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# Intersections of Mobility and Belonging: Blogging Subjectivities of Finns on the Move

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## **Abstract**

As components of the contemporary experience, mobility and displacement (Appadurai 1990; Said 2002) are accompanied by our need to belong: while global mobility is encouraged by and expected from the educated ex-pats and temporary workers, the “flows” of migrants cause “debates, challenges, and crises” in the European nation-states (Skey 2014). Yet, in the novel interest in digital mobilities, the analysis of personal experiences has been left aside. In this article, the focus is on affective accounts of mobility and belonging. The autobiographical narratives published in the blogosphere are analyzed to shed light on the processes of multi-sited place attachments. The analysis of intersecting mobilities rests on the divergent experiences based on, for example, geographical, gendered, ethnic, age-related, class, or economic differences of the bloggers, mainly Finnish exchange students, travelers, and (spouses of) ex-pats. Analyzing individual digital narratives brings forth the varying experiences and processes of belonging and emphasizes the spatially, temporally, and experientially multidimensional character of mobility and belonging and the localities and situatedness of mobile actors. This analysis of mobility blogs emphasizes the increasing role of the Internet in producing translocal belonging and the centrality of places in self-understanding and meaning-making.

**Keywords:** affects, autobiographical narratives, belonging, blogs, gender

## **Introduction**

Mobility and displacement are said to be the key constituents of late-modern experience (Appadurai 1990), so much so that in research, a “mobility turn” has been identified (Cresswell 2010, 551). To Urry (2007, 2010),

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who emphasizes the diversity of mobilities and their complex interdependencies (2010, 348), the “social” is essentially “mobile” in contemporary culture. There is now a need to acknowledge the new forms of mobility tied to technological advancements that enable diverse forms of agencies online.

Global mobility is expected from both educated and highly skilled expatriates (Koikkalainen 2014, 156) and low-paid temporary workers (Anthias 2012; Passerini et al. 2010). Recent events in the Middle East and Africa have significantly affected our understanding of mobility (Rolshoven and Schlör 2016). Migration from the Global South, labeled the “refugee crisis,” has challenged European societies, including Finland. The heated political debates and the media encourage hostility by using the rhetoric of catastrophe in describing the “floods” or “swarms” of migrants entering Europe (Devereux, Haynes, and Power 2016).

Acknowledging the different kinds of mobilities in different historical times (Rolshoven and Schlör 2016, 11), the focus of this article is on contemporary migration and the “debates, challenges, and crises” allegedly inflicted upon the European nation-states (Skey 2014). Immigration stokes emotional anxiety and extreme political activity and is leading to the success of right-wing populist parties throughout the continent, with their demands to “close the borders” to protect Europeans (Saresma 2019, forthcoming). In this situation, the fact that Europeans themselves have always emigrated, and that the flow of migrants away from Finland, especially to the Americas and to Sweden, has only recently receded enough to make Finland now a net receiver of migrants (Martikainen, Saukkonen, and Säävälä 2013; Habi and Koikkalainen 2014, 3–4), seems to have been lost, giving way to hostile and aggressive anti-immigration rhetoric (Lähdesmäki and Saresma 2014).

In the sociological study of mobilities (see, e. g., Urry 2010) and the more recent interest in digital mobilities, which refers to the ways information and communication technologies and social-media applications affect the formation of social relations and interactions, interdependent with corporeal mobilities to communication (Taipale 2014; Castells et al. 2006), the analysis of personal experiences of mobility and migration has been largely ignored.

In this article, the focus is on how mobility and belonging are described and constructed in and through autobiographical writing published on the Internet. The aim is to reach the “universal but always particularly constructed” experiences of moving (Cresswell 2010, 550) through blogs written by Finnish migrants. These fragmentary autobiographical narratives are analyzed to shed light on the processes of corporeal and digital mobilities, as well as negotiations of belonging and how they are expressed.

Elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> I emphasize the need for the analysis of intersecting mobilities, which refers to the diversity of migrants’ experiences. Urry (2010, 348) emphasizes the workings of power in positioning migrants

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<sup>2</sup> The project website [www.intersectingmobilities.org](http://www.intersectingmobilities.org) will be updated constantly.

hierarchically on the basis of their gender, country of origin, skin color, or religion, and he argues that the “geographical intersections of region, city, and place” need to be analyzed “with the social categories of class, gender, and ethnicity.” For Lykke (2010, 9), gender intersects with “power differentials based on class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, geopolitical positioning, age, dis/ability, and so on.” In the blogs studied in this article, the identity markers are notably homogenous: all the blogs are written by supposedly white, mostly young, and educated Finns. However, I wish to show that even in such a homogenous group, the experiences of mobility and belonging vary.

My aim is to identify and explore the new forms of mobility by focusing on the blogs of mobile people. Blogs, as autobiographical narratives, are read here as cultural texts that represent and produce the subjectivities of the writers in interaction with the contemporary social atmosphere. Analyzing these texts sheds light on the processes of corporeal and digital mobilities. The objective is to emphasize the spatially, temporally, and qualitatively varying experiences of mobile actors and to explore the processes of belonging.

The main research questions are the following: How are mobility and belonging articulated in the blogs? Do the experiences of mobility vary in this relatively narrow set of texts? Does contemporary digitalized culture, which offers new forums of agency on the Internet, allow for the creation of new experiences of mobility and new ways of belonging? And finally, based on reading a selection of blogs written before and another set written after the watershed of the so-called refugee crisis of 2015, has the “crisis” affected the contents of the blogs?

In what follows, I present an analysis of blogs written by mobile people based in Finland. First, the key concepts and theoretical background of the analysis are explained. Then, by interpreting the blog texts and the meaning-making processes that are deployed in relation to mobility and belonging, six subjectivities constructed by writers in and through their writing are formulated. After introducing the various subjectivities and discussing the manifestations of the intersecting categories of power that are deployed in the process of writing, I address the possible effects of the so-called refugee crisis on the construction of mobile subjectivities based in Finland. Finally, I place this analysis in the broader context of contemporary mobility to see whether and how the performatives of mobility and belonging have changed in the digital age.

### **Concepts, Methods, and Materials**

As defined by Devereux, Haynes, and Power (2016), migration in a globalized world means “the process of moving across symbolical or political borders” (xv). It is a material and symbolic action of dislocation and relocation that requires the constant performing and narrating of belonging. Lähdesmäki et al. (2016) noted in their meta-analysis of the uses of the concept *belonging* in recent scholarly articles that while mobility indeed

enables and demands manifold belongings, it may also arouse feelings of non-belonging and experiences of exclusion and hostility.

Exploring the concept of mobility entails analyzing various forms of migration without separating or categorizing hierarchically the various subject positions of mobile people, as do the concepts of migrant, emigrant, immigrant, refugee, expat, or “external citizen” (about the migrant hierarchy in Finland, see Koskela 2014, 21). Mobility refers to a free and self-initiated move, whereas migration in certain research paradigms is understood as a forced movement from one country to another. Migration is also perceived as longer in duration than mobility, which can include shorter or longer stays abroad (Habti and Koikkalainen 2014, 7). Cresswell (2010, 552) advocates an approach to mobilities that considers all forms of mobility and not only particular forms of moving like migration research. In this orientation, the concept of mobility is “as much about meaning as it is about mappable and calculable movement,” which makes mobility “an ethical and political issue” (552). The term migration has acquired a pejorative connotation in Europe since the 2015 refugee “crisis.”

Belonging is simultaneously an affective experience, a material connection, and a shifting process that must be constantly negotiated (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016; Probyn 1996). The intensity of the feeling of belonging may vary, but the need to belong simultaneously to several places is not exceptional. Belonging is multi-sited and relational: individuals simultaneously belong “here,” to their beloved spaces and relationships, and “there,” to the places of their memories or the places from which they have been dislocated. One way in which the negotiation between feelings of belonging and non-belonging, so characteristic of mobile people, can take place is through autobiographical writing.

Sharing one’s life experiences and thoughts through autobiographical writing has always been a fundamentally social act, but in the context of social media the sociality is emphasized. Blogging is a social process in which individuals and groups construct shared meanings through contents, communities, and Internet technologies. The blogosphere as a scene of representations of digital mobility is a tempting arena for both bloggers and readers because blogs can be published and accessed from anywhere. Blogs are a forum where one can answer the need to reflect and process one’s personal experiences and share them with others.

Blogs are an influential site of contemporary agency in the online public space. Blogs, as Wallsten (2007) claims, are one of the most important applications of social media: they influence media coverage of politics, and bloggers are influential agenda setters (Larsson and Hrastinski 2011; Saresma 2017). Blogs as sites of agency are typical of civic society, providing tools for communication and networking in digital environments with fewer gatekeepers than in traditional forms of civic activity (Sunstein 2001). This sense of freedom and anonymity has encouraged a growing amount of hate speech, and several reactionary ideologies, such as anti-feminism, racism, and xenophobia, thrive on Internet discussion forums and blogs;

immigration is also the object of hostile comments (Saresma 2018). This article, however, focuses on the more positive sides of the blogosphere, namely, the sense of belonging that blogging makes possible and the potentially new forms of subjectivity formed in and through blogging.

Personal blogs as spaces for identity work are mostly single-authored and typically personal in tone (Blood 2002, xii). As a type of autobiographical life-writing, they can be situated in the larger historical continuum of life-writing that is published in the semi-public arena of the blogosphere (Pole 2010). They are inherently social and present a relational mode of subjectivity construction (Jäntti et al. 2018), emphasizing the social existence of humans as profoundly relational, as being-with-others.

Subjectivity as a philosophical term refers to the quality of being a subject. In considering the constitution of contemporary subjectivity, feminist philosopher Braidotti (1994) emphasized the concept of difference and more specifically of gender, ethnic, and cultural difference as the basis of subjectivity in the globalized and technologically mediated world. In her *nomadic ethics* (2006), difference and diversity are the prerequisites for an ethical approach. Following Braidotti, I take subjectivity as an inherently social mode. Unlike her, my interest lies not so much in embodied subjectivity but in the textual subjectivities formed in blogs. For me, subjectivity is a textual position the writers occupy in the blogs. In negotiating their mobile agency in blogs, writers construct a textual environment where they can deal with the pressing questions of mobility and belonging. Subjectivity is a process of self-reflection and simultaneously a relational mode of being, a way to claim agency in the eyes of readers.

Blogs are a means of constructing certain kinds of subjectivity. An analysis of the mobility blogs emphasizes the increasing role of the Internet in producing transnational belonging. Besides being a textual construction of agency, subjectivity is also an analytic category: reading the blogs that comprise my material, I distinguish and identify six different subjectivities, which cover all the blogs I have analyzed. These categories are in no way exhaustive.

In addition to the notion of subjectivity in my analysis of mobility and belonging, I apply intersectionality as a theoretical and a methodological concept on which to build my analysis. The concept was introduced by Crenshaw (1989). Drawing from Black feminist thought, she refers to the multiple subordination of poor black women, also pointing out that questions of ethnicity and race were not sufficiently discussed by white feminists. In European feminist research, inspired by postcolonial thought, similar criticism has been directed toward the blindness of hegemonic white/Nordic feminism to race and ethnicity. Accompanying this heated discussion, there is an increasing dedication to intersectionality as not only a category or a metaphor, but also a theory or a methodology (Carbin and Edenheim 2013). In this tradition, it is not only groups of oppressed and marginalized people who are studied: since nobody is merely privileged or subordinated, unmarked categories of power and of

the normative and powerful groups also need to be analyzed (Choo and Marx Ferree 2010, 133).

Acknowledging the criticism that despite the number of identity markers, researchers subscribing to intersectionality are still only adding more categories (Carbin and Edenheim 2013, 239), my starting point is not a structurally oriented sociological categorization of power and subordination based on gender, race, and class, but a subtler take on differences in the experiences of mobile bloggers. This requires not only sensitivity to the different aspects of identity and social status, but also an analysis of negotiations of difference and sameness as they are deployed in the blogs, without presupposing that certain power differentials (e.g., whiteness, wealth, economic and educational status) are more important than others (e.g., being a “foreigner”).

Theoretically and methodologically, a multidisciplinary approach to mobility is not bound exclusively on any of the “separate fields of conventional exile studies, migration studies of all shades, diaspora studies, urban studies, and tourism studies” (Rolshoven and Schlör 2016, 11), even though all have inspired the idea of intersecting mobilities. Instead, in emphasizing biographies and “the complex lifeworld” of people on the move (11), this approach draws from cultural studies, gender studies, and autobiography studies; it highlights the productivity of autobiographical narration and the meaning-making processes in blogs, and also recognizes the relationship of personal stories to the social context, including the cultural moment and its political atmosphere. To me, blogs are both cultural spaces of interaction and visually, verbally, and graphically constructed artefacts (Driscoll and Gregg 2010). As a cultural studies scholar, I utilize textual analysis (Frey, Botan, and Kreps 1999): in interpreting the narratives and categorizing the variety of subjectivities constructed by bloggers, I pay attention to the societal change that has taken place in Europe and in Finland during the last two years, namely the “refugee crisis.” I contemplate the possible changes the suddenly increased number of immigrant refugees to Europe has had, if any, on the blogs of mobile people based in Finland.

In the emergent field of blog studies, most of the empirical articles that have been written so far have been quantitative (Larsson and Hrastinski 2011). Here, a qualitative approach is applied that makes it possible to analyze the meaning-making processes that are involved in blog writers’ construction of certain subjectivities. Classifying the subjectivities draws attention to differences between the various narratives and narrators. Utilizing intersectionality as an analytical tool means sensitivity to all kinds of differences, not only to the most obvious ones (gender, skin color, and economic position). It means focusing on the unmarked categories of power—whiteness, middle class status, and education—and highlighting the differences that can be found in even the relatively homogenous set of mobility blogs written by bloggers based in Finland.

The blogs analyzed here are fragmentary autobiographies that have not been published in the literary world or collected in any national archives,



but have been written by a random range of mobile people. The corpus selected for close reading comes from a list of Finnish blogs called Blogilista.fi (<http://www.blogilista.fi>), comprising more than 60,000 blogs. When collecting the first set of material in the spring of 2015, I came up with twenty-three blogs that explicitly dealt with migration. From this corpus, I selected the ones that had an autobiographical quality, had recently been updated, and were written either by an (im)migrant or from the viewpoint of someone close to one. My first set of materials was made up of nine blogs by Finnish migrants, most of them last updated during 2014 and 2015, with some blog entries dating from as far back as 2011 or 2012.

Suspecting that the so-called refugee crisis of the fall of 2015 might have changed people's attitudes not just toward immigration but also toward migration on a larger scale, I then renewed my search. Taking the first thirty hits, I narrowed down the corpus by excluding advertisements, blogs that were only visible to invited readers, and clearly racist blog posts. I ended up with seven blogs, which was more or less the same as in the first set of material I had analyzed. In what follows, I present sixteen blogs that make up the material analyzed, categorizing them under six types of subjectivity. These cannot be considered fixed and absolute; instead, this approach demonstrates that the bloggers' different experiences affect the subjectivities constructed. I will now proceed to introduce the blogs under the six subjectivities I identified.

### **Pre-“Immigration Crisis” Blogs:**

#### **Subjectivities of a Drifter, a Temporary Resident, and a Stranger**

Reading the first set of blogs led me to identify three types of mobile subjectivity. The first is *the drifter* who travels around Europe or the globe. The blog *Kohti ääretöntä ja sen yli* (To infinity and beyond) and the blog *Nana* represent this type of subjectivity. Belonging is constructed not so much through an attachment to place as through a relationship to significant others or certain lifestyle choices. In *Kohti ääretöntä*, the young Finnish female blogger describes her life in the Netherlands with her Dutch boyfriend. She writes about her travels with him and her friends to nearby countries and about the dream she and her boyfriend share of setting up a hostel for surfers in Portugal. In this blog, belonging is mainly constructed through activities, traveling, and surfing.

The ecological and ethical life style in *Nana's* blog is used to connect the young adventurer, formerly living in Germany and now in Argentina, to the world: she explicitly refuses to settle down or adjust to the demands of society. Instead, moving around, she remains faithful to her ecological ideology and philosophical soul-searching. Both bloggers are “allergic to possessions”<sup>3</sup> and claim that they want to decrease the number of personal belongings they have.

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3 The double quotes mark direct citations from the blogs, most of which were originally published predominantly in Finnish. The author has translated the citations from Finnish into English.



The second type of subjectivity is that of the *temporary resident*. The blogs *Talvi Prahassa* (The winter in Prague) and *Satu Aachenista* (Satu from Aachen) describe the construction of a sense of belonging and feeling at home in situations where the writers have temporarily moved to another country either to study or to live with a partner working abroad. Mobility is thus not a chosen way of life, as in the moving-around blogs, where a drifting subjectivity is attached mainly to significant others, but mobility is rather something determined from the outside, either because of studies or because of life choices made by the partner and followed by the blogger. In formulating this subjectivity, a relational mode of writing is deployed, characteristic of most autobiographical writing (Miller 2000). The partner in these blogs is the *significant other*, the one “through whom, to whom, or about whom the life narrative is narrated” (Smith and Watson 2001).

In the case of the subjectivity of a temporary resident, belonging in the new environment seems to be constructed by highlighting the importance of significant others, for instance, by discussing the adjustment of the family to the new neighborhood or by describing the daily routines of the family in the new country. These blogs emphasize the provisional nature of mobility, which is shown in the way the bloggers are bemused by the strange habits and practices found in foreign lands and in contrast with those at home. This, as I interpret it, allows one to keep a certain distance, highlighting the temporary nature of the migration. However, even the blogs that mainly describe temporary residences demonstrate, and explicitly discuss, how the need to write decreases as one adapts to the new country.

These blogs contain tourist-like photographs of sights, parks, and statues; descriptions of sightseeing, visits to museums and other tourist attractions; and the documentation of everyday study or work-related activity. Thus, the materiality of belonging as well as the subjectivity of a visitor are emphasized.

The third type of subjectivity is tired of non-belonging: the subjectivity that is in the process of becoming estranged from one’s home country—either because one lives abroad or sees one’s home country in a different light after marrying an immigrant. This *estranged subjectivity* is, unlike the previous types, about the wish to belong and about the difficulty of achieving the sense of belonging. This feeling of non-belonging is aptly described in the blog *Cartaverde/Visa Journeys*, which I will return to at the end of this article.

Blogs performing estranged subjectivity differ from the two previous types of subjectivity in their affective tone: whereas the previous ones are filled with mostly positive emotions, such as joy and excitement, interspersed with surprise and amazement, the blogs that deal with the dream of settling down include disappointment and even anger toward those who are getting in the way of the sense of belonging, be it immigration officials or anyone else with hostile or even racist opinions. For example,

in the blog *Mustavalkoisia tapauksia* (Black-and-white incidents), a white Finnish woman describes how, now that she observes life through the lens of her African-born black husband, she sees life differently in her own country. She narrates how her husband came to Finland almost five years ago, with his “guiding light to be able to work and create a life in a safe environment.” That, however, proved impossible because of the racist attitudes of many Finns.

The blogs analyzed within the first set of material are, despite the three different forms of subjectivity (moving around, temporary residence, and estranged subjectivity), surprisingly homogenous. From the perspective of the intersecting positions of power, all are written from the viewpoint of white, middle-class women: from unmarked, yet explicit categories of power, not from a position of subordination (Choo and Marx Ferree 2010). The writers possess a certain level of education or cultural and economic capital. This becomes evident in the resources that enabled them to travel and to live abroad, to have constant Internet access, and—especially—to have the ability to reflect on their choices and attitudes. They had moved abroad temporarily to “find themselves,” to study or work, or to follow their husbands. Some were married to immigrants, which had opened their eyes to white privilege. This is an issue the expatriates did not reflect upon at all.

All in all, the landscape of mobility described in the Finland-based transnational blogosphere is white. The subjectivities in this set of blogs are quite conventional—young girls seeking to discover themselves, students, housewives—although they are built on migration and mobility. Already a certain racism found in Finland is brought out. Nevertheless, predominant is a mindset that does not recognize its privilege, that takes it for granted that white Western migrants are welcome everywhere. Let us now look at the second set of blogs and try to find out whether this changed after the so-called refugee crisis, which has shaken the self-understanding of Europe as a tolerant, open society.

### **Post-“Immigration Crisis” Blogs: Sensitive, Reflective, and Aware Subjectivities**

The seven blogs that comprise the second set of material were all written sometime after the fall of 2015. Again, three types of subjectivity were identified in this more recent set of material. Every single one of the blogs could be positioned quite clearly at one end or the other of a continuum ranging from very matter-of-fact, educational blogging to affective, emotional blogging. To start with the more emotional ones, I will describe the *sensitive subjectivity* that is performed in two of the blogs, namely *Keijukammari* (Fairy chamber) and *IrtoNainen: Kohti uutta minua* (Lady adrift: Toward the new me).

The writer of the blog *Keijukammari* describes herself as a young woman, an artist and illustrator “obsessed by mythology,” who has emigrated from Finland to Wales. Her blog posts deal with topics ranging

from Finnish mythology to how sensitive people often wind up in creative professions to Disney animations. The blog is interesting in the way it constructs the subjectivity of an artist who lives in a fairy-tale world of mythology and magic and writes mostly on these topics, paying little attention to more mundane issues.

Immigration is a topic discussed explicitly by IrtoNainen, whose blog is full of nostalgia and yearning to be somewhere else. In her blogger profile, she even describes herself as “an individualistic person who longs.” Her post titled “Immigrants” tells the story of her parents, who emigrated to Canada as a young couple and returned two decades later but considered themselves to be “stuck between two countries and continents, not feeling well anywhere, missing something else for the rest of their lives.” Their strong feelings of homesickness and melancholy are conveyed via pictures of an old tumbledown cottage, soon to be demolished.

Both of the subjectivities constructed above can be classified as *sensitive subjectivity*, since they are both affective in tone, performing a sense of yearning or a nostalgic relationship either to a lost past or to a fictive world filled with imaginary creatures that have their origins in ancient mythologies or in fairy tales.

The second type of subjectivity, which I call *reflective subjectivity*, is typically performed in the blogs *Outi's life*; *Elämäää Tanskassa* (Life in Denmark); and *Eau de Cologne*. This subjectivity is simultaneously affective and analytical. Emotional in style, the feelings described in these blogs range from enthusiasm to despair. Despite the emotional turmoil depicted in the blogs, the tone is in essence matter-of-fact as the blogs aim to teach their readers something or to enlighten their readers.

In *Elämäää Tanskassa*, the blogger describes her experiences as an emigrant: she migrated because she fell in love with a Danish man. She analyzes her feelings of separation from the loved ones she has left behind in Finland and what it actually feels like to live abroad. The blogger, who calls herself Daness (*Tanskatar*, a modification of the gender neutral *Tanskalainen* [a Dane], which emphasizes her femininity), illustrates vividly her fearless leap into the unknown. One exception to her fearlessness was her last night in Finland. Then, she says, realizing that she had practically no experience of living abroad, she started to panic: her language skills were poor, she had neither a job nor her own apartment, and her boyfriend was her sole safety net.

Her emotional turmoil stabilized as she settled down in the new country. She says that she now has a job, friends, and hobbies. Still, she sometimes gets very homesick and misses especially her friends, who seldom come to see her in Denmark. She does not regret moving abroad and, indeed, expresses her determination to stay, despite being frequently asked when she plans to return to her home country.

In an entry posted in September 2015, she reflects on her experiences as an immigrant against the backdrop of the media panic on immigration and the “flood” of asylum seekers from the Global South to Northern

Europe. She describes the questions she constantly gets about when she is going to leave, whether she has a job, and whether she pays taxes in Denmark. The rudest comment she reports hearing was to the effect that she was an imported wife, bought in Finland, and the most ignorant one was about Finland being a part of Russia. All this hostility makes her realize and think deeply about the heartless response that meets refugees fleeing from war.

In the blog *Eau de Cologne*, the writer, describing herself as a novice blogger and a novice emigrant, reflects on her writing skills and the level of publicity and privacy involved in sharing her experiences about moving to a foreign country in this way. She received negative feedback from some Finns in the blog's comments section when she wrote about her feeling of belonging in Cologne, where she had then been staying for less than a year. She asks whether she should only pour out her homesickness and longing for Finland and not share the feeling of being at home in Germany. "Why shouldn't I feel good about living in another country? When am I allowed to say that my home is in Germany?"

These existential contemplations on belonging seem to turn into feelings of exclusion and displacement, as invoked in an incident that she eloquently describes: when she puts some of her spare dishes on offer on a public Facebook group in a message written in a mixture of English and German, she instantly receives mean comments, including a demand that she learn proper German. She is also told that immigrants like her should just go home. As a result of this episode, she says, her image of "Cologne as a liberal, tolerant, and exuberant city suffered a severe blow."

She describes being the target of hostile, racist comments, sharing the experience of many contemporary migrants and refugees in Europe. She finds this "outrageous" and "unbelievable." But the xenophobic attacks also make her reflect on the experiences of "those who have to listen to this hatred on a daily basis and face-to-face." She refers here to her own whiteness, which normally renders her invisible to racists and distinguishes her from those who are racialized on the basis of their skin color.

In the blog *Outi's life*, the situation in the fall of 2015 has stimulated Outi, who, emphasizing her relationality, describes herself as "a mother of two and a wife to a wonderful husband," to post an entry titled, "Let's get the concepts clear—and my personal meditations." In the post, she first explains the differences between the concepts of migrant, returnee, guest worker, asylum seeker, and refugee very informatively and then reveals that while writing this, she is crying and feeling utterly dismayed by people's thoughtlessness and lack of empathy. She is distressed and feels anxious because of the racist hate speech directed at migrants and refugees. She writes,

Every day I'm scared.

What insults have been shouted at my husband and children?

Do I have to wash spit out of my family's clothes?

Have they already encountered someone who has gone further than just spitting on them?

Living in Finland, she shares the experiences of Daness in Denmark and Eau de Cologne in Germany, asking: "What has happened to this nice country? How did racism become tolerated? Where has all the humanity disappeared to?"

I call the third type of subjectivity in this set of material *aware subjectivity*. The blogs under this title are reminiscent of the previous subjectivity in their certain, matter-of-fact tone, but they are the least affective or emotional in this set of texts. There were two blogs in this category, *Sirkka Helenan blogi* (Sirkka Helena's blog) and *Aiheita* (Issues/Reasons, where the title *Aiheita* can refer to both issues and reasons in Finnish).

Sirkka Helena blogs about the question of family reunification which, as a result of the refugee crisis, became a fiercely debated issue in Finnish politics after the government tightened the requirements for asylum seekers who were hoping to join their families. Indeed, numerous deportations, or the removal or forced exile of family members, have been carried out by the present government. She relates current cases, noisily debated in the Finnish media, to her own experiences when she was the newly wedded wife of a Swiss man. When they married, she was told that the most important thing was for the married couple to share a nationality. She therefore took Swiss citizenship and claims that in so doing she lost her Finnish citizenship without even realizing it. Their children became "truly international," and everything worked well—until the divorce. Then, the blogger wanted to leave Switzerland, but several countries refused her a residence permit. Eventually the Finnish president granted the blogger and her young daughter Finnish citizenship. She shares her story in order to teach the importance of citizenship to people who expect to be able to move freely around the world.

*Aiheita* is a blog that covers a vast range of topics, from Finnishness, travel, and culture to the Swedish-speaking minority of Finland (including the lively discussion on the compulsory study of Swedish in Finnish schools), immigration, religion, and the environment. Photographs and the personal details that are given indicate that the blogger Dominik is a middle-aged man who was born in Finland, is married and lives in Finland, and travels extensively. He blogs about his journeys, describing his destinations and adding texts and pictures to his observations, and, in doing so, effectively maps the globe. There is a certain educational and informative tone to his blog, but he sometimes expresses opinions that betray at least a hint of opposition to immigration.

Mostly, the xenophobia in *Aiheita* is carefully disguised under the educational and no-nonsense tone. This is exemplified in the blog post dated 6 December 2015, Finnish Independence Day. In the entry, Dominik,

writing in what I call the aware subjectivity, analyzes a question put by an Iraqi immigrant, Aso Aziz, who is married to a Finnish woman, has two children with her, and earns his living as a small entrepreneur, running his own pizzeria. Aziz asks in an interview published in that day's newspaper, "What more do I need to do in order to become Finnish?" Dominik has a clear answer, which he prefaces with a long and detailed introduction to the history of the Finno-Ugric people and their differences from Sámi and Roma people, and even differences between people living in Eastern and Western Finland. The answer Dominik then gives is simple: Aziz can never become a Finn in the ethnic sense because of his genetic heritage, but he can become a member of the national state through marriage and reproduction.

Common to almost all of the blogs in this second set of material is that they comment on the refugee crisis either in terms of being shocked by its effects (as do *Elämäää Tanskassa*, *Eau de Cologne*, and *Outi's life*) or by joining the immigration-critical voices (as does Dominik).

### **New Digital Mobilities?**

Above, I introduced six subjectivities—those of a drifter, a temporary resident, a stranger (the first set) and sensitive, reflective, and aware subjectivity (the second set)—that I constructed on my reading of sixteen blogs. The list is only one example of how to categorize the variety of subjectivities formed in the blogs. It does, however, illustrate that even in a relatively homogenous group of Finnish bloggers, there is diversity in the experiences of mobility. The blogs also show that current anti-immigration attitudes in Europe, including xenophobia and racism, are not limited to people with a certain ethnic background or skin color but are encountered by white Finns in Germany as well as black immigrants in Finland.

The blogs analyzed here consist of autobiographical fragments of the mobile lives of a narrow selection of Finns. They are filled with observations about living abroad or seeing the home country through the eyes of an immigrant. The texts express a variety of emotions: there are affective descriptions of joy, excitement, fear, and frustration. My reading of the material suggests to me that, with their affective and relational quality, these blogs function as *blogs of mobility and belonging*: they represent and reproduce both being on the move and affectively attaching to new places.

A relational mode is embedded in autobiographical writing and is present in both of the sets of material analyzed here. Belonging is expressed and created by the different subjectivities not only by talking about significant others or their lack as a result of mobility, but in a variety of other ways: some emphasize places and material objects, others foreground affective experiences. Following Jokinen's (1996) idea about diaries as a holding environment—a term borrowed from Winnicott—for stay-at-home mothers who sometimes feel lonely, it could be argued that the blogs analyzed here serve as a holding environment for their writers and simultaneously as sites for constructing new, mobile subjectivities.

Juxtaposing the two sets of blogs, collected before and after the watershed formed by the 2015 “refugee crisis,” shows that, in the first set, subjectivities are more individualistic as they focus on the personal relationship of the authors with their spouses or their need to find themselves philosophically. The blogs in this first set contain a significant amount of existential contemplation, while the second set of blogs is more concerned with social and political realities. Society, with its structural racism and people’s attitudes, hatred and the like, becomes more visible and the formulated subjectivities turn from the bloggers’ inner life to social reality. In this sense, a new quality of awareness of the wrongs and inequalities is present in the later set of blogs: the pre-2015 innocence has given way to social consciousness and a need to comment on the new situation.

I suggest that in this new awareness there is potential for opening space to (self-)reflection, an ethical stance toward migration, and empathy. It is a relational position: mobility can and should be understood not only through one’s personal experiences but also through those of others, even if they differ. In the end, nowadays, in the face of the alleged “crisis” and the attitudes behind the media panic, being white or middle class does not save mobile people from encountering hostile attitudes toward foreigners.

Especially the second set of blogs is involved in this kind of politicized writing. However, the blogs demonstrate that Finns, even mobile ones, are perhaps only half-way through in their attempt to “re-think whiteness” and in “re-locating the nomadic European identity,” which is the ideal of Braidotti (2010); they are not yet the “new, alternative, trans-cultural subjectivities” that Braidotti calls for in this new phase of globalization (34). The bloggers show genuine disbelief when they become the targets of racist attacks. In such situations, they cannot help but ask—perhaps slowly becoming aware of the (white Western) privilege that they are now in danger of losing—“How can this be happening to me?”

Analyzing the variety of subjectivities formed in the blogs has some theoretical implications for research on corporeal and digital mobilities. I chose to analyze the publications of bloggers based in Finland because I wanted to explore the heated controversy over immigration here, characterized by strong emotions and the mobilization of aggressive anti-immigrant attitudes, from a different angle (Saresma 2019, forthcoming). Turning to the blogs by mobile people based in Finland enabled me to bring out the reverse side of the blogosphere and to carry out an act of “reparative reading,” instead of the “paranoid reading” (Sedgwick 2003) encouraged by the new media environment. Reparative reading refers to the choice open to the researcher between the agency and willingness to engage in dialogue of the former and the often negative, suspicious, and perhaps even aggressive approach of the latter.

The study has shown that in the blogosphere, an increasing variety of mobile subjectivities is emerging. Nevertheless, I must ask, what exactly is new about digitally constructed narratives of mobilities? Do they really



produce new forms of subjectivities? Or are they, rather, just another medium through which mobile people can channel their affective experiences of mobility and belonging?

### **A Dream of Belonging**

An entry (posted on May 7, 2009) in the blog *Cartaverde* (later re-named *Visa Journeys*), which was mentioned earlier as exemplifying estranged subjectivity, captures the dynamics of mobility, belonging, and displacement:

Is normality too much to ask?

Being able to feel home and safe anywhere, or at least somewhere.

Being able to live every day with the person you love (—).  
Going somewhere with the company you like (—) instead of  
feeling trapped where you are now as you can't go anywhere.

Closing the eyes in the evening when falling asleep, and  
then waking up rested in the morning with no nightmares.  
When I feel unrested I just want to go. And I no more know  
where to go next. Away.

As if I ever belonged anywhere.

According to my interpretation, in this, normality refers to feeling at home and living a harmonious life with a loved one. In opposition to this is a certain restlessness, anxiety, and the sense of being imprisoned. In the text, a sense of non-belonging is linked with aimless drifting from place to place, desperately longing for a place to attach oneself to.

This excerpt reminds me of the autobiography of the Jewish writer Janina Bauman, titled *A Dream of Belonging* (1991), which describes eloquently her experiences in searching for a place in the world after surviving the Second World War. What seemed to me to be a universal need to belong made me think about the homogeneity of the Finland-based blogs analyzed above. The blogs have a lot in common: they are all written by white, Western, middle-class, young(ish) people, mostly women. However, there might be some connections to the blogs of belonging, written as they are from the position of unmarked categories of power, with other, perhaps not-so-privileged subject positions.

It is not difficult to imagine that a Jewish woman under Nazi rule in the 1940s or a modern refugee fleeing from her or his country of origin, not knowing where to settle and where to feel safe, might feel exactly like Cartaverde. Perhaps it does not actually matter whether the narratives of belonging and displacement are published in the social media or as a traditional book. What connects the biographical fragments of mobile

subjectivities is perhaps the negotiation between mobility, displacement, and belonging that is common to them all, regardless of the intersecting differences of the writers, such as the historical and geographical location, gender, nationality, or skin color.

And yet, reading the contemporary blogs, one cannot help but wonder who exactly is allowed to dream about belonging. Is it only white, educated Finns who have the privilege of belonging, or can people with other ethnic backgrounds, social statuses, and countries of origin belong, too? Is there any possibility that the hostile attitudes to immigrants caused by the current refugee crisis will soften when “we” as mobile people realize that we too are encountering increasing hostility? Could blogs written by the privileged, where similar experiences of displacement and exclusion are described, provide the foundation for an ethical stance? Could these blogs open a space for thinking seriously about the profound questions of mobility, migration, and belonging in general?

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