(Im)mobile Lives

Young Russian Women's Narratives of Work and Citizenship Insecurities in Finland

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Abstract

This article examines the interconnectedness of geographical and social mobility using the empirical case of young, highly educated Russian women's migration to Finland. My qualitative interview data shows that an insecure migrant status channels young migrant women to a precarious gendered path from au pairing to studying and working in a low-skilled sector in order to continue residence in Finland. The stories of highly educated migrant women doing domestic and low-skilled work show how geographical mobility is achieved at the cost of descending social status. The empirical discussion demonstrates that "subjects on the move" celebrated by the new mobility paradigm are, in fact, unequally mobile, and achieve mobility at a high social cost, including social downgrading and deskilling. Furthermore, structural vulnerabilities in terms of insecure migrant status create dependence on employers and produce opportunities for the exploitation of migrant labour.

KEYWORDS: Au pair, Finland, migrant labour, migration.

Introduction

This article examines how immigration controls structure the mobility of young, highly educated Russian women to Finland, channelling them to a precarious path from au pairing to studying and working in a low-skilled sector. This independent gendered path of migration is a result of young women's efforts to navigate the inflexible system of immigration controls, namely the continuous obtainment of residence permits, which are strictly connected with female migrants' ability to study, work or do domestic work. The reality presented by my research participants in their narratives of migration is a reverse image of the celebratory theories on fluid social structures, a borderless world, networks, and flows of commodities (Cas-

tells 2000; Ohmae 1990; Urry 2007). Borders and border controls are still present after actual migration, and play a concrete role in young Russian women's lives and work in Finland. By showing not only the labour conditions of young migrant women but also their extended biographical path from au pairing to studying and working, this article aims to demonstrate how longer periods of life after migration are subdued to coping with immigration controls in a new country. Focusing on the role of borders in young migrant women's lives, the article also demonstrates migrants' structural vulnerabilities in the labour market, which lead to the exploitation of labour.

By examining the precarious migrant path of an au pair-student-worker as a way of coping with immigration controls, this article contributes to the sociological discussion on mobility (e.g. Sheller & Urry 2006; Urry 2000; 2007; Uteng & Creswell 2008). The coping path of young Russian women in Finland shows that unequal access to mobility in terms of an insecure migrant status leads to social downgrading and the precarization of life. The article thus highlights the interplay between geographical and social mobility (see also Näre 2014). In the context of the growing fascination with the "society on the move" (Lash & Urry 1994, 252), my empirical case focuses on mobility-related inequalities (cf. Ohnmacht, Maksim & Bergman 2009). I also show how mobility and coping with border controls are gendered processes.

Finland has experienced a rapid increase in its ethnic diversity, with the Russian population representing 40 % (66,379 people) of all foreign-born residents (Statistics Finland 2014). At the same time, Finland witnesses an overrepresentation of migrants in the service, cleaning and construction sectors (Statistics Finland 2013) and in healthcare (Näre 2012), as well as high migrant unemployment. In addition, due to demographic changes and women's increased labour participation, there is a characteristic shortage of domestic care workers in the Finnish society, which migrant labour is expected to fill. The creation of care employment such as au pairing has been one of the policy responses to the shortage, although strictly speaking, au pairing is a cultural exchange programme rather than employment (Zechner 2010). The au pair system allows the host families to have someone from abroad look after their children and do light domestic work, while the au pair gets an opportunity to live with a foreign family and learn the language and local culture. This primarily intra-Western cultural exchange has been transformed into a path for predominantly female economic migration from post-socialist states to Western Europe, while fulfilling the demand for care and domestic work (Tkach 2012). The au pair visa, which is given for one year in Finland, is prominent for its low entry requirements, and often works as an entry point to the country[1]. Many au pairs stay after their au pair visas expire, moving to other migrant statuses (Anderson 2001). To continue staying in Finland after au pairing, a young, single, non-EU migrant

1 A potential au pair only needs to find a family in a receiving country to be eligible for a visa. He/she should also be between 17 and 30 years old, which makes au pairing a migration channel particularly for young people. Au pairs in Finland receive a monthly pocket money of at least 280 euros from their host family. They are required to participate in day-to-day family duties, mostly taking care of the host family's children, along with doing light domestic work. The time occupied in such services shall be no more than five hours per day, and the au pair should be treated as part of the host family. According to the au pair contract, the au pair should be given an opportunity to improve his/her education, in particular with regard to the foreign language, and to increase his/her cultural development (European Agreement on Au Pair Placement). Au pairs and host families can select each other; and in practice, families prefer highly educated young females speaking foreign language(s), which means that au pairs generally come from well-educated middle-class backgrounds (Bikova 2010).

may obtain a student residence permit or a work-based residence permit. These permits require proof of income, e.g. a bank statement certifying the possession of almost 7,000 euros in one's bank account in the case of a student visa, or a long-term work contract signed by the employer in the case of a work-based permit. These regulations render the crossing of national borders – while already in a country of migration – a gendered and classed process (Yuval-Davis et al. 2005).

My discussion is based on ethnographic fieldwork on Russian-speaking youth's employability in the Helsinki metropolitan area and on in-depth qualitative interviews (N=8) with young Russian women who came to Finland as au pairs and later became students and workers. These stories are part of a larger set of interviews with young Russians in Helsinki (N=45). The focus on migrant women highlights independent female migration, shifting the focus from reproducing a masculine understanding of migrant subjectivity (as criticized by Skeggs 2004, 48) towards a more differentiated understanding of migration to Finland. It emphasizes gendered structural causes of independent migration paths for men and women (Parreñas 2001, 61).

This article is organized as follows: I start with a theoretical discussion on mobility and borders which has guided my analysis. I discuss the "mobility turn" (Urry 2007) and its critiques by border and feminist scholars. I then analyse my empirical data, discuss the findings and present my conclusions.

Mobility, Borders and Gendered Subjects

My intention is to bring the empirical case of the au pair-student-worker path of young Russian women in Finland to the sociological discussion on mobility. The "mobility turn" (Urry 2007), or the "new mobility paradigm" (Sheller & Urry, 2006), has called for the establishment of a movement-driven social science and introduced new metaphors of movement, such as fluidity, networks and flows, in place of stasis, structure and social order. The new mobility paradigm argues that the "subject on the move" and mobile subjectivity should become central objects of social inquiry (Sheller & Urry 2006). Trying to establish a "sociology beyond societies" (Urry 2000), mobility scholars take deterritorialization processes as their point of departure and argue for the end of states as containers for societies (Sheller & Urry 2006). Similarly, other theories of globalization have celebrated the emergence of a new "borderless world" (Ohmae 1990) manifested through the free flow of communications, capital, corporations and consumers. In addition, the network society has been argued to replace the space of places (nation-states) with the space of flows (Castells 2000). Mobilities, understood in this sense, thus refer to this new project of the social sciences, embracing the physical movement of people and objects as well as technologies and information (Sheller & Urry 2006, 212).

Yet the discussion on mobilities is mainly centred around physical and geographical forms of mobility across space. For example, John Urry (2007) names 12 forms of international movement: asylum and refugee travel; business travel; discovery travel of students, au pairs and young people; medical travel; military mobility; post-employment travel; "trailing travel"; diaspora travel; travel of service workers; tourist travel; visiting friends and relatives; and work-related travel. Although mobility scholars draw a connection between social mobility and physical movement in creating inequalities, they do so mainly through the notion of "access" to the material or physical modes of mobility, e.g. having access to public transport, owning a mobile phone and having appropri-

ate documents (Manderscheid 2009; Urry 2007). However, the effects and social costs of geographical mobility are largely overlooked. Following the work of other migration scholars (e.g. Ahmad 2008; Anderson 2013; Könönen 2012; Näre 2013), I argue that the discussion on mobilities tends to ignore the continuing role of nation-states' borders in structuring people's social and geographical mobilities, taking an unduly celebratory tone.

The work of border scholars has also challenged the celebration of a borderless world and insisted that borders have become increasingly important, salient and dispersed in globalization (Rumford 2006). The world has become more open to the circulation of goods and capital, but more closed to the movement of human bodies, as Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson (2013) remind us. The barriers restricting mobility are not only international borders, but also sub- and supra-state borders. Among these are the borders regulating the status of migrants e.g. as students and workers (Neilson 2009). The role of borders has been pronounced in the shaping of labour markets. For instance, as extensive research has demonstrated, the continuous multiplication of control devices like visa regulations has long-term, negative effects on migrants' labour market position and job precarity, even after regularization and shifting to a more secure legal status (Ahmad 2008; Goldring & Landolt 2011; Goldring 2010; Könönen 2012; Neilson 2009). The crossing of territorial borders, e.g. coming to the EU from non-EU countries, as in the case of Russians' migration to Finland, entails the production of boundaries between individuals, i.e. boundaries of status (Rigo 2005). For example, while "welfare payments allow entitled poor to survive outside the labour market, the foreign-born have no choice but to work" (Wills et al. 2010, 26). In particular, immigration controls produce status and construct the labour force through dependence on employers not just for work but also for continued residence in the country through work-based residence permits (Anderson 2010; 2013). In terms of employment, immigration controls subject workers to a high degree of regulation, giving employers mechanisms of control that they do not have over citizens (Anderson 2010; 2013). Recent research has shown that in Finland, the employment of migrants with insecure statuses is characterized by a lack of choices, income insecurity and temporal and spatial flexibility (Könönen 2013).

Thus, research on migration raises the important question of how various forms of mobility, namely geographical, social and labour market mobility are interlinked (see also Näre 2014). Trying to establish a better life abroad, migrants often experience a discrepancy between their training and the social status of their jobs in a new country; they also achieve geographical mobility at a high social cost, including social downgrading and deskilling (Näre 2014; Parreñas 2001). The classical sociological notion of social mobility is understood as "any transition of an individual from one social position to another" (Sorokin 1959, 133). Thus, it is important to investigate further how physical movement pertains to upward and downward mobility in social space, namely the labour market.

Feminist scholars have called for greater attention to the subject of movement and shown that gender is at the core of migration (Donato et al. 2006; Levitt, DeWind, & Vertovec 2003; Nagar et al. 2002; Näre & Akhtar 2014). The ability to cross borders varies according to class, nationality, religion, "race" and gender (Yuval-Davis et al. 2005). Beverley Skeggs (2004, 48) importantly argues that the mobility paradigm tends to reproduce a "burgeoning masculine subjectivity" and describes "what exists for privileged few". Similarly, Eleonore Kofman (2013) illustrates how labour migration programmes and policies have different impacts on gendered subjects of labour. She shows how the gendered classification of know-

ledge leads to differential valuation of migrants' contributions to the economy, and whether they deserve to enter and reside in a country. Thus, immigration controls reveal the gendered nature of labour markets and the gendered construction of "skills" (Ruhs & Anderson 2010, 19). Au pairing is a case in point: migrant care work and au pairing are feminized and historically rooted in a mixture of domestic work, family control and cultural education (Stenum 2010, 24). Moreover, the ethnification of care work contributes to a white, middle-class conception of gender equality while domestic and care work are still carried out by women – except that women are now coming from abroad (Isaksen 2010). The au pair solution doesn't question men's share of care and domestic work, thus, maintaining gender imbalance.

In what follows, I demonstrate how restricted access to geographical mobility in terms of insecure migrant status affects young Russian women's mobility in social space, particularly in the labour market. The data presented below show how mobility is a "resource to which not everyone has an equal relationship", to quote Beverley Skeggs (2004, 49).

Methodology and Empirical Data

This research is based on an ongoing ethnographic study of young Russians' employment in the Helsinki metropolitan area, for which I have interviewed 45 young Russians (20–29 years old). I used multi-sited ethnographic methodology (Marcus 1995; Hannerz 2003; Falzon 2009), which means that the ethnographic field of young Russians entering the labour market was constructed through multiple sites. I entered the field by participating in various activities organized by and for Russian youth in Helsinki. My positionality as a young Russian migrant originally from Karelia who has lived in St. Petersburg, where most of my participants come from, allowed me to establish rapport (Smyth & Mitchell 2008) and develop informal, friendly relationships with the participants. I attended employment workshops organized by Russian communities, job fairs for young people organized by the city of Helsinki, and Youth Guarantee events, from August 2014 to May 2015. I also started attending career counselling for unemployed young people in May 2015. At these sites, I conducted participant observation and short ethnographic interviews (Heyl 2001), i.e. informal conversations with young people in the field. I kept a field diary where I took field notes in Russian, English and Finnish. Using multi-sited ethnography, I have followed the path of unemployed young people, tracing the settings through which they search for work. While meeting young people in these settings, I also recruited them for in-depth interviews if they wished to participate in the research. I did most of the interviews in cafés near the informants' homes or universities. The interviews lasted 80 minutes on average and were structured around young people's biographies after moving to Finland, particularly their experiences of unemployment and work.

Initially, at a workshop on finding work in Finland, I met two young Russian former au pairs who later introduced me to their friends. I then found other au pairs through other participants' contacts. While interviewing them, I was struck by the similarity of these young migrant women's paths, which they described as moving from au pairing to studying and finding work in Finland. Therefore, in this article, I focus on eight young Russian women who came to Finland through au pairing, and then became students and workers to continue their lives in Finland. All but two women earned their higher degrees in Russia before moving to Finland as au pairs. Before migration, all of them had job experience in schools, non-governmental organizations, banks or small companies.

When talking about their financial problems and the cost of living in Finland, two women said that their families were helping them financially; yet this money was not enough to pay for all their living expenses in Helsinki. They made it clear that they had no resources to support themselves other than the wages they earned from working in Helsinki. Their narratives are characterized by an insecure migrant status, which means they migrated to Finland not through family ties or ethnic remigration[2], but through the independent gendered path of an au pair-student-worker. I used thematic narrative analysis (Riessman 2008) to uncover the women's migrant trajectories, and to thematically categorize their experiences of migration and employment in Finland.

Ethnographic Stories of Young Russians' Employment in Helsinki

At the beginning of my fieldwork, while talking to young people at the observation sites, I was surprised by the differences in the experiences of migrancy and employment within the group of young Russian-speaking women. Those who migrated through ethnic remigration or family reunification never mentioned the theme of residence permits or immigration controls. This was when I understood that mobility to Finland is structured according to migrants' citizenship status, even within the ethnic group of Russian-speaking migrants in Helsinki:

> On the commuter train coming back from a workshop on finding work, Olga[3] and Alina started "bombarding" me with complicated terms describing various migrant statuses in Finland and how their work defined their residency in Finland: "First I had a student visa here – a *B status* – but when I graduated, I didn't know how to stay in Finland, as I would need a work-based residence permit. My friend told me, "Keep doing your cleaning job, so you will bring an employment contract to the police, and they will give you a permanent residence permit, an *A status*."
> (Field diary, 29 September 2014.)

As non-EU citizens, former au pairs Olga and Alina are required to renew their residence permits every year until they get a continuous residence permit (A status). After au pairing, they entered educational institutions, and after graduation, their student visas expired. To stay in Finland, they are required to have a job to get a work-based residence permit. Due to scarce time resources to find a better job, and a low chance of employment, young women continue working as cleaners to stay in Finland. Thus, while already in Finland, they still continuously experience border controls through the residence permit system that regulates their right to geographical mobility, i.e. staying in another country. This limited access to geographical mobility restricts their mobility in the labour market, including the possibility of finding a better job. Hence, besides facing difficulty in finding work, they are forced to negotiate citizenship insecurities.

The differences in narratives that I encountered in my fieldwork are a reminder of the heterogeneity of migrants (Anderson 2013, 176) and the emerging legal hierarchies (Könönen 2013) among them. Migrants who have entered via family reunification or ethnic remigration have permanent legal status and their mobility is unrestricted, hence their experiences of immigration controls and employment are different than the au pair-student-workers of my study. As Steven Vertovec (2007) has stated, various channels and statuses within

2 These types of migration to Finland give access to welfare provision – such as a three-year integration period including employment services, language courses, traineeships and social benefits – unlike migrating through au pair status.

3 All names of participants are pseudonyms.

the same ethnic groups, along with the rights and restrictions attached to them, constitute a fundamental dimension of today's patterns of super-diversity[4]. The number of migration channels and immigration statuses has expanded, each carrying specific and legally enforceable entitlements and controls: workers, students, family members, au pairs, asylum seekers and refugees. This underscores the inadequacy of an ethnicity-focused approach for understanding the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. Newcomers' experiences and opportunities are shaped by migration channels that are often related to gendered flows and regimes (Vertovec 2007, 1049). In what follows, I explore the trajectory from au pairing to studying and working as a way of coping with multiple borders, namely residence permit requirements. I first empirically illustrate how the demand for care work in Finland opens a migration channel for young females through the au pair visa. I then discuss domestic, work, and legal insecurities in Finland.

Getting Settled in Finland: From Au Pairing to Studying to Working

The stories of my female interviewees are almost identical and can be seen as a constant movement from one residence status to another, thus coping with border controls while already in the country. First, after coming to Finland as au pairs, they enter Finnish educational institutions to prolong their stay through a student visa while also working part time. Upon graduation, they are obliged to find work within six months to stay in the country. However, this was not their educational or career strategy. These young women did not necessarily want to be au pairs or students; rather, they chose these statuses because the corresponding visas provided them with the easiest entry to Finland. Initially, their move to Finland was described as a search for a "better and interesting life in Europe" with the possibility of pursuing a good career. This was how Alina justified her decision to come to Finland as an au pair:

> I noticed in the university a poster advertising an au pair programme; it said that you can live abroad for one year. I always wanted to try to live abroad: it is like in the movies, they have different lives there; everything is so beautiful, clean and interesting. All living in private houses [...] "Would I work in a bank after graduation in Russia for 300 euros? Is this a life that awaits me in the future?" I was thinking. So I decided to go to Finland, use this chance and maybe try to stay there.
> (Alina, 24, BA Economics in Russia, vocational degree in Finland.)

Alina described her poor career prospects after graduation in her hometown in contrast to an idealistic vision of life in Finland. Thus, she saw au pairing as a channel to move abroad and establish a better life. However, she faced domestic insecurities while working as an au pair:

> The family I was staying with was terrible. They were treating me as a servant and, frankly speaking, they were racists. Even though I could have gone away in a month, I stayed, as I was upset that my dream of living abroad wouldn't come true.

Because Alina's stay in Finland and her dream of living a better life here was strictly equated with her au pair residence permit, she had to bear with the family's treatment. Alina's story is surprisingly similar to the stories of other young women who used the au pair programme as a channel to come to Finland after getting a bachelor's degree in Rus-

4 Indeed, there are foreign nationals from 174 countries, in other words, nearly all countries of the world, speaking 138 different languages and mostly living in the capital area (Statistics Finland 2007; Näre 2014). That makes the Helsinki metropolitan area a "super-diverse" (Vertovec 2007) space.

sia. They all said that being an au pair was a way to stay in Finland rather than a temporary adventure of cultural exchange:

> I just wanted to move away, to go far away. There were different reasons for that. And then my friend told me that if you want to move away, there is this au pair programme. I came here and I had to stay with two children day and night while the parents were working; I was alone all the time [...] Now I have also brought my little sister here, through au pair visa too because it is harder to get here through other channels. You come here as an au pair and then you try to stay.
> (Inna, 28, BA Sociology in a country in Central Asia, vocational degree in Finland.)

Inna clearly stated that au pairing is the easiest entry to Finland compared with other channels that require a work contract or bank statement. Most of my research participants planned their strategies for staying in Finland, actively engaging with borders, i.e. immigration control, before coming to Finland. However, staying as au pairs, young women find themselves in vulnerable positions, when the host family treats them in a way that is far from "au pair" – meaning *equal* in French. Yet they cope with such treatment in order to stay in Finland and "make a dream come true", to use Alina's words. As the above quotes show, young women's access to geographical mobility is legally and physically tied to the host family that provides them with a permit. Thus, breaking their relationship with the family can lead to them having to leave the country. Temporary residence and dependence on the family works as the main mechanism for governing migrants (Stenum 2010), making them accepting of and vulnerable to "domestic insecurities" (Robyn 2004).

Although formal regulations state that an au pair should not be engaged in child care and housework for more than 30 hours a week, most of my participants described au pairing as full-time domestic and care work performed five or more times a week. Even though an au pair should be regarded as a family member, my participants were spatially segregated from the rest of the family; this emphasized their non-family status. As Olga said, her relations with the host family constituted abusive live-in employment rather than "being part of a family":

> If I bring her [the wife] a paper which states an excess in my working hours, this paper will be lost or ignored. But if I eat too many buns for breakfast, they would immediately tell me that I eat too much. Hey, I *work* in your house, by the way!
> (Olga, 29, BA Political Sciences in Russia, BA Management in Finland.)

Similar to Rhacel Salazar Parreñas' (2001, 165) findings on domestic workers, this quote shows the employers' attempts to regulate bodies of au pairs through, for example, food rationing as part of the general effort to control them. Thus, although immigration controls construct au pairing as non-work and ambiguous relations exist between employment and family labour in domestic work, my participants indeed perceive au pairing as work, in spite of it not being recognized as work in terms of status and protection. Considerable legal and physical dependence on the family/employer in terms of residence in the country makes au pairing similar to precarious migrant employment relations (Anderson 2010; Cox 2007) and migrant domestic work in particular (Anderson 2001; Näre 2014; Parreñas 2001). Hence, my research participants instrumentalized immigration controls, using the au pair residence permit as a mobility channel to Finland, in contrast to the common notions of au pairing as a "gap year" for young people, a cultural exchange or a youthful strategy for exploring life.

Continuing the Quest: Becoming a Student (Domestic) Worker

"When I first came to Finland as au pair, I had a clear goal – to study after au pairing, and maybe stay in Finland later, too", said Olga. To stay in the country after working as au pairs, my participants entered educational institutions to obtain the next residence permit based on studying. Explaining their decision to study in Finland, these young women stated that being a student is the next available status that allows them to stay in Finland: "I had to enter this [vocational educational institution] just for my residence permit", said Alina, who already has a bachelor's degree in economics from Russia. However, in contrast to the au pair visa, the study residence permit for non-EU citizens in Finland requires having almost 7,000 euros on one's bank account. Such residence permit requirements function as a border (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013) that regulates inclusion into the Finnish society. The financial visa requirement obliges the young women to start saving money while being au pairs – another economic reason for accepting domestic labour[5] and its insecurities. Others, unable to prove to the police they have sufficient funds, got a work-based permit, and the only available jobs they could take were in cleaning companies, often working in private households. Alina had to take three jobs in the summer with no days off to earn 7,000 euros, in order to extend her student-based stay in Finland. The jobs she found within a limited amount of time were cleaning, working in a Russian-based tourist company and working as a waitress in a 24-hour restaurant owned by migrants. She said, "I couldn't say no to any job as I had to get this money. Once I got the permit, I left all the jobs because it was a nightmare to work just to earn this money."

These examples illustrate how borders are dispersed throughout society (Balibar 2004; Mezzadra & Neilson 2013), particularly through residence permit requirements that are enforced when already in the country. Such borders produce particular labour regimes. To sum up, young women experience social downgrading and deskilling when their education and qualifications are hardly used at this point of their lives in Finland. These stories of coping with border controls while already in the country clearly show how young women's social mobility is affected by their migrant status and limited geographical mobility.

Brett Neilson (2009) writes about the emergence of a "student-migrant-worker" subjectivity, whose distinguishing mark lies in its crossing of legal statuses on the path to obtaining permanent residency in the target country. As shown above, the position of my participants is similar; however, gender works as a key organizing factor of migratory patterns. Young Russian women not only start their migratory path in care and domestic labour as au pairs but also continue working in domestic and private care, often for elderly people, during their studies. While many of the young male students I interviewed also work in cleaning services, young women often continue working for private households as domestic workers and carers employed through private companies.

As numerous stories of my research participants show, the formal obligations of regularizing one's legal status in Finland push young women to become available for any kind of work for the sake of continuing residence in Finland. Since young migrant women's access to mobility is restricted by the requirement to work, they get involved in

5 I use the terms labour and employment although au pairs are officially regarded not as workers but guests of the host families. Most au pairing stories in my data are no different from precarious migrant employment in general, marked by high dependence on the employer and permanent insecurity.

occupations that do not correspond to their previous training and degrees. Parreñas (2001, 150–153) points to the contradictory class mobility of domestic workers, which refers to a simultaneous decline in social status and increase in financial status. The interviewees' stories fit this definition neatly. Similarly to the migrant domestic workers in Parreñas' research, the young women I interviewed described the discrepancy between their training and education and the social status of their current jobs. The pain of such contradictory class mobility is moderated by the financial gains through higher wages for low-wage service work in Finland. These financial gains, despite a simultaneous downgrading of social status, are also the reason why these women stayed in Finland.

Despite the difficulties they face in Finland, the interviewees regard the labour markets in their home cities as even more repressive due to the low wages and high cost of living. They also believe that the foreign language skills they gained in Finland would become unused and forgotten at work in Russia. The possibility of moving to bigger cities in Russia, such as St. Petersburg and Moscow, would require networks and money. Finally, as Olga summarized, "giving up and coming back after so much time and effort put in building life in Finland would mean a failure in life".

Paradoxically, the acquisition of a degree in Finland after earning a higher degree from Russian universities facilitates the entrance to supposedly unskilled jobs. The situation is also described as the blurring of boundaries between skilled and unskilled work, as well as between categories of student and worker (Neilson 2009). Unlike young Finns, for example, who may also do low-skilled work while studying or being officially unemployed; young, highly educated migrants keep doing this work even after graduation in Finland to extend their work-based residence permits, having no access to welfare services. Thus, it is not only the lack of recognition of previous work experience and qualifications or the lack of Finnish language skills[6] that direct migrants to particular kinds of occupations and social downgrading; instead, immigration controls, too, play a central role in creating labour markets, channelling migrants to the most available statuses and jobs. In what follows, I describe in more detail the nature of employment relations in which young Russian-speaking women are involved in Helsinki.

Employment Relations

To stay in Finland after studying, one is required to get a full-time employment contract of at least one year, or a six-month visa to find employment. The need to find a job to stay in the country makes recent graduates highly dependent on employers. Such employment relations often induce employers to abuse of labour, making young women available for unsocial working hours and hyperflexibility:

> Once, my employer told me that if I don't clean the tables fast enough, they will fire me the same day: "If we don't pay you, where will you go in this country? We can easily find someone else in your place as our place is still very prestigious." They then started giving me only night shifts and they weren't doing this for Finnish girls working in the afternoon. They use the fact that you are a foreigner here; they don't do it with Finns. They say, "You will live on the street if you refuse to work as I tell you here."
> (Anna, 28, BA Philology in Russia, vocational degree in Finland.)

Anna illustrated how immigration controls provide the employers with mechanisms of control over migrant workers that they do not have over

6 However, most of my participants evaluated their Finnish skills as intermediate, and some spoke Finnish fluently.

citizens, while making migrants dependent on employers in terms of residence in the country (Anderson 2013). It is well documented that irregular migrants are recognized as particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (Ahmad 2008; De Genova 2002). However, as my data and other studies (Könönen 2012) show, regular non-EU migrants are also highly dependent on their employers, who may abuse the legal vulnerability of the migrants. Some young women mentioned that they had experienced harassment by their male employers, but the few employment alternatives made it hard for them to leave these jobs immediately. Thus, contrary to the idea of "rebordering" (Andreas 2000, 3) the state through stricter visa requirements, immigration controls should be best thought of as a mechanism for producing migrant employment paths and relations.

Similarly, Olga had to work in a cleaning company after graduation to have her work-based residence permit in Finland extended. She described her working conditions as a cleaner as follows:

> I didn't have a fixed place for work; they were sending me here and there. I had to wake up at four in the morning to go to work, then I was coming back home and maybe also working in the evening. I wasn't able to plan my day at all. But I had to accept it, as I felt that I couldn't say no to a job. Once I got a permit, I left the job.
> (Olga, 29, BA Political Sciences in Russia, BA Management in Finland.)

As Olga and other participants showed, the employment regimes of young migrants are a result of restricted access to mobility, i.e. the need to obtain residence permits, which channels them to particular occupations and employment relations. Therefore, young Russians' access to the labour market in Finland has major implications beyond employment itself, namely residence in the country and social advancement.

Conclusions

The empirical case of the young migrant women in Helsinki has demonstrated how the ability to move in the social space, i.e. to improve or lose social statuses and search for better careers, is affected by immigration controls and access to mobility across national borders. At the time of my research, young migrant women could hardly become integrated into the Finnish society and labour market at a level matching their education, previous qualifications, and work experience. My analysis points to the paradox that despite the will to attract the "best talents" to Finland, young women's higher education degrees did not contribute to their social advancement, at least for the first several years after migration. The stories of young, highly educated Russian women in Finland show that geographical mobility can sometimes be achieved only at the high cost of decreasing social status, deskilling and social downgrading. I thus argue that the literature on mobility-related inequalities (see Manderscheid 2009 for a review; MacDonald & Grieco 2007) and access to mobility (Urry 2007, chapter 9) should take into account the ability to move not only in physical space but also in social space, e.g. achieving social advancement or at least a relative social stability after moving elsewhere.

This article has therefore problematized the celebrated notions of a "world in motion" proposed by the mobility turn (Urry 2007). My empirical case demonstrates that mobility is a resource with limited access and that "the subjects on the move" are unequally mobile. While navigating the inflexible system of immigration controls and moving from one migrant status to another, migrants become subjected to the enormous power of employers,

and vulnerable to the abuse of labour. This shows that exploitation and "migrant division of labour" (Wills et al. 2010) are produced structurally, and that borders and unequal mobilities should be thought of as a mechanism for producing migrant employment paths and relations. My analysis suggests that the discussion on mobility should further investigate social costs related to mobilities.

Despite the sense of degradation experienced by the interviewees of this study, by no means do I want to present young, highly educated Russian women as victims dependent on the goodwill of host families and employers, with no agency or resistance to themselves. Rather, these stories of struggle to stay abroad are a reminder of contrasting realities to the theories celebrating fluid social structures, networks and transient bonds (Castells 2000; Ohmae 1990; Urry 2007). My findings as well as other studies in Finland (Könönen 2012; Näre 2012; 2013) point to migrants' structural vulnerabilities produced by mobility to a new country. The stories of my research participants, which are supported by other research findings (see special issue on glocalization of work, *Sosiologia* 3/2012), are a reminder that in a globalized world celebrating the erosion of nation-state borders, many people still have to pay the price of a decline in their social status to be mobile and to establish a new life elsewhere.

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