



## Exploring multicultural belonging

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Viktorija L.A. Čeginskas's dissertation "Exploring Multicultural Belonging. Individuals across Cultures, Languages and Places" focuses on adult individuals in various Western societal contexts. The people she has studied were born into families of different cultural backgrounds, with parents originating from two different countries and themselves growing up in yet another country. Her aim is to develop an understanding of the multiple loyalties and bonds people possess, and of the processes of identification and bond creation by such persons.

Čeginskas listed 3 research questions:

- 1) How do multilingual, multicultural and multinational individuals construct their sense of belonging in relation to others and in what way do they perceive their belonging?
- 2) What possible constraints may they experience in the process of constructing belonging?
- 3) What particular strategies do multicultural individuals develop in order to manage their multiple attachments?

The dissertation has been published in book form by the University of Turku in the series "Turun yliopiston julkaisuja – Annales Universitatis Turkuensis" and its sub-series "Humaniora." The publication includes an introduction, which had not been published before (altogether 161 pages in length), and the four articles published earlier. The introduction and 3 of the 4 articles are in English; the other article is in Finnish. Three of the four articles are peer-reviewed, two are pub-

lished in scientific journals, and one (also meeting academic standards) appears as a book chapter.

Methodologically, Čeginskas takes a qualitative research approach and uses interviews as a main source. She has also sent a questionnaire to a larger number of possible informants, but has not used that material in the actual research, only as a preliminary preparation for it. Therefore, this is a classic study where one goes to the persons concerned and discusses with them the topics one has chosen, and then analyzes the transcribed interviews with the help of the theoretical literature and the concepts found in it.

First, I have to commend the candidate for choosing this topic. In today's world it is an extremely important and timely one. As Čeginskas writes in the introduction of her work: "in contemporary times, interaction between people from distinct cultural and linguistic backgrounds increases as a result of more varied opportunities of individual mobility and new levels of transnational economic exchange and political collaboration worldwide." The social relevance of her research is definitely a merit.

Too often, emigration and immigration are seen as a threat – in both media discussion and also scientific research. However, migration is also an opportunity for the receiving societies, and in many cases also for the sending countries – though with respect to the latter, usually with a delay. With the flow of people today, it is worth remembering this. Čeginskas's dissertation is not about migration per se, but about a topic resulting from the migration of the parents of the people studied. I found this research design extremely inspiring.

In social sciences and humanities research the paradigm change from so-called misery research to research where immigrants are seen as an opportunity is still under way, and Čeginskas's dissertation clearly belongs to the new paradigm.

The introduction is more or less an independent monograph with all the necessary components: research questions, an acknowledgement

of previous research, a theoretical discussion including the concepts used, as well as methods and sources. This is followed by an analysis of the data and finally the conclusions, where she presents her main research findings.

The introduction provides a good picture of the research as a whole even without reading the articles Čeginskas has published earlier. I especially liked the part where she looks back and more or less criticizes some of the choices she had made when writing the articles. We who do research all know that research questions change during the process, but with article-based PhD dissertations you are limited by the work you have done earlier. Čeginskas showed courage in bringing this up and discussing it in a scientific context. This is the way article-based PhDs should be written.

However, I was a little surprised that Čeginskas never used the word “ethnography” in her research. Nor did she mention ethnographic methods or reflexive ethnography. In research literature the term “ethnography” refers both to a particular form of research and to its eventual written product. Čeginskas would have been much better off with these methodological tools than some of the ones she chose. I find particularly problematic the rarely used term “extreme insider research approach.” If the candidate had adopted the term “reflexive ethnography” she would not have needed to be so apologetic in the introduction.

Čeginskas knows the theoretical discussions on cultural borderlands very well. She masters a large number of concepts, but in some cases is not very clear in defining them. A good example is Vertovec’s term “super-diversity.” This concept

would have been much more useful here were it not simply presented as a catchy word and a kind of name-dropping, but instead within a deeper exploration of the theme Vertovec introduced in his article in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*.

Consequently, Čeginskas could have been more careful in choosing and defining her main concepts, and also in using them in the analysis section. I do like the main concept of “belonging,” which is also in the title of her work. The first part of the concept, “multicultural,” I am not so keen on. The candidate could have taken a more critical approach towards this term and introduce current discussions that criticize it. In spite of this, however, I found the analysis of this study very logical as well as multifarious in that it considered different points of view.

The research material is qualitatively relevant and quantitatively sufficient. However, the research ethics should have been discussed in more detail. The study is ethically on solid ground, but research ethics are only partly discussed. For example, where the material will be archived and what was agreed with the interviewees should have been mentioned.

In sum, this work has significant informational value. The research task is defined appropriately. Also the length of the study is reasonable. The structure of the dissertation is logical and the language clear. Čeginskas has mostly demonstrated a critical attitude towards previous research, theories, methods, material, sources and the academic significance of her own work. Her research is original and independent.

*Hanna Snellman*