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Article • DOI: 10.1515/njmr-2018-0026 NJMR • 8(3) • 2018 • 183-191

Nordic Journal of Migration Research

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN THE LIFE STORIES OF DEPORTED ASYLUM SEEKERS FROM FINLAND TO IRAQI KURDISTAN

Abstract

This study explores how social inclusion and exclusion manifest as a dynamic continuum in the everyday lived realities of irregular migrants. Based on narratives of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers, who were eventually deported from Finland, the analysis depicts the ways in which societal structures, personal negotiations as well as relationships and social networks interplay in lives characterized by multiple locations, transitions and positions. Establishing and maintaining social contacts, belonging to various networks and being able to decide and act are primary factors that help us understand how the narrators relate to the continuum. The participants construct narratives illustrating several viewpoints or positions regarding participation, agency and dependency on outside actors and networks.

Keywords

inclusion/exclusion • asylum seeking • deportation • life stories • Kurds

Received 18 March 2016; Accepted: 29 May 2018

Sirpa Korhonen*, Marko Siitonen

Department of Language and Communication Studies, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland

Introduction

Refugees, internally displaced people, asylum seekers and irregular migrants on the whole are sometimes represented as "the most excluded, disempowered, and disenfranchised populations in the world", (Wilding 2009: 166[1]). In this article, we examined the different positions asylum seekers may find themselves in during the varying turns of their journey and challenged the above mentioned simplistic assumption of a static position of "the excluded" by examining the constructions of inclusion and exclusion through the life stories of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers in Finland who were eventually deported back to their region of origin.

We explored the precariousness of status and belonging (Sigona 2012; see also Bernhard *et al.* 2007) of our participants through the concepts of social inclusion and exclusion. The aim was to expand our understanding of the dynamic tensions between the two concepts and illustrate how they stand in contradiction but are simultaneously necessary components of the narrated experiences. In our analysis, social inclusion and exclusion do not present a dichotomy but rather appear as a continuum of oppositional tendencies forming a larger whole (see e.g. Baxter & Montgomery 1998).

Our study looks at the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion through two cases of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers in Finland who were deported after receiving negative decisions on their applications for asylum. Deportation, understood as a "state practice" (Drotbohm 2011: 381) to remove "undesired" (see e.g. Juntunen, Kalčić & Rogelja 2014) migrants by force, or threat of force (Collyer 2012), from a nation state, has become increasingly common with the closing of national borders (e.g. Collyer 2012). The two Kurds' experiences bear similarities to other cases discussed in research literature regarding deportations (e.g. Collyer 2012; Drotbohm 2011; Hautaniemi, Juntunen & Sato 2013; Schuster & Majidi 2013); the biographies illustrate the deportees' relationships on an interpersonal and community level and vividly picture their precarious belonging.

Life stories is a narrative approach typically focusing on small data sets based on individual experiences (see e.g. He 2002; Huttunen 2010; Koettig 2009). The method can facilitate the study of changes in individual lives, instigated by personal decisions, relationships, cultural environments, communities, societies, nation states and supranational units, and it was considered appropriate for this small and hard-to-reach target group (deportees from Finland). The approach also answers the call for connecting "the different stages of the journey" (Schuster & Majidi 2015: 648) in deportation studies. In addition, life stories allow for insight into the contradictory and complex nature of experiences, regarding them as a mirror of social realities (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou 2008).

This article is a part of a biographical-narrative project of researching refugee returns[2] from Finland, aiming to understand different return situations within "ongoing migration processes" (Ammassari & Black 2001: 18). The two biographies in this article constitute a special case within the project, most clearly exemplifying the central themes of our study. The first author met the returnees in Iraqi Kurdistan in December 2013; they had been seeking asylum in Finland for two to three years and were then deported and lived back in their cities of origin at the time of the interviews. The analysis of

* E-mail: sirpa.i.korhonen@jyu.fi

their life stories shows shifts and tensions between experiences of inclusion and exclusion within the trajectories of the biographers, in their respective locations and positions. Moreover, the results illustrate how, within the dynamic continuum of social *inclusion–exclusion,* another continuum of *power of decision and agency – lack of control and agency* is embedded. In the next sections, we will elaborate on these, discuss the key concepts and depict the life stories of the two returnees along with an analysis of their experiences. Finally, we will present and discuss our findings.

Identifying social inclusion and exclusion

Neither inclusion nor exclusion appears unproblematic in their use. Originally, a substitute for poverty, social exclusion is still strongly associated with economic and material aspects. Many studies focusing on social exclusion posit that work-related status and economic status are its main criteria (Giambona & Vassallo 2014; Lister 2000; Rose, Daiches & Potier 2012), thus claiming that the poor and unemployed are synonymous with the excluded. This overly simplistic view does not consider e.g. the different ways to participate and be included outside of paid employment (see e.g. Lister 2000). Studies into inclusion, in turn, generally focus on those at risk of poverty and exclusion and look for socially inclusive practices and policies (European Commission 2004: 10; Luxton 2002; Sheehy 2004).

Another way to approach social inclusion and exclusion is through the lense of relationships. In this line of research, researchers often consider relationships central to inclusion as something that satisfies the need to belong (Ricard 2011; Rose, Daiches & Potier 2012). Studies highlighting exclusion, in turn, emphasize isolation, being alone and rejected by others as essential markers of social exclusion (Blackhart *et al.* 2009; Ricard 2011; Williams 2007). Studies into social exclusion may also shift the focus towards social relations (Sen 2000; Skoda & Nielsen 2013) or different networks, such as social, economic and cultural (Burchardt, Le Grand & Piachaud 2002; Gore & Figueiredo 1997; Silva, Levin & Morgandi 2013).

Individual, or group, agency is intrinsically cognate to the discussion of exclusion and inclusion. It is then a question of participation in the basic political, economic and social activities of one's society and of understanding the mechanisms controlling participation (Bellani & D'Ambrosio 2011; Giambona & Vassallo 2014; Silva, Levin & Morgandi 2013; Wilding 2009). Following Sen's (2000: 14) idea of active and passive exclusion, Skoda and Nielsen (2013: 2) regarded exclusion as the product of "deliberate attempts by social or political elites to deprive people of opportunities, or the outcome of more subtle and mundane everyday social practices embedded in local relations of power". Both inclusion and exclusion are seen as multidimensional processes that either enable or limit possibilities and abilities to participate (Correa-Velez, Gifford & Barnett 2010; see also Burchardt, Le Grand & Piachaud 2002; Chan *et al.* 2014; Sen 2000).

In migration research specifically, social inclusion and exclusion have been utilized and evoked in many ways. Regarding particularly irregular migration and undocumented migrants, recurrent shifts in legal status and position impact individuals' experiences of inclusion and exclusion and make way for the reflection of state mechanisms, citizenship and mobility rights and hierarchies of membership (Khosravi 2010a; 2007; Sigona 2016). For example, asylum seekers may shift from an "illegal" entry to a "legal" stay during the process of the application for asylum and further to a possible detention and deportation or "illegal" hiding after a negative decision (see Khosravi 2010a: 98). Khosravi (2010a; 2007) supported the idea of "inclusive exclusion" (see also Agamben 1998), which he defined as a "dialectical principle" (Khosravi 2010a: 112) referring to the position of being "on a threshold of in and out" (Khosravi 2007: 332), excluded but at the same time included to a certain degree. Sigona (2016: 274-275), regarding statelessness, preferred to discuss "hierarchies of inclusion and membership" and "differential and precarious inclusion" as opposed to "radical exclusion". It is important here that there are no clear-cut categories of inclusion and exclusion, nor do they form a dichotomy. It is this line of thinking that our take on the dynamic relationship between social inclusion and exclusion also follows.

To sum up, while research has at times focused on either social inclusion or exclusion, for the purposes of this study, we deem it more useful to approach inclusion and exclusion as a dynamic continuum. These processes are relative to a given society or community and operate at different levels (individual, group, community, society). The dynamic nature of inclusion and exclusion also means that they are subject to change over time (Atkinson *et al.* 2002; Chan *et al.* 2014; European Commission 2004; Giambona & Vassallo 2014). On this basis, our research question is: how do deported asylum seekers construct narratives of inclusion and exclusion in their life stories?

Method

Researching irregular migrants' returns to the country of origin, the first author travelled to Iraqi Kurdistan[3], specifically to the city of Sulaymaniyah and its surroundings, to conduct interviews with returnees from Finland. This study focuses on two of them, Baban and Hano (pseudonyms chosen by the participants themselves), who shared the experience of asylum seeking[4] in Finland, followed by deportations two to three years after their arrival in Finland. Methodologically, the two life stories offer ample material for analysis and allow for the focus on detailed individual experiences. Thematically, failed asylum seeking is a very topical issue at the moment and provides a fruitful context for the analysis of inclusion and exclusion.

Since the study focuses on understanding participants' experiences and the many unpredictable turns in their migration trajectories, a hermeneutic methodology of biographical-narrative interviews (Rosenthal 2004) was chosen for the study. Rosenthal (2006: 3) maintained that "to understand and explain social phenomena we have to reconstruct their *genesis*"; this is why the life story is being solicited.

The participants volunteered to be interviewed by replying to an announcement on the web pages of a Finnish Kurds association. With the help of an interpreter[5], the first author contacted them by phone after arriving in Sulaymaniyah, Iraqi Kurdistan, and set up an informal meeting with each to discuss the interviews. This was the stage where trust was established and rapport created between the parties; in addition to discussing the aims of the interviews and practical arrangements, it was a matter of getting to know each other, sitting down together and drinking tea. Both Baban and Hano were eager to continue to actual interviews and expressed their appreciation of the fact that someone cared for their experiences. The interviews were conducted, with the help of an interpreter, either in Finnish (e.g. Hano) or English (e.g. Baban), in compliance with the participants' preference. The excerpts originally in Finnish were translated into English.

With access to an office, Baban's first interview took place at the University of Sulaimani and the second in a quiet corner of a restaurant, for reasons of convenience for him after long working

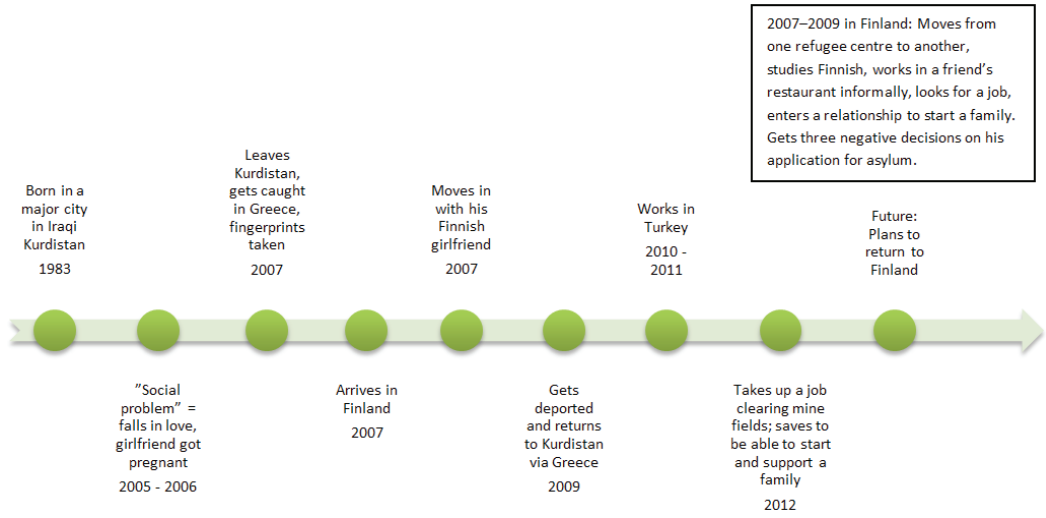

Figure 1 Baban's life story

hours. The languages he chose for the interviews were Kurdish and English. Hano's first interview took place in his family's farmhouse in the mountains around the city of Sulaymaniyah and the second in the first author's place of residence. Finnish and Kurdish were spoken in the first interview, but soon Hano became more active in Finnish, and by mutual decision, the second interview was in Finnish only. The interpreter was present and helped a few times when needed.

The first interviews started with an initial question to generate the participant's life story told freely as one desires (Rosenthal 2004). At this stage, the researcher only listened and made notes for follow-up questions. Since both participants' free narration was fairly short (30–40 minutes), it was possible to continue with follow-up questions in the first interviews. Both participants also expressed their wish for more detailed questions. Between the interviews (two to three days), some preparations were made by listening to the recordings, compiling follow-up questions and outlining the biographies with major turning points and relationship charts. The second interviews began by having a look at these together and then moving on to more detailed questions about the return process and relationships.

In addition to the actual interview sessions, there were several contacts with both participants: talking over the phone, walking around in the parks and the bazaar and drinking tea together. These meetings were not recorded but notes were made with the participants' consent.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, after which they were analysed applying an approach to the analysis of biographical material presented by Merrill and West (2009) for themes and by Rosenthal (2004; Rosenthal & Fischer-Rosenthal 2004) for sequentialization and textual sorts to find out "how" the stories are told. The analysis went through several stages, with both authors discussing and renewing the themes as they emerged. Thematic shifts also served as benchmarks for the sequentialization of the data. In the thematic sequences, the textual sorts of argumentation, description and narration (including story and report) (Rosenthal 2004; Rosenthal & Fischer-Rosenthal 2004) were looked into, in order to interpret the meaning the sequences carried for the narrators. Typically, sequences depicting the "inconceivable" in the narrators' lives, e.g. where they felt misjudged by the acts of those in power, suggested an agenda for the argumentation. Sequences depicting important personal memories were narrative. Story, elaborated in detail, as if reliving the moments, was a prominent textual sort both in the context of happy recollections, illustrating moments of success, and the saddest events, such as deportation and police actions.

Next, we present the life histories of the participants and then move on to a discussion of the results. Finally, conclusions on how inclusion and exclusion are negotiated in the two life stories are presented.

The life stories of two returnees: biographical data

BABAN

Baban (see Figure 1) was born in 1983, and in his early twenties, he encountered a "social problem" as a result of his romantic and sexual involvement with a local woman. He wanted to marry her but was not accepted by her family. She became pregnant and consequently, Baban was subject to intimidation. With financial help from his father, he left Iraq via Turkey to Greece where he was captured and fingerprinted. Let go, he found his way to Finland and applied for asylum there. Later the same year, he became involved with a Finnish woman and moved in to live together with her. After two and half years, he was deported to Greece, detained there and then let out without any possessions, and he was ordered to leave the EU. With his parents' help, he got back to Kurdistan, depressed and suicidal. He worked in Turkey for two years, to return again, and then worked in the minefields in the area bordering Iran.

HANO

Hano (see Figure 2) was born in 1985, and he started working with his father on the family farm at the age of 12. In his twenties, he encountered a severe "social problem" that involved a powerful family in the region. He was, however, not willing to unfold the details of this problem. He received death threats and with the help of his father and brother left the country. He travelled via Turkey, Greece

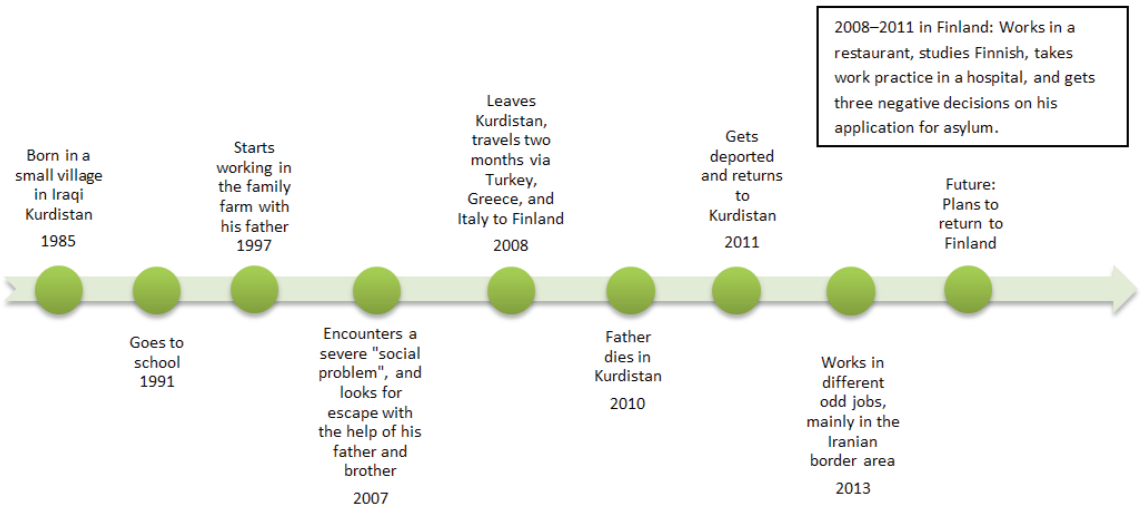

Figure 2. Hano's life story

and Italy to Finland, where he applied for asylum. Hano had relatives living in Finland and soon started working in their restaurant. He also took integration courses and did practical training in a geriatric hospital. While in Finland, his father died suddenly. After three years, he was deported back to Iraq. He was told that he would be flown to Erbil in Kurdistan but found himself in Baghdad instead, a city where he had never been before.[6] After returning to Kurdistan, he has been working in different casual and unqualified jobs, mainly in the Iranian border area.

Constructing inclusion and exclusion in Baban's and Hano's life stories

The constructions of the inclusion–exclusion continuum in the life stories of the two returnees fall under seven thematic areas, which are almost entirely shared by the participants. The themes distinguished were as follows: 1) family and relatives; 2) friends; 3) romantic involvement; 4) others in a similar situation; 5) own efforts; 6) host society and 7) active exclusion. Over the following paragraphs, each theme is given in a more detailed description.

For the sake of stableness and security in the participants' lives, the social networks provided by **family and relatives** appeared indispensable for the narrators. Family and relatives represented a close-knit web, always appearing welcoming, however much pain and anxiety the biographers' transitions may have caused them. Family helped Baban and Hano when they most needed them, and there was no one else to turn to. Hano explained how his "father thought it's better to be away than dead, and gave [him] money to go away", and similar characteristics apply also to Baban's experiences when he left Kurdistan. In addition, on their way back, the family was greatly needed. Deported to Greece, left without any money and with an ultimatum to leave the country, Baban slept in the parks until he managed to borrow a mobile phone so that he could call his parents and ask for money to travel back. "I somehow I could reach, so phone, by phone Kurdistan, and they found a way to send me some money to get back to Kurdistan". Both men disclosed their anguish and regret over the sorrow and distress they caused in the family. Baban explained that "I knew that mother worried a lot about me ... my mum just cried, and she was trying to get that money for me". The most tragic moment in Hano's transnational family life was the death of his father, unexpected and sudden, and deemed suspicious. He felt far away but connected to his family in a situation where he said he should have been present. "I always tried to call my mum but she was truly, she always just cried and couldn't do anything, of course I knew how sad she was always, (sighs) it is not easy". After their return, the family was described as a natural support for both. Baban said that "of course I went to my parents", and Hano explained how "my sister and brother came, they all came, and I forgot everything, we visited my father's grave together".

Friends were another point of inclusion, almost as important as family, even though the relationships were also seen to cause contradictory feelings. Both returnees described their relationships with a best friend. The return was a crucial point in the friendships that had endured the years apart. Upon his return, Baban's best friend Jamal proved to be invaluable. He helped Baban financially and to find work but also stood by him during the turmoil following return, marked by depression, drinking problems and attempted suicides. Also, Hano's best friend Saman remained by his side through the different transitions. After the return, however, there was a change: they did not meet as often as before.

At the same time, relationships with friends and acquaintances eventually became more complicated than perhaps could be foreseen. Hano described that he was welcomed back by his friends and they were glad to see him "but they always asked what happened there, why aren't you going back, and it was difficult ... not the same as before". Baban's narrative is demonstrative of the change that took place, impacting his belonging and position. "When I came back I had that feeling I am not belong to them anymore because they had better life, they got married, nice car, nice house, money and as you know, I hadn't, ... for them it's a little bit funny, they say so". According to his account, he was not close to his friends any more and felt that they were unsympathetic towards his experiences, even ridiculing his misfortune.

Romantic involvement has been the most important manifestation of inclusion for Baban, both in Kurdistan and in Finland but, with the abrupt endings of the affairs, also the site for active

exclusion (explained below). The first affair was life-changing for a young man but with sad consequences. The second one, in Finland, made Baban believe in the beginning of a new life: "I was thinking this time will not happen something like last time, I'm somewhere else". As it happened, this relationship also suffered from an unexpected separation, this time through the actions of the authorities.

Others in a similar situation provided the biographers with information and company. Even though the companions changed en route, both narrators were included in a clandestine "community", where relationships were established and various services produced for people crossing borders irregularly. In exchange for money, both men were trafficked between different countries, received falsified documents and carried out secret truck drives within the EU. Baban told that "in Greece quite everybody know where you could find the trafficker because they have a kind of own space, they spend time there and people can go there". Another "grouping" Baban came to belong to was those fingerprinted in Greece and seeking asylum in Finland. They shared information to help reach their goal: to be able to stay in the new country. Deported back to Kurdistan, Hano was in the company of others with a similar fate, but according to his account, they were "invisible" to each other because in those situations "you can't see anything, you're not there". Particularly during the journeys, the biographers' relationships appeared ephemeral by nature, defined by the shared experience of acute affinity within a small group. Participation in these groups was, nevertheless, also cautious and complicated by issues of trust in travelling companions and traffickers. At the same time, Hano and Baban felt that they were left at the margins of the world bustling around them.

Both participants also discussed their **own efforts** and (attempts at) agency. At first, Baban worked for what he calls "connections", and later on when living together with his girlfriend, he was aiming at a "normal" life. "I tried to build a family and have work". Finding work was, however, very difficult. "We [Baban and his girlfriend] were to [went to] many centres and offices to get some job, but I hadn't any permit stay [residence permit], that's why I couldn't get a job". Back in Kurdistan, Baban's efforts had been directed at working and collecting money. His aim, however, was not to be (re)included in the local society but to get back to Finland. He said that he took up the dangerous job of minesweeping in the border area next to Iran because it is particularly well paid and it is possible to work long hours.

Hano's own efforts contributed to his inclusion in the Finnish society in various ways. He started working in the relatives' restaurant – and paying taxes – as well as learning the language immediately after moving to his relatives' place. He was an active learner in every situation but liked it even better when he started taking classes. According to his account, learning the local language facilitated his other endeavours in the new life he was living. He was inspired by the educational opportunities offered in Finland, something he did not have access to in Kurdistan. Hano described himself as "hard-working" and "peaceful" and being "always on time", all qualities appreciated in Finnish working life. In an elaborate narrative, he proudly explained how he was awarded a stipend (a prize for doing well at school): the first foreign-born student to receive it. Importantly, he received it in his own right. He wanted to become a practical nurse and work with elderly people. Hano's aspirations towards his new life communicate his idea of being included: working towards being an ordinary, supportive member of society.

Some aspects of the **Finnish host society** were assessed inclusive by the biographers. Both men made friends and built social networks in Finland, even though Baban explained that "in Finland I had more girls as friends as men because men are somehow ... a bit rasistic or they don't wanna have contact with the men". Nevertheless, both narrators looked longingly back to Finland; the sensory impression in their narratives draws a vivid image of belonging. Baban says: "I would like to go to [town N] and go to the harbour there, smoke a cigarette, and just see the people around me and speak Finnish, I miss that". An open and social person, Hano got to know people wherever he was. He recounts regularly visiting a cafeteria where he enjoyed the company of older, "really good" people, and he remembers "going past bakery S, there was the aroma of fresh bread, we went in to get some coffee and bread, it was wonderful".

Furthermore, as stated by the Finnish policies and practices regarding asylum seeking, the biographers received, for instance, an integration package with educational opportunities and help with accommodation and basic income. Baban only took a three-month course in Finnish, but Hano used all the possibilities offered to him, including the practical training in a workplace. In addition, he frequently mentioned an important structural factor for him: the way Finnish working life is organized. He appreciated the fact that working hours, days off and salaries are written down in work contracts and the employers actually adhere to the contracts.

The most prominent experiences of **active exclusion** (Sen 2000:14-15, see also Skoda & Nielsen 2013: 2) in the narrators' lives involve agents in the position of power. For Baban, they are related to his abruptly and even violently ended romantic relationships and to the actions of authorities in Europe. Baban was at first reluctant to tell what happened in Kurdistan before he left and referred to the incident as a "social problem". Later on, when getting back to the topic, he was willing to share his story. "I was with a girl, in a relationship here. I tried to, we tried to get married but her family, it didn't allow it. Then she got pregnant, her family tried to kill me. In Islamic country, it's not allowed, not get married and be pregnant. They aborted the baby, and they were really hard to her for a long time, then after they forced her to get married with some other man. Abortion, that was when I was in Finland". Under community pressure, Baban left Kurdistan, and consequently, as narrated by him, he was excluded from his significant others, the community and finally, his country by powerful forces who decided on his behalf.

The second serious relationship came to a sudden halt too. Baban had already received two negative decisions on his application for asylum, but he still seemed fairly confident of getting a positive one. His situation was uncertain all the time he stayed in Finland, with little communication with the authorities. At a given moment, he was called to report weekly at the police station, "to give his signature". On one of those days, there were "three police waiting for me, they just caught me". Baban's girlfriend was with him at the police station and accompanied him during the moment. "My girlfriend freaked out. The most difficult thing was that my girlfriend started to cry and shout, that I couldn't handle". During the days in police custody, Baban was not allowed to see her or talk to her.

According to Baban's account, the authorities assisted him with his application for asylum at the beginning of its processing. He also received legal aid in Finland. In other cases, when entering and leaving Europe, he has been an "illegal" (Khosravi 2010b), regarded as a criminal – but he did not feel that he was one. "It's looked like that I am a really big kind of big terrorist guy". To cut a long story short, he was captured first in Greece, detained, fingerprinted and told to leave the country within twenty days. During the deportation process in Finland, he was detained for a few days and under the Dublin Regulation flown back to Greece, where once again he was arrested

for seventeen days, then let out without any money or assistance and ordered to leave the country (and Europe).

There are some details in Baban's story that raise questions concerning EU and Finnish practices regarding asylum seeking and deportation. While in Greece for the first time, he claims that he was only registered and ordered to leave the country. He also gives a harsh picture of the Finnish system to ensure a "voluntary" return. In Baban's words: "They forced me to sign the paper that I am going by myself back, I decide myself to go back. They told me we'll send you anyway back but it would be better to sign that paper and then you can once again come back here, there was two police and my lawyer". According to his narrative, removal from Greece deprived Baban of everything, even human dignity. "Around five in the morning two polices came to bring [me] to the airport. Two of them Greece police were ready for me and they put me to jail there. There was also one guy from Africa in the same room ... I hadn't any money, I just, they just let me out, I was in the street. I don't have money for place sleeping, I sleep in the park, I don't have five euro to buy cigarette". According to Baban, Greek authorities neither offered help to him in the situation nor informed him of assisted voluntary return. Rather, he emphasizes how alone and powerless he was left by the authorities in Greece.

Looking at Hano's life story, there have been two important phases characterized by active exclusion. One of them resulted in action and the other in complete lack of agency. First, Hano was excluded from his original community. Owing to an unspecified "social problem" in his village community, he was unable to continue living there, up against a powerful family that could threaten him and his family and deprive him of work and living opportunities. "[During the time I was in Finland] there was always some trouble, they harassed my mother, and some of them harassed my brother and sister ... it is like that, we cannot do anything [very quiet], this is our culture ... it was a large group, a big family, lots of relatives, really big in Iraq, ask anybody and they know them. They have a lot of money and a lot of power, they have married so, they are in the towns Z and X, they own all the shops". His reaction was to take action, i.e. to flee and start working for a new life.

After the third negative decision on his asylum application, Hano was in detention and resigned to his fate to be deported back to Kurdistan. He felt he had lost all agencies over this matter and had no influence over his destiny. He could not contact anybody and was taken by a police van to the airport, put into a plane and flown back – but "back" to Baghdad, a place where he had never been before. This action taken by the police was preceded by years of uncertainty; negative decisions were given, appeals made and no one could tell how long the process would take. Hano describes how there were so-called "facts" being circulated among asylum seekers, giving unsubstantial rise to false hopes. An air of uncertainty followed him, even after two years back in Kurdistan. He still did not know why he was deported. He could not understand the decision or its justification. In his argumentation, he repeatedly tried to figure out what it was that he did wrong. The whole episode culminated in the false information about the arrival airport. In his narrative, he depicts how frightened he was to be in Baghdad. He also felt he was lied to and sent back on a false pretence: "Look, I was in town N at the police station to sign my paper, they said 'wait a minute', I waited for five minutes, I think, he was writing something or calling or something, I don't know, right away my heart started [shows how the heart pounds], this is not a normal thing, it's not like it's been. A policeman came and said 'go', I asked why, he told me not to ask anything, just go, he locked the door and I was alone there. Then I knew. He said 'you have to go back now', I asked why, he said 'just because', I said 'please, tell me', he said 'I don't know, this is the law in Finland'... why don't they believe me in Finland, because I know the police in Finland is sometimes better than here ... why did they lie".

In summary, the analysis of the two life stories illustrates the most prominent aspects regarding the dynamic continuum between inclusion and exclusion in the multiple locations through the different transitions in the returnees' lives. Establishing and maintaining social contacts, belonging to various networks and being able to decide and act are primary factors that help us understand how the narrators relate to the continuum. The participants construct narratives illustrating several viewpoints or positions regarding participation, agency and dependency on outside actors and networks.

Conclusion

The results of this study highlight the individual and unpredictable paths that asylum seekers sometimes experience and contribute to our understanding of the dynamic continuum between social inclusion and exclusion in the context of asylum seekers' migration process. In a context where structural issues, i.e. national and higher-level policies are constantly regulating human agency, the individual viewpoint is important to consider too. For example, in the cases of Hano and Baban, there seems to be a discrepancy between how the officials in Finland and the participants themselves understood their position. Unlike the officials in Finland – whose negative decisions regarding Baban and Hano's refugee status serves as proof of their view – the two participants of this study saw themselves as refugees and continued to do so after their return. The slow processing of the application procedure did not improve their situation: they had no control over the process, and the perceived lack of communication made them unaware of what was actually happening.

The tension between social inclusion and exclusion appears in the biographers' life stories as intertwining and complementary experiences. This is best characterized by unanticipated turns from inclusive practices into active exclusion. Owing to the dramatic nature of the narrators' experiences, inclusive and exclusive phases take sudden turns in the life courses depicted. There is evidence of various structural factors connected to the participants' experiences of inclusion and exclusion, as is indicated by the concept of "inclusive exclusion" (Khosravi 2010a; 2007). These are closely linked to the position that the migrants occupy in the society. As asylum seekers, both narrators received inclusive measures that were meant to aid them to settle in into the Finnish society and afford opportunities that would enhance their agency. Owing to the deportation decision, their position changed abruptly, leaving them without the possibility of controlling their lives. The threshold position (Khosravi 2007) offered the narrators glimpses of what might have been possible, albeit not within their reach.

Both Baban and Hano felt that they were deprived of something essential for them in their region of origin, Kurdistan, which they described in extremely static terms. Baban ended up outside the community and without the relationship he aspired, and Hano ended up without opportunities to participate, specifically with no access to other than basic education. In Finland, they felt that they were able to improve their lives or at least begin the process. Along with the shock of the return, according to their narratives, they became failures in the eyes of their compatriots and felt that they had not gained any additional value from the experience in Finland. Back in Kurdistan, their lives seemed to have been on hold while others had moved on. Their "social capital, i.e. reputation, connections of the individual

returnee and his kinship networks" (Hautaniemi, Juntunen & Sato 2013: 104) supported their return only marginally.

The goal of immigration has often to do with improving the life situation of oneself and one's family. Discourses on success are an integral part of migrant stories. Deportation commonly denotes failure (Coutin 2015; Drotbohm 2015; Schuster & Majidi 2015). Against this backdrop, the reactions Baban and Hano faced upon returning to their home could be anticipated. While people in their earlier social networks had moved on with their lives, the returnees experienced a kind of a double exclusion, being cast out of the European host society and not being welcome at home either. This rejection can be seen as a social stigma that can leave an individual in a limbo between inclusion and exclusion. Both are planning to remigrate if they can find a way to do so.

After attempted suicides, excessive drinking, and fleeing to Turkey, Baban chose not to get involved so much; dangerous work and long working hours kept him apart from the community pressures. Similarly, Hano ended up being always on standby for work to take him away. The border area that both returnees occupied as their work environment creates a powerful image of their positions in the society and respective communities. Choosing a strategy of seclusion suggests a conscious need to keep a distance from the "home" community. It can be a move that allows individuals to protect themselves from further adversities and to be the masters of their own destinies, to take control where otherwise there is little or no choice.

With the growing emphasis on restricted entries, strict asylum policies and so-called voluntary returns, the EU countries, among others, must be aware that their "get rid of" (Harvey 2006: 94) policies heavily impact individual lives. Return may seem like a simple solution for those powers but not for the individual deportees themselves. The long period of time waiting in limbo-like conditions can leave a severe mark on social relationships and their general outlook on life. This study informs us of the experiences in two individual lives and allows us to understand how complicated, contradictory and marked the negotiations around inclusion are; it also humanizes those represented as "illegals", whose entries are denied.

Sirpa Korhonen (MA) is a doctoral student in Intercultural Communication at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Her areas of interest include studies on irregular migration, especially issues related to return, and biographical-narrative methods.

Marko Siitonen (PhD) is an associate professor in Intercultural and Digital Communication at the Department of Language and Communication Studies, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. In his research, he looks at how both existing and emerging cultural practices are negotiated in the changing world.

Notes

1. Wilding (2009) critically discusses the fixed representations and attributions regarding refugees, referring to Malkk's (1996: 386) view of "standardizing discursive and representational forms (or … tendencies)".
2. Of the three "durable solutions" (=integration in the country of first asylum, resettlement in a third country, return to the homeland; UNHCR), "repatriation has become the most desirable durable solution" since the end of the Cold War (Van Hear 2006: 10).
3. Or Southern Kurdistan.
4. The asylum seeking procedure in Finland follows the Alien's Act (301/2004). Using Hano and Baban as our examples, upon entering Finland, they immediately informed the police (alternatively: border control) of their application. After this step, the authorities registered them as asylum seekers, took fingerprints and checked necessary registers, for instance for being registered elsewhere in the EU (Dublin Regulation), as Baban was in Greece. Waiting for the asylum interview, they were placed in a reception centre. In due course, the interview was organised. First, their identity and travel route were established to decide if the application could be processed in Finland, and second, detailed reasons and evidence to support the asylum seeking were collected. The Finnish Immigration Services processed the application. Meanwhile, they were allowed to move freely in Finland and after 3 to 6 months stay in the country were in paid employment. However, they were not registered in the Finnish Population Information System and hence could not receive a personal identity code.
   A positive decision grants the person seeking asylum a residence permit card and entitlement to a refugee travel document or an alien's passport and municipal placement. Hano and Baban both received a negative decision. According to the law, they were to be advised of the assistance for a voluntary return. They chose to appeal against the decision to the administrative court. A further appeal against the decision of the administrative court was then lodged to the supreme administrative court, after the supreme administrative court granted leave to appeal. A final negative decision resulted in an obligation to report and deportation, which were soon carried out.
5. The interpreter originally came from the Sulaymaniyah area. He accompanied the first author to Kurdistan from Finland, where he currently lives.
6. Hautaniemi, Juntunen & Sato (2013: 97) maintained that because of the difficulties in deportations to Erbil, Baghdad became the point of destination.

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