JYX JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.

Author(s): Vehkalahti, Kaisa; Ristaniemi, Helena

Title: Places of Belonging, Places of Detachment : Belonging and Historical Consciousness in Narratives of Rural Finnish Girls

Year: 2022

Version: Accepted version (Final draft)

Copyright: © Bristol University Press 2022

Rights: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Rights url: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Please cite the original version:

Vehkalahti, K., & Ristaniemi, H. (2022). Places of Belonging, Places of Detachment : Belonging and Historical Consciousness in Narratives of Rural Finnish Girls. In D. Farrugia, & S. Ravn (Eds.), Youth Beyond the City : Thinking from the Margins (pp. 195-214). Bristol University Press. https://doi.org/10.51952/9781529212037.ch010

10

Places of Belonging, Places of Detachment: Belonging and Historical Consciousness in Narratives of Rural Finnish Girls

Kaisa Vehkalahti and Helena Ristaniemi

Introduction

The depopulation of rural areas has been a long-standing phenomenon in Northern Scandinavia, including Finland, where school closures and the centralization of services have challenged the lives of young people (Karlsen Bæck and Paulgaard, 2012; Paulgaard, 2015; Armila et al, 2018; Öhrn and Beach, 2019). Out-migration concerns particularly young women from sparsely populated rural areas. The 'rural exodus' of young women – to borrow the term used by Swedish researcher Mats Johansson (2016) – can be detected particularly among people aged 18–29, which points at close connections between migration and education as well as movement to more female-friendly labour markets. In the media, the out-migration of young women is often labelled as a straightforward threat to the future of rural communities and lifestyles (Käyhkö, 2017; Sireni et al, 2017, p 31).

While recognizing that mobility is a necessity for many rural young women (see Corbett, 2007; Farrugia, 2016) to pursue education or work opportunities at some point in their lives, in this chapter we hope to pay attention to some other elements involved in the processes of building a sense of belonging – or not belonging – in rural places. We agree with those youth researchers who have underlined the importance of seeking more holistic perspectives that allow for a deeper analysis of the complexities that characterize the experiences of rural young people in various non-urban locations (Corbett, 2007; Cuervo and Wyn, 2012, 2017; Farrugia, 2014).

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

Growing roots in the local community is often interpreted as a hindrance to social progress. However, as this chapter demonstrates, questions revolving around belonging are far from straightforward. Young people may express strong belonging in their rural home area or local culture while also recognizing its social problems and appreciating the benefits of city life. In recent years, more attention has been given to rural young people's positive identification with their home places (for example Corbett, 2013; Stockdale and Haartsen, 2018; Morse and Mudgett, 2018; Tuuva-Hongisto, 2018; Rönnlund, 2019).

Methodologically, this chapter represents sociologically informed cultural history. Our focus on the concept of belonging relies on the theorizations of Cuervo and Wyn (2012, 2017) and Wyn et al (2019), who have emphasized that belonging is a continuous and relational process. We seek to contribute to the ongoing discussion about rural belonging by explicitly considering temporality. We ask how young people's temporal orientation in relation to local culture and history contributes to their commitment to rural places. Temporal elements involved in identity and placemaking are conceptualized in terms of historical consciousness (Rüsen, 2004). We approach historical consciousness as intertwined with the processes of belonging. We explore how the immanence of the past, family ties, traditions, nature and community co-construct the feeling of belonging to a place. Here, historical consciousness is not understood as referring to past history only – or even primarily – but rather it is understood more widely as an orientation process, of placing one's life in a continuum between the past, present and future.

Our analysis draws on qualitative longitudinal data from 21 girls, aged 16–19, from two sparsely populated regions, one in Central Finland and the other in the Northern Finnish Sámi homeland.[1] As a concept, rurality is rather elusive (Cloke, 2006; Cuervo and Wyn, 2012), defined differently in different countries when referring to non-urban areas. In comparison to other parts of Europe, Finland often appears as an exceptionally rural country. According to the OECD (2008, p 16) standards, Finland was among the five most rural OECD countries in 2008 with regard both to the proportion of rural areas (89 per cent) and the population. Compared to other European countries, industrialization and urbanization began late in Finland, but the development has been fast. Depopulation has particularly affected the most sparsely populated rural areas. Historical links between rurality and agriculture have blurred with the decline in the importance of agricultural production. Today only 3 per cent of the Finnish labour force is employed in agriculture and forestry, with the majority of people living in areas defined as rural being employed in other fields, such as in the service sector (Sireni et al, 2017, pp 14–17). The rural territory is heterogeneous, which is reflected in our study. It focuses on two regions that can both be categorized as sparsely populated, but are also quite different in in terms of

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

nature, culture, economic and social structure, and history. The Sámi people are the only indigenous group in the European Union, which makes the second site of this research – the Finnish Sámi homeland – special, particularly in relation to questions concerning belonging and historical consciousness. Our study includes girls with various backgrounds, both indigenous and non-indigenous.

Place, belonging and historical consciousness

Our analysis builds on the growing literature of spatialized youth studies that have highlighted the importance of place in understanding young people's lives (for example Cuervo and Wyn, 2012, 2017; Farrugia, 2014; Sørensen and Pless, 2017; Habib and Ward, 2019; Juvonen and Romakkaniemi, 2019). In this chapter, we approach place as constructed through social relations (Massey, 1994), and we understand that feelings about place, like attachment or alienation, are shaped profoundly by time and are subject to change (Tuan, 1997 [1977]). As Habib and Ward (2019, p 1) summarized, belonging is infused with individual and collective histories and tied closely to the social milieu that young people experience daily. Further, focus on place as a meaningful site turns aside the power-laden comparisons between rural and urban and allows us to view the rural as a place of attachment and not only as a place that is lacking something (Cuervo and Wyn, 2017, pp 222, 230). Perspectives grounded in indigenous studies have further alerted us to the complexity and sensitivity of questions related to belonging in a place. In the context of the Sámi, the land is considered a place that carries with it essential elements of the culture and community (Valkonen and Valkonen, 2019, p 17). Even if we do not apply a new materialist stance in this chapter, we do recognize that belonging is an assemblage of both human and non-human entities (see Wyn and Cuervo, 2019).

Our understanding of the concept of belonging relies on the theorizations of Cuervo and Wyn (2012, 2017; see also Wyn et al, 2019), who approached belonging as a continuous and relational process. Drawing on Bell (1999) and Duff (2010), they emphasized the performative nature of belonging, showing how belonging is built through the repetition of mundane everyday practices that construct deep affective experiences of place (Cuervo and Wyn, 2017, p 228). People and social relations constitute another element of belonging that is central to our analysis. Belonging implies connectedness with others, such as family, kinship, local or ethnic communities, or national identities (for example Antonsich, 2010). As suggested in previous studies both internationally and in Finland, family and relatives play an important role in the organization of the everyday lives of rural young people, who are often seen as more dependent on their families compared to their urban counterparts due to long distances, lack of public transport and the

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

unavailability of services. This dependency may also translate into warm mutual relationships with parents and siblings (Cuervo and Wyn, 2017, p 221; Käyhkö, 2017; Armila et al, 2018, pp 1207, 1211; Tuuva-Hongisto, 2018). Similarly, Nystad et al (2017) emphasized the importance of families and kinship in the construction of Sámi identity. Interaction with family, friends and community members creates a sense of belonging in the Sámi community that often extends across regional and national boundaries. It also influences the Sámi people's expectations and goals.

As Zanazanian and Nordgren (2019) stated, people's understanding of the past and temporality strongly impact their ability to navigate the world and to orient themselves. However, more precise definition and operationalization of this connection has been challenging. Historical consciousness has been one of the most productive approaches. Theoretically, its origins lay in German philosophy and the critical perspective of the Frankfurt school (Ahonen, 1998). As a concept, historical consciousness does not refer to what people know about the past as such but directs attention to how the past is perceived in the present day and how people view temporal developments. More importantly, it encompasses the role that historical orientation has in shaping our future expectations (Ahonen, 1998, p 26; Clark and Peck, 2019). Our approach is inspired by German philosopher Jörn Rüsen's (2004) theory of historical consciousness as a nexus that ties the past and the present in a way that has future implications.

This concept has been widely used with both broader and more narrow implementations (Körber, 2016). The discussion has been dominated by educational research, where the term has been utilized particularly for didactic purposes in history education and curriculum studies (for example Zanazanian and Nordgren, 2019; Lévesque and Croteau, 2020). Broader approaches have explored everyday uses of history and connections between collective history cultures and individual meaning making (see Körber, 2016; Clark and Peck, 2019; Zanazanian and Nordgren, 2019). Rantala (2012) analysed how children perceive history and emphasized that their understanding of history is shaped strongly by both narrated memories from older generations and the material memory culture.

Moving beyond the pedagogic uses of the term, we are consciously broadening the limits of historical consciousness as an analytical tool in order to address the intertwined processes of belonging and historical orientation. With this concept, we refer to a sense of temporality and cross-generational connectedness to different communities and places as well as to young people's orientation in time. By combining this approach to the performative understanding of belonging (Cuervo and Wyn, 2017), we seek to explore those subtle everyday practices that are often unconscious and remain implicit in interviews. For example, when asked directly about the role of local and family traditions or history in their lives, some young people may be puzzled

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

by the inquiries, answering that they have no particular traditions. However, the same young people may produce rich accounts about how their family spends time together in nature or how their educational choices rely on long-standing networks and traditions in the family.

Finally, we are committed to relational and responsible indigenous ethical approaches throughout the entire research process (Smith, 1999; Kuokkanen, 2002, 2020). We build on the knowledge of Sámi researchers for grounding, and their theorizations are essential for us as bridgebuilders from outside the community (Kuokkanen, 2002, p 251; Francett-Hermes and Pennanen, 2019; TENK, 2019, p 50). We are also aware that the past can be interpreted differently, and it is not our intention to compare but rather to discuss the different ways of perceiving cross-generational belonging among young people.

Research sites, data and analysis

Our analysis draws on an ongoing qualitative longitudinal study involving 21 girls from two sparsely populated regions. The participants were contacted through their schools at the age of 15 or 16, during their last grades (eighth or ninth grade) of compulsory school. In Central Finland we contacted nine girls during the school year 2015–2016,[2] and in the Sámi homeland 12 girls during the school year 2018–2019. In Central Finland participants were recruited from one rural municipality, but in the Sámi homeland from several small communities due to both ethical and methodological research choices. We were particularly interested in the experiences of girls living in the sparsely populated areas, in which communities are very small, without compromising their identities.[3]

Our Central Finnish research site witnessed a wave of out-migration after the 1960s. It is a small rural municipality with less than 5,000 inhabitants, located more than 100km from the provincial centre. Agriculture and forestry constitute a significant share (20 per cent) of the local labour market, which corresponds exactly to the national median for sparsely populated rural areas. Agriculture in this region typically refers to smallholding dairy farms. Fathers of the girls included in this study were typically employed in the forest industry and logistics, while mothers worked in the service sector, which constitutes the most common source of employment in the region. The unemployment rate is a few percentage points above the national rate. The population is both socially and ethnically homogeneous. The municipality consists of several rural villages, from which services like schools have gradually withdrawn to the town centre. There is an upper secondary school in the municipality, but no vocational schools. Most young people who choose vocational education must move to new towns after their compulsory education ends at the age of 16. Of the nine girls

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

included in this study, five continued their studies in their hometown's upper secondary school. Three moved to other locations for vocational studies, and one commuted to another town from the home municipality (see also Vehkalahti and Aapola-Kari, 2021; Vehkalahti et al, 2021).

The Finnish Sámi homeland consists of the northernmost parts of Finland – Eanodat, Ohcejohka and Aanaar – and the northernmost part of Soađegilli – Vuocchu, where 'the Sámi have self-regulation concerning their language and culture' (Sámediggi, 2017). The Sámi is a group of indigenous people whose transnational homeland (called Sápmi) is located in Northern Scandinavia and the Kola peninsula and divided by the borders of four different nation states: Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia (Lehtola, 2002, p 10). The colonial history of Sápmi goes back centuries, with the weight of structural and governmental actions (Nyyssönen, 2014; Lehtola, 2015; Tervaniemi and Magga, 2019). The Sámi people are not just one group but several groups with slightly different cultures, histories and languages. The Northern Sámi and two smaller minorities, the Inari Sámi and Skolt Sámi, are the three Sámi groups in Finland. Traditional livelihoods such as reindeer herding, fishing, berry picking and *duodji* (traditional handicrafts) are still considered an important part of the culture and local economy (Sámediggi, 2017). However, as in the whole of Lapland, unemployment rates in the Sámi homeland are high, which drives young people away from the north. Today approximately 10,000 Sámi people live in Finland, most of them outside the Sámi homeland.

The girls from the Sámi homeland came from different cultural and social backgrounds. Eight identified themselves as Sámi or Sámi-Finnish. Four identified themselves as Finnish but noted that their families have Sámi background. Their families' socioeconomic backgrounds varied: some had parents with a university degree, while others had parents with a low level of education or who were unemployed. A few had families who were employed at least partially in traditional livelihoods, like reindeer herding and Sámi handicrafts. Educational possibilities in the Sámi homeland are limited to three upper secondary schools and one vocational school. All 12 girls in this study either continued to or applied to upper secondary education or aimed to complete a double degree of upper secondary school combined with vocational school. While it is important to note that Sámi culture and the construction of Sámi identity are not the focus of this chapter, we wish to underline that the narratives presented by girls from the Sámi homeland were produced against this rich and, in many ways, complex historical background.

In this chapter we focus on a critical transition period in the lives of the girls: the end of comprehensive school and the start of further studies either in upper secondary or vocational schools. During our short follow-up (in Central Finland four years and in the Sámi homeland two years) they have made important choices concerning education, careers and movement

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

between rural home regions and cities offering further education. Our data consist of altogether 66 semi-structured group and individual interviews conducted in six phases with the Central Finnish girls and in three phases with the girls from the Sámi homeland. During the comprehensive school the research participants were interviewed two or three times, most often in small groups, or together with their closest friend. At the end of the ninth grade, all girls participated in a life course interview involving a lifeline drawing, in which they were asked to depict critical moments and their future goals (Thomson and Holland, 2002, pp 340–349; Worth, 2011, pp 208–409). In addition, we used photo elicitation (Clark- Ibáñez, 2007) as a method to elicit memories and stories. The participants were invited to bring photos depicting places and people important to them.[4] After continuing to vocational and upper secondary schools, the participants have been followed by annual interviews, now conducted most often as individual interviews (Vehkalahti and Aapola-Kari, 2021). Each follow-up round has involved a certain theme, but the interviews have been conducted with sensitivity to the girls' responses. It has been our priority to ensure that the participants felt comfortable and safe (see Thomson and Holland, 2002; Saldaña, 2003, p 27). This means that each interview has followed its own rhythm depending on our previous discussions and issues that were relevant to the girls' lives at the time. The participants were given every opportunity to focus on topics they wished to share with us and to withdraw from others.

While cross-sectional data may reveal the 'end result' – whether rural young women end up in cities or not – longitudinal data has the benefit of capturing the back-and-forth movement that occurs before this endpoint (see Saldaña, 2003; Holland, 2011). Themes such as the home region as a place, social relationships and girls' future orientations have been revisited in several interview rounds. For this chapter, we analysed our material by paying attention to themes related to belonging and historical consciousness. Transliterations were coded and thematized using the NVivo (QSR International) analysis program by focusing on the following themes: family and kinship, local community, friendships, gendered practices, nature (including relationships with animals as well as nature-based hobbies and activities), cultural heritage, educational and occupational orientation, and girls' general orientation on the rural–urban axis.

Findings and discussion

Based on this thematization, three positionings were established. Some of the girls expressed particularly strong attachment to their rural surroundings. In the following, we refer to this positioning as *narratives of strong belonging*. In contrast, *narratives of detachment* refer to those pointing at gradual

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

detachment from the home community, region or rural surroundings in general. Most of the girls' accounts, however, could be placed somewhere in between these binary positions. This is understandable considering that they were interviewed during a life phase that is generally characterized by the constant weighing of possible futures. In many interviews, the young women engaged in complex ponderings around the issues related to their home environments and communities, for example, cross-generational family bonds that created a sense of belonging in the community as well as alienation from other local communities or traditions observed as hostile. Hence, we named this positioning *narratives of contradicting bonds of belonging*. In the following section, key examples are chosen to exemplify the three-fold positioning of these narratives.

Narratives of contradicting bonds of belonging

> 'It has to be the tranquillity here somehow, clean nature. You can be free here. You don't need to be scared of anything here, like, there's no city racket or anything. It is safe to live here.' (Girl, 17 years old, central Finland)

When asked to describe the best qualities of their home regions, both girls from the Sámi region and those from Central Finland most commonly mentioned closeness to nature, peace and silence – here phrased in terms of safety and freedom by one of our Central Finnish participants. Hiking in the forests, fishing, hunting and rearing animals were commonly mentioned by girls from both research sites. Almost all of the girls from the Sámi homeland had a hunting licence, even if they did not hunt regularly, and except for few, they drove snowmobiles and quad bikes. Forests were described as a place where rural girls felt at home, and none of the girls presented these activities as extraordinary or masculine (see also Käyhkö, 2017, pp 12–13; Cairns, 2014, pp 480–483).

Belonging in rural nature was constructed in terms of solitude – the ability to be in peace and alone – but also in terms of social ties, as a cultural place. While girls from both research sites spent time in nature, the narratives presented by girls from the Sámi homeland involve a deeper cross-generational layer. Nature-related hobbies were perceived as part of their heritage from earlier generations. The girls described how joint trips often entailed cross-generational discussions and storytelling (cf Wilson, 2008). In these activities, place mattered; girls went fishing and hunting in the same places that their ancestors had. Old stories became meaningful when told in their place of origin. These stories were often related to older generations and ancestors, which made them meaningful for engendering historical consciousness within the family (Green, 2019).

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

In the following quotation, Anne described how she spent time in nature with her reindeer herding community. Her story highlights how the northern landscape is layered with cross-generational cultural knowledge:

> 'I have heard so many of them [traditional stories], and especially there where we have markings and where we go in the spring also. Everyone gathers there at summer, because of [the] markings, and I have heard many stories about the place. And then my mother comes from [a] different direction. All her family is from there, and I have heard some things from there also, when we have been there with the reindeer.'

Anne's family had lived in the region for generations, and her sense of belonging was deeply rooted in her family's oral histories. The quotation is an illuminating example of how the concept of space is connected to nature, and particularly cultural places, in the Sámi culture (Keskitalo, 2018, p 46). Green (2019) analysed the relationship between private and public narratives by highlighting that family stories construct continuity within the individual family while simultaneously relating to more commonly shared narratives within the community. The way Anne described the meaningfulness of oral tradition in her interviews is not only connected to her own family but more widely to the Sámi culture and understanding of family and kinship. However, connectedness to the family heritage should not be interpreted as static (Kuokkanen, 2002, p 250). Rather, interpretations of the past were implemented through the lens of the present. For the Sámi girls, belonging was not solely about the place or people but an entanglement of both, that is, narratives of belonging to the Sámi culture (Lehtola, 2002, p 87).

Nature was the basis for descriptions of strong belonging within narratives that were otherwise contradictory. After compulsory schooling, some of our participants moved to more urban surroundings for further studies. For some, this engagement with urban spaces further underlined the importance of connecting with silence and nature when they had the opportunity to spend time in their rural home surroundings. In addition, stories about animals and pets emerged as significant markers of belonging. All but one Central Finnish girl shared stories about cats, dogs or horses as important companions in their lives, while girls from the Sámi homeland additionally mentioned reindeer. Pets in particular were often considered family members who had followed the girls from childhood to youth. The notion of pets as comforting partners or substitutes for friends (Wiens et al, 2016) gained new meaning for those girls who brought their pet to the city. Here, pets represented continuum with the rural lifestyle and history that otherwise could not be experienced in everyday life. In contrast, sad and longing stories were shared by those girls who were separated from their pets upon

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

moving. Animals (especially dogs) also held an important place in the girls' future dreams, as many described their dream residential environment as a place where it was possible to keep dogs.

In the *narratives of contradicting bonds of belonging*, belonging did not necessarily imply an intention to stay in the rural home region. For many of the girls, the region did not offer possibilities in the long run. Anne, quoted earlier, left the Sámi homeland after comprehensive school. For her, better opportunities to study outweighed place attachment. This was also the case for Nora from Central Finland, who hesitated between staying and leaving. She decided to stay in her hometown for upper secondary school, but after graduating, she felt that moving was inevitable. She did not anticipate returning to her hometown, even though its importance seemed to increase after having started vocational studies elsewhere:

Nora:	It means a lot! So many young people say "I will never return [to my hometown, it's] such a bad place" and everything like that, but I like it. Somehow, I appreciate it. … And now I like [my hometown] even more, even if I didn't want to live there all my life, and will probably never move back there again. I like it anyway.
Interviewer:	When you say you will "never move back there", where does that feeling come from?
Nora:	There are no jobs [in] such a small place. There's nothing but the upper secondary school there. Like, no places to study and no proper jobs either. You can just … like work on a check-out counter. And that's it, probably. … You get a feeling that you would just get stuck there because it's so small and so on. There are no opportunities like elsewhere. I wouldn't want to move to Helsinki, it's such a huge place, but maybe to [the biggest city in the province]. There you have a lot more opportunities for everything.

Nora's description of her old hometown as a place with no future illustrates the contradictory feelings of both belonging in the home region and being pushed away from it. In addition to the lack of jobs, she mentioned high alcohol consumption by young people, something that also other young women mentioned as a rural problem in their later interviews. Hence, their stories can be interpreted as *narratives of contradicting bonds of belonging.* The narratives feature bonds of belonging in the region and its historical continuum, but not in a way that would imply a future in these regions. Instead, the girls envisioned a future in which they stayed connected with their home regions despite living elsewhere.

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

Narratives of detachment

Some narratives pointed to more decisive detachment from the rural surroundings. From the viewpoint of historical consciousness, the rural landscape and home community was described as a childhood place or even a place of memories. In the following quote, Venla described her relationship to her Central Finnish hometown after a year in vocational studies in the city. During the ninth grade, she had discussed belonging to her rural home place primarily in terms of social relations. Venla had a wide circle of friends and spent a lot of time in places where they used to hang out in the town centre, like the local gas station, and a swimming place in the summer. A year later, the place looked different:

> 'Positives [in the rural place] are the tranquility and of course the fact that my family is here, my roots and all those memories and all friends and acquaintances and such. But then again, the negatives are that you sure see that especially the young people start to melt away, gradually. … Like on a Friday night there may be no one anywhere; they are just sitting at home or something. … I'm always looking forward to coming here for the weekend, but then when I'm here, I'm like, "Why did I come here?" or like, I don't see myself here anymore. I enjoy being here so much, and this is an important place for me, but I feel that there is just nothing for me anymore. This is so withered as a place. … You start to feel like you should just have stayed there [in the city].'

Places that only a year ago could have been described as 'thick places' – to borrow the concept introduced by Duff (2010) to describe how affects and repetitive affective encounters construct meaningful places – had started to lose their significance in Venla's life. The quote encapsulates the wistfulness and melancholy of being in a place that has been important but realizing that it no longer is. The home region had increasingly become a place of the past and memories, and in a way that has no implications for her future.

Further, Venla's story is an example of how cross-generational relations may also offer a safety net for moving away. Venla's older siblings and friends already lived in the city that she moved to after comprehensive school, and her boyfriend accompanied her. In the lifeline interview conducted at the end of the ninth grade, the atmosphere of excitement and anticipation was palpable. She shrugged off the possible forthcoming challenges with ease: "My sister and brother have made it, so surely I can, too!"

The close family bonds that tied Venla to her home region also made it easy to move away. In her life, history was literally present in the form of long-standing traditions of migration. For her, detachment from the home

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

community and region was not something that had to be contemplated or justified – quite the opposite. It was presented as a naturalized step, something that everybody took for granted. Here, historical consciousness had an opposite effect compared to the previous narrative positionings.

Narratives of strong belonging

Finally, the narratives of belonging included a few, where belonging in the rural was described through multiple bonds of commitment, named here as *narratives of strong belonging*. These narratives included descriptions of feeling strongly connected to the home place and nature, which was in many cases marked by both activities in nature and the presence of long-standing family bonds, particularly traditional uses of natural resources. Belonging was also constructed in relation to close cross-generational relations and to local networks of people. Most importantly, the girls situated their future dreams in their rural surroundings and made conscious educational and occupational choices that supported their aims of staying in the region.

The Sámi language constituted an important dimension of belonging in the home region for the girls from Sámi families. Sámi language skills conflate generations and places, as language is perceived as one of the most important aspects of the culture (Virtanen and Seurujärvi-Kari, 2019, pp 8–9). This marks a profound difference in comparison to the Central Finnish girls. After finishing their comprehensive school the young Sámi people not only had to consider leaving their home places and important people, but also whether they were ready to leave their cultural and linguistic surroundings. The ability to continue their studies in the Sámi language was possible in the local upper secondary schools, which was an important factor when deciding whether to stay or not.

In the following quote, Emma pondered her future while drawing her lifeline at the end of ninth grade:

Emma:	I would like to teach [the] Sámi culture [to] my children, so perhaps I would like to live somewhere in the North. It would be easier to teach it, when you are surrounded by it. But otherwise, I'm not like, like it was so urgent for me to move back here, but it would be nice to return.
Interviewer:	So do you think it is more important for the culture than it is in terms of being able to live here?
Emma:	Yes. Although it is nice to live here, when you can move in the nature and like that. I don't believe that I would enjoy living in a city that much, although I suppose you would get used to it, if you live there long enough.

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

> But at least for now it feels like I feel more at home in a remote place like this.

Emma's lifeline included plans to attend university outside the region but also dreams of returning and establishing a family in the Sámi homeland. In these plans, historical orientation translated into cross-generational connectedness to her tight network of grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins as well as to the tradition of helping and being present in each other's lives. Transmission of cultural heritage was important for Emma, who shared an interest in *duodji* with her female relatives.

For Emma, belonging in a place meant living "somewhere North". Girls from the Sámi homeland often described their networks of friends and family transnationally. For many, Northern Norway was a more familiar place to be than Southern Finland. In their narratives of future wishes, Lapland, the Sámi homeland, and Northern Norway were often perceived in terms of 'returning home from the city life'. Geographically, the home region where the girls felt they belonged could be quite large, as their networks of kinship and friendship extended widely across the Sápmi. In the Central Finnish narratives, 'staying' referred to staying in the home community or in neighbouring small rural towns. It could also refer to a place characterized by a 'rural' lifestyle, including spacious detached houses, animals and closeness to nature (such as forests, lakes and fields).

Finally, *narratives of strong belonging* were described in terms of the traditional local uses of natural resources, which refers specifically to agriculture in Central Finland and reindeer husbandry in the Sámi homeland. Ronja from the Sámi homeland rooted her belonging strongly in her family's reindeer herding and the cultural practices and landscape surrounding it. In the ninth grade, Ronja stated that she had been raised to be a reindeer herder since childhood, and at that time she worked with reindeer daily (both in the summer and during the school year). In fact, she often prioritized the reindeer over her schoolwork. Ronja drove dozens of kilometres by snowmobile with her dog to feed and herd the reindeer and to participate in gatherings and markings.

Characteristic for Ronja was reflection on the possibilities and problems connected to herding through a cross-generational gaze. Her father's family had been engaged in reindeer herding for generations. For the photo-elicitation interview, she brought several pictures of reindeer, reindeer fences, and herself working with the reindeer. She was connected to the chain of local herders and the land through reindeer herding. In one of the interviews, she stated that she had been connected to the land since she was a baby. For her, the reindeer were not just production animals but beloved companions that she cared for and worried about their wellbeing. However, Ronja was aware that reindeer herding was both a privilege and

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

burden (Kaiser et al, 2013, p 7), as she recognized how endangered the livelihood was. She described her contradictory feelings of love and sadness in relation to the reindeer:

Interviewer:	What makes you happy right now?
Ronja:	Well, [friend's name] and other friends and those reindeers. They are like they make you – or like, you love them and get good feelings when you see them, and then again half of your feelings are anger and bitterness, and kind of sorrow. … It is strange. For I love them so much.

For narratives of strong belonging, future orientations can be interpreted as strategies of belonging, to use the concept introduced by Cuervo and Wyn (2017, p 22). These are strategies aimed at being able to stay in the home region. Having a future in rural places, where working opportunities are limited, requires career plans suitable for the rural economic structure, such as reindeer herding.

Similarly, Laura from Central Finland made an occupational choice that was based both on her lifelong attachment to animals and the agricultural labour markets available in her home region. In one of our first encounters, Laura introduced herself as a "lonely little hermit", referring perhaps to how she perceived herself as rather shy but also to her home place in one of the remote villages, where she was happy, not missing anywhere. Laura's childhood and youth had been filled with animals. Just like Ronja, who brought pictures of reindeer to the photo-elicitation interview, Laura shared pictures of horses. After her compulsory education, she chose vocational studies and further adjusted her choice of orientation so that it would provide better opportunities for employment in the region.

Rural girls sometimes expressed that they were conscious that they were "going against the grain" compared to urban expectations of youth and good life (cf Lanas et al, 2013, pp 395–396) with their choices. As Laura summarized after returning to her home region following her vocational studies: "I'm taking it easy here with my cat. Other people can do whatever they want." Girls who saw their future in their home regions did not recognize the narratives of emptiness and withering. Rather, they emphasized that they could be themselves in the home community.

While rural gender roles are not the focus of this chapter, it is important to note the gender-specific social and labour market structures the girls faced. Becoming a reindeer herder may in particular be interpreted as a conscious choice to step into a world perceived as masculine by many, or alternatively, as a means of resisting gendered cultural norms (cf Kuokkanen, 2009; Ruotsala, 2009; Kaiser, 2011, p 49). However, we argue that girls'

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

choices to stay should not be interpreted as mere adaptation to a masculine culture but conscious choices to participate in a historical continuum, to partake in local ways of life, and to find one's own way within the gendered labour market structure.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have highlighted the role of historical consciousness (understood as an orientation process of placing one's life in a continuum between the past, the present and the future) as an important co-constructing element in the process of belonging in a place. We suggest that young people's temporal orientation in relation to local culture and history plays a significant role in young people's commitment to rural communities. Multiple strands of commitment tie rural young people to their local surroundings, where the past is present in the landscape and everyday life in a myriad of ways, including in the form of long-standing cultural traditions and social networks of migration. The immanence of the past, family ties, traditions, nature and community co-constructed the sense of belonging in a place.

For the girls of our study belonging was an ongoing process of placing themselves in a cross-generational continuum that was strengthened through mundane, everyday practices. Most of the accounts represented *narratives of contradicting bonds of belonging*, as they featured both elements of belonging and non-belonging. However, a feeling of belonging did not necessarily imply a willingness to build a future in the region defined as the home place. *Narratives of detachment* refer to those narratives pointing at more definite detachment from the home community, region and rural surroundings. Within this narrative, the rural home place was typically described in terms of memories and childhood but not as a place for the future. Finally, our data included some *narratives of strong belonging*, where belonging in the rural area was described through multiple bonds of commitment: both in relation to people and to places, which were in many cases marked by the presence of long-standing family bonds and traditions, most notably traditional uses of natural resources.

It is important to recognize that the impact of historical binds is often complicated. While some historical binds – like historical relationship with natural resources – may attach the young person more closely to her local community, others – like local gender roles or social problems – may result in detachment. Moreover, these bonds were not a thing of the past but actively lived and reinforced by the girls in their everyday lives. What marked the greatest difference between the narratives of belonging was the girls' orientation in relation to the future. In narratives of strong belonging, the girls situated their futures in their rural surroundings and made strategic

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

educational and occupational choices that supported their aims of staying in the region or staying in close contact with their local culture.

The fluidity of youth is inherently present in the ways in which the girls orientated themselves both temporally and in relation to their rural home regions as places. The longitudinal approach captured these rural young girls in a life phase that is characterized by constant evaluation of possible futures as well as concrete changes regarding education, mobilities and social relations. Accordingly, the girls' narratives about their home places are also subject to change.

Notes

[1] The research has received funding from the Finnish Academy project 'Rural Generations on the Move. Cultural History of Rural Youth, 1950–2020' (no. 323105, 2019–2024) and the University of Oulu funded project 'NorFlux. Northern Rural Youth in Flux' (2018–2022).

[2] The Central Finnish girls were recruited as part of a qualitative longitudinal research programme 'Youth in Time', which involved five geographically, socially and economically different municipalities in Finland. A total of 129 young people, both boys and girls, were recruited to the programme during their last grade of comprehensive school during the 2015–2016 school year (for example Vehkalahti and Aapola-Kari, 2021; Vehkalahti et al, 2021). In Central Finland the follow-up involved both boys and girls (nine each), but only the girls are included in this analysis.

[3] Due to research ethical consideration all names used in this chapter are pseudonyms, and research sites are not revealed.

[4] Data from Central Finland consists of 37 group and individual interviews, eight lifeline drawings and eight maps of social relations, produced by nine participants, born in 2000. This data has been collected through six interview rounds between 2015 and 2019. Data from Sámi homeland consists of 29 group and individual interviews, 11 lifeline drawings and 52 photographs, produced by 12 girls, born in 2003–2004. These interviews have been implemented in three phases during years 2019–2020 and the additional materials are collected as part of the interviews. In Central Finland photographs brought by the young people to photo elicitation were not saved as part of the data. In Central Finland photo elicitation was connected to drawing of the lifeline. In Sámi homeland this took place as a follow-up interview conducted after the girls had moved to further studies.

References

Ahonen, S. (1998) *Historiaton sukupolvi? Historian vastaanotto ja historiallisen identiteetin rakentuminen 1990-luvun nuorison keskuudessa*, Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura.

Antonsich, M. (2010) 'Searching for belonging: An analytical framework', *Geography Compass*, 4(6): 644–659.

Armila, P., Käyhkö, M. and Pöysä, V. (2018) 'On the educational edges of a learning society: The Finnish hinterland as a framework of educational choices for young people', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 21(9): 1198–1215.

Bell, V. (1999) *Performativity and Belonging*, London: Sage.

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

Cairns, K. (2014) 'Both here and elsewhere: Rural girls' contradictory visions of the future', *Gender and Education*, 26(5): 477–489.
Clark, A. and Peck, Carla L. (2019) 'Historical consciousness: Theory and practice', in A. Clark and C.L. Peck (eds) *Contemplating Historical Consciousness: Notes from the Field*. New York: Berghahn Books, pp 1–16.
Clark- Ibáñez, M. (2007) 'Inner-city children in sharper focus: Sociology of childhood and photo elicitation interviews', in G.E. Stanczak (ed) *Visual Research Methods: Image, Society and Representation*, London: Sage, pp 167–196.
Cloke, P. (2006) 'Conceptualizing rurality', in P. Cloke, T. Marsden and P. Mooney (eds) *Handbook of Rural Studies*, London: Sage, pp 18–28.
Corbett, M. (2007) *Learning to Leave: The Irony of Schooling in a Coastal Community*, Halifax: Fernwood.
Corbett, M. (2013) 'I'm going to make sure I'm ready before I leave: The complexity of educational and mobility decision-making in a Canadian coastal community', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 32: 275–282.
Cuervo, H. and Wyn, J. (2012) *Young People Making it Work: Continuity and Change in Rural Places*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing.
Cuervo, H. and Wyn, J. (2017) 'A longitudinal analysis of belonging: Temporal, performative and relational practices by young people in rural Australia', *Young*, 25(3): 219–234.
Duff, C. (2010) 'On the role of affect and practice in the production of place', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28(5): 881–895.
Farrugia, D. (2014) 'Towards a spatialized youth sociology: The rural and the urban in times of change', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(3): 293–307.
Farrugia, D. (2016) 'The mobility imperative for rural youth: The structural, symbolic and nonrepresentational dimensions of rural youth mobilities', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 19(6), 836–851.
Francett-Hermes, M. and Pennanen, H. (2019) 'Relational ethics in indigenous research: A reflexive navigation of whiteness and ally positionality', *Dutkansearvvi dieđalaš áigečála*, 3(2): 125–148. Available from: http://dutkansearvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Dutkensearvi-Vol3Issue2-Francett-Hermes-Pennanen.pdf
Green, A. (2019) 'Intergenerational family memory and historical consciousness', in A. Clark and C.L. Peck (eds) *Contemplating Historical Consciousness: Notes from the Field*, New York: Berghahn, pp 200–212.
Habib, S. and Ward M.R.M. (2019). 'Introduction: Investigating youth and belonging', in S. Habib and M.R.M. Ward (eds) *Youth, Place and Theories of Belonging*, London: Routledge, pp 1–11.
Holland, J. (2011) 'Timescapes: Living a qualitative longitudinal study', *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(3): Art. 9. Available from: http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1729/3232

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

Johansson, M. (2016) 'Young women and rural exodus: Swedish experiences', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 43: 291–300.

Juvonen, T. and Romakkaniemi, M. (2019) 'Between mobility and belonging: The meanings of locality among youth in Lapland in the transition to adulthood', *Young*, 27(4): 321–335.

Kaiser, N. (2011) *Mental health problems among the Swedish reindeer-herding Sami population: In perspective of intersectionality, organisational culture and acculturation*, Umeå: Umeå University.

Kaiser, N., Ruong, T. and Salander Renberg, E. (2013) 'Experiences of being a young male Sami reindeer herder: A qualitative study in perspective of mental health', *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*, 72(1).

Karlsen Bæck, U.-D. and Paulgaard, G. (eds) (2012) *Rural Futures? Finding One's Place within Changing Labour Markets*, Tromsø: Orkana Forlag.

Käyhkö, M. (2017) '"Vähän niinku metän keskellä ja silleen." Syrjäseutu, yläkouluikäiset tytöt ja tutuksi eletty paikka', *Sukupuolentutkimus*, 30(3): 7–23.

Keskitalo, P. (2018) 'Saamelainen aika- ja paikkakäsitys pedagogisissa järjestelyissä', in P. Granö, M. Hiltunen, T. Jokela and J. Aerila (eds) *Suhteessa maailmaan: Ympäristöt oppimisen avaajina*, Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press, pp 35–52.

Körber, A. (2016) 'Translation and its discontents II: A German perspective', *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 48(4): 440–456.

Kuokkanen, R. (2002) 'Alkuperäiskansojen diskurssi ja dekolonisaatio', in S. Lakomäki and M. Savolainen (eds), *Kojootteja, Sulkapäähineitä, uraanikaivoksia. Pohjois-Amerikan intiaanien kirjallisuuksia ja kulttuureja*, Oulu: University of Oulu, pp 240–264.

Kuokkanen, R. (2009) 'Indigenous women in traditional economies: The case of Sámi reindeer herding', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 34(3): 499–504.

Kuokkanen, R. (2020) 'Reconciliation as a threat or structural change? The truth and reconciliation process and settler colonial policy making in Finland', *Human Rights Review*, 21: 293–312.

Lanas, M., Rautio, P. and Syrjälä, L. (2013) 'Beyond educating the marginals: Recognizing life in northern rural Finland', *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 57(4): 385–399.

Lehtola, V.-P. (2002) *The Sámi People: Traditions in Transition*, Inari: Kustannus-Puntsi.

Lehtola, V.-P. (2015) 'Sámi histories, colonialism, and Finland', *Arctic Anthropology*, 52(2): 22–36.

Lévesque, S. and Croteau, J.–P. (2020) *Beyond History for Historical Consciousness: Students, Narrative, and Memory*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Massey, D. (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

Morse, C.E. and Mudgett, J. (2018) 'Happy to be home: Place-based attachments, family ties, and mobility among rural stayers', *The Professional Geographer*, 70(2): 261–269.

Nystad, K., Spein, A.R., Mitkija Balto, A. and Ingstad, B. (2017) 'Ethnic identity negotiation among Sami youth living in a majority Sami community in Norway', *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*, 76(1): 1316939.

Nyyssönen, J. (2014) 'Suomalainen koululaitos ja saamelaiskysymys', in P. Keskitalo, V. Lehtola and M. Paksuniemi (eds) *Saamelaisten kansanopetuksen ja koulunkäynnin historia Suomessa*, Turku: Siirtolaisuusinstituutti, pp 63–87.

OECD (2008) *OECD Rural Policy Reviews: Finland 2008*, Helsinki: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Öhrn, E. and Beach, D. (eds) (2019) *Young People's Life and Schooling in Rural Areas*, London: Tufnell Press.

Paulgaard, G. (2015) 'Place attachment, unemployment and masculinity in the age of mobility: Young men in the high north', in S. Thidemann Faber and H. Pristed Nielsen (eds) *Remapping Gender, Place and Mobility: Global Confluences and Local Particularities in Nordic Peripheries*, Abingdon: Routledge, pp 207–220.

Rantala, J. (2012) *Lapset historiakulttuurin kuluttajina*, Helsinki: Historiallis-yhteiskuntatiedollisen kasvatuksen tutkimus- ja kehittämiskeskus.

Rönnlund, M. (2019) '"I love this place, but I won't stay": Identification with place and imagined spatial futures among youth living in rural areas in Sweden', *Young – Nordic Journal of Youth* Research, 28(2): 1–15.

Ruotsala, H. (2009) 'Is there room for women in the reindeer forest?', in P. Olsson and H. Ruotsala (eds) *Gendered Rural Spaces*, Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, pp 70–87.

Rüsen, J. (2004) 'Historical consciousness: Narrative structure, moral function and ontogenetic development', in P. Seixas (ed) *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp 63–85.

Saldaña, J. (2003) *Longitudinal Qualitative Research: Analyzing Change Through Time*, Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.

Sireni, M., Halonen, M., Hannonen, O., Hirvonen, T., Jolkkonen, A., Kahila, P., Kattilakoski, M., Kuhmonen, H.-M., Kurvinen, A., Lemponen, V., Rautiainen, S., Saukkonen, P. and Åström, C. (2017) *Maaseutukatsaus 2017*, Helsinki: Maa- ja metsätalousministeriö.

Smith, L.T. (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd edn, London: Zed Books.

Sámediggi (2017) 'Saamelaisten perinteisten elinkeinojen nykytilanne Suomessa – Biodiversiteettisopimuksen seurantaindikaattorien taustoitus'. Available from: https://www.samediggi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Perinteiset-saamelaiset-elinkeinot-2.pdf

Sørensen, N.U. and Pless, M. (2017) 'Living on the periphery of youth: Young people's narratives of youth life in rural areas', *Young*, 25(4S): 1S–17S.

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC

Stockdale, A. and Haartsen T. (2018) 'Editorial introduction: Putting rural stayers in the spotlight', *Population, Space and Place*, 24(4): 1–8.
TENK (2019) *Finnish National Board on Research Integrity 2019: Ihmistieteiden eettisen ennakkoarvioinnin ohje*. Available from: https://www.tenk.fi/sites/tenk.fi/files/Ihmistieteiden_eettisen_ennakkoarvioinnin_ohje_2019.pdf
Tervaniemi, S. and Magga, P. (2019) 'Belonging to Sápmi: Sámi conceptions of home and home region', in T.H. Eriksen, S. Valkonen and J. Valkonen (eds), *Knowing from the Indigenous North: Sámi Approaches to History, Politics and Belonging*, London: Routledge, pp 75–91.
Thomson, R. and Holland, J. (2002) 'Imagined adulthood: Resources, plans and contradictions', *Gender and Education*, 14(4): 337–350.
Tuan, Yi-Fu (1997 [1977]) *Space and Place: Perspective of Experience*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Tuuva-Hongisto, S. (2018) 'Kotona, maalla, syrjässä: Syrjäkylänuorten haaveita kotiseudulle jäämisestä', *Nuorisotutkimus*, 36(3): 23–37.
Valkonen, J. and Valkonen, S. (2019) 'On local knowledge', in T.H. Eriksen, S. Valkonen and J. Valkonen, *Knowing from the Indigenous North: Sámi Approaches to History, Politics and Belonging*, London: Routledge, pp 12–27.
Vehkalahti, K. and Aapola-Kari, S. (2021) 'Laadullinen seurantatutkimus nuorista: tutkimusasetelma, menetelmät ja aineistot', in K. Vehkalahti, P. Armila and S. Aapola-Kari (eds) *Sata nuorta – sata polkua aikuisuuteen: Laadullinen seurantatutkimus Nuoret ajassa*, Helsinki: Nuorisotutkimusverkosto, pp 25–56.
Vehkalahti, K., Armila, P. and Sivenius, A. (2021) 'Emerging adulthood in the time of pandemic: The COVID-19 crisis in the lives of rural young adults in Finland', *Young*, 29(4): 399–416.
Virtanen, P. and Seurujärvi-Kari, I. (2019) 'Introduction: Theorizing indigenous knowledge(s)', *Dutkansearvvi dieđalaš áigečála*, 3(2): 1–19.
Wiens, V., Kyngäs, H. and Pölkki, T. (2016) 'The meaning of seasonal changes, nature, and animals for adolescent girls' wellbeing in northern Finland: A qualitative descriptive study', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 11(1): 1–14.
Wilson, S. (2008) *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Black Point: Fernwood.
Worth, N. (2011) 'Evaluating life maps as a versatile method for lifecourse geographies', *Area*, 43(4): 405–412.
Wyn, J., Cuervo, H. and Cook, J. (2019) 'Expanding theoretical boundaries from youth transitions to belonging and new materiality', in S. Habib and M.R.M. Ward (eds) *Youth, Place and Theories of Belonging*, London: Routledge, pp 12–24.
Zanazanian, P. and Nordgren, K. (2019) 'Introduction', *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 51(6): 771–778.

Brought to you by University of Jyväskylä | Unauthenticated | Downloaded 10/30/23 09:28 AM UTC