is a difference between identity negotiations over the content of identity (who we are), as opposed to the value of identity (what we are worth) (Liebkind 1992: 164). Apart from specific situations, skilled migrants are not demanding recognition for actually being skilled migrants; that they know they are already through their qualifications and professions. The recognition they seem to be after is more about being seen like a 'migrant elite': the ideal type of migrant. A wanted, appreciated migrant. The type of migrant that, according to opinion surveys, is valued in Finland. Through the strategies of boundary making skilled migrants are saying that they have done their part as the migration rhetoric in Finland defines it. They have done their duties by paying taxes, by having an education, by contributing to society both economically and culturally. Now they are merely demanding their right to be valued and included as equals.

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CouchSurfers Helsinki

>www.couchsurfing.com/places/europe/finland/helsinki<

Expatriate Finland Forum >www.expatriate-finland.com<

Finland Forum >www.finlandforum.org/bb<

Free Magazine >www.freemagazine.fi<

Helsinki Social Club >www.facebook.com/pages/category/Social-Media-Agency/Helsinki-Social-Club-1315680608450599/<

Helsinki Times >www.helsinkitimes.fi<

International English Speakers' Association in Finland ry (IESAF)
>www.iesaf.fi<

InterNations >www.internations.org/helsinki-expats<

Jolly Dragon >www.jollydragon.net<

Junior Chambers International Cosmopolis >www.jcicosmopolis.fi<

Kansainvälinen Kulttuurikeskus Caisa >www.kulttuuri.hel.fi/caisa<

Otaniemi International Network >www.oin.sharetribe.com/<

Ovi-magazine >www.ovimagazine.com<

Return Ticket >www.returnticket.fi/en<

Six Degrees >www.6d.fi<

Uranus discussion forum > www.rekrytointi.com/en/<

³⁶ This is a curated list intended to give a general idea about the type of online sources included as secondary, exploratory data. I have left out personal sites, e.g. blogs written by skilled migrants in Finland, so as not to compromise the anonymity of the research subjects. Some sites may no longer be active, may have moved or adapted their focus since I actively followed them.