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Narrative analysis of the effects of the Russo-Ukrainian war on
first-generation Russian migrants in Finland

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the ways in which the Russo-Ukrainian war influences and is manifested in first-generation Russian migrants' narratives of belonging, the purpose of which is to further explore the relationship between homeland conflict and the ways in which migrants construct deterritorialised narratives of belonging. The research is based on seven in-depth interviews analysed through the methods of narrative analysis. It utilizes the theoretical concepts of translocational positionality and cosmopolitanism. The study finds that the social locations that migrants navigate are not limited to traditionally understood identifiers such as nationality. In doing so I suggest that the concept of globalisation necessitates the use of a global frame of reference in analysing the supra-local positionality of migrants, as conceptualising supra-local narratives of belonging as extensions of certain localities is found to significantly limit the understanding of how migrants forge and navigate their understandings of belonging.

Keywords: Belonging, conflict, cosmopolitanism, diaspora, diasporisation, globalisation

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1. Introduction

1.1 Aim and Research Question

The aim of this study is to explore the ways homeland conflict influences and is manifested in migrants' narratives of belonging. Further, it seeks to scrutinize how these influences are reflected in migrants' sense of belonging to the diaspora. Through scrutinizing such connections the study seeks to understand the internal dynamics of the diaspora and examine the role belonging plays in diasporic modes of imagination. This is done through applying the concepts of cosmopolitanism and translocational positionality to an analysis of the navigation of social collectivities that take place in a diasporic space. The study takes on the form of a narrative analysis based on in-depth interviews about the lived experience of first-generation Soviet Russian emigrants in Finland. The study is thus based on the following research question:

How does the Russo-Ukrainian war influence the narratives of belonging of first-generation Soviet Russian immigrants in Finland?

1.2 Delimitations

The study is concerned with the narratives of belonging presented by first-generation Russian emigrants who have arrived in Finland during or recently after the fall of the Soviet Union. The study includes in-depth interviews with seven middle and working-class middle-aged women who reside in Southern Finland. The timing of the participants' migration situates their experience in a unique context, as they were the last generation to migrate from Soviet Russia before or during radical social, political and economic changes. Their migration stories are thus delineated by the dissipation of their home nation, making for particularly engaging narratives of belonging.

With increasing attention being given to the mobility of persons, goods and ideas we witness a certain blurring of various boundaries. Although the case can be examined through multiple different analytical concepts, belonging as a concept is chosen for its ability to describe the processes of moving and shifting boundaries. It becomes particularly salient when thought of in regard to challenging a priori assumptions in social research that may restrict our understanding of such boundary bending. Belonging as an analytical concept allows us to move the analysis past these taken for granted assumptions and groupism to understand the

positionality of migrants as social actors and agents and how they experience and move throughout the world.

1.3 Relevance

Since the conception of the “Brandt line” in the 1980s, the boundaries of the global north and south have become increasingly blurred, due to processes such as economic integration, shifts in the global division of labour, as well as progress in theoretical understanding of development (Horner, 2020). In other words, beyond processes of globalisation that have made the divide increasingly more redundant, the emergence of alternative understandings of welfare has suggested that the Brandt line may have never been an effective tool in understanding welfare and the lack thereof. The World Bank announced in 2016 that it will no longer be distinguishing between developing and developed nations, solidifying the position many hold on the function of such a polarisation. Scholars such as Horner (2020) continue to argue for the replacement of terms like international development with global development, due to more multi-polar understandings of globalisation and the increasing attention that is being paid to East-West relations. This change in how development is framed has been necessary to understand development as less polarised and linear, but rather nuanced and set in varied specific circumstances. This falls in line with a more nuanced framing of Wallerstein’s (1987 in Modenski 2004) world-systems theory, where alongside the world system, smaller, more fragmented structures of a similar type have risen to the attention of development theorists. Authors such as Robinson (2011) have in fact criticised Wallerstein’s theory for its incompatibility with the functions of globalisation. In this critique, it has been argued that the traditional understanding of a world system does not take into account global and transnational forces such as global institutions and its focus on nation-states has been made largely redundant by such forces (Robinson 2011). In conclusion, processes that exacerbate and contribute to poverty are no longer understood as geographically bound to the global south, but are instead understood as global processes. Hence, there is a need for analysis that goes beyond the over-simplistic lines drawn between the developing and developed.

Furthermore, there has been an increasing focus on diasporas as agents of development. Processes of globalisation have necessitated academic emphasis on transnational circulation and cross-border practices, that is, concerning people, money and ideas (Faist et al. 2010, p.22). As

argued by Skeldon (1997, p.3), the emergence of new forms of spatial mobility is a prerequisite for any significant progress in development, thus making migration flows a fundamental part of the development process. Mobility functions both as a cause and consequence of changes in global economic, social and political structures.

This makes diasporas attractive subjects of research. An aspect of diasporas as agents of development is the role diasporas play in internal and international conflict. Processes of globalisation have rendered conflict increasingly deterritorialised, increasing the capacity of diasporas to contribute to peace processes (Vyotiv, Fernon, 2021). Armed conflict, of course, has significant impacts on several dimensions of development beyond casualties. Conflict, as an antithesis to development, has piqued the interest of development agencies, and when coupled with the increased interest in the role of diasporas in development, the contributions of diasporas as “peace wreckers” or “peacemakers” bring insight into the migration-development nexus (Van Hear, 2011). Thus to understand how globalisation and growing transnational circulation impact processes of peace and subsequently development through the perspective of diasporas, and to understand the potential of diasporas as agents of development, we must first understand the internal dynamics of diasporas and their emergence.

1.4 Disposition

The paper begins by presenting the context within which the study takes place. This includes a brief overview of the history and condition of the migration of Russians to Finland and an exploration of the patterns and narratives of Russian warfare since the fall of the Soviet Union. To situate the reader's understanding of the position of the Russian diaspora in relation to the conflict, reactions to the conflict such as political demonstrations will also be discussed within this section. From there I elaborate upon the ongoing discourse and findings of research on diasporas, conflict and belonging to provide an understanding of the body of literature the study attempts to contribute to, and the findings in previous literature that prove useful to the study at hand. This review of literature aims to point out the potentially neglected aspects of the literature. To understand the analytical point of view I seek to apply to the literature and findings, the conceptual framework formulated in this study is laid out. The framework seeks to combine compatible analytical concepts on both micro and macro levels of social processes. Thus I

discuss the utility of diaspora as a theoretical tool, processes of globalisation and their relevance to the diasporic experience, and the concept of cosmopolitanism and belonging. The methodology of the study is stated, which is followed by results and analysis, which apply the concepts discussed in the conceptual framework to the data gathered in the interviews, leading to the conclusions of the study.

2. Background

2.1 Russian migration to Finland

It is challenging to provide an estimate of the number of Russians residing in Finland. In 2020, Tilastokeskus (the Finnish national authority for collecting and compiling statistics on various fields of society and economy) reported that over 80 000 people living in Finland are from the former Soviet Union. The authority defines a person of foreign background as someone whose parents are both born outside of Finland. They report there to currently be a total of around 444 000 people of a foreign background in Finland. This makes people with their background in the Soviet Union by far the largest minority group in Finland. In 2016, there were 30 970 citizens of the Russian Federation in Finland and 27 456 individuals with dual Finnish and Russian citizenship (Varjonen, Zamiatin, Rinas 2017). However, statistics are arguably not always the most appropriate way to estimate national identities. Some for instance find it more suitable to talk of the Russophone population as a whole.

Nevertheless, it is evident that there is a significant presence of people in Finland with affiliations to Russia. Despite the movement of people between Russia and Finland being more or less consistent for decades, up until the 1970s it was more common for Finns to emigrate to Russia than the reverse. Finland's rapid development and consequent status as a welfare state, however, made Finland an increasingly attractive destination for Russian migrants, especially due to Finland's high demand for labour arising from the declining birth rate, ageing population and lack of qualified labour (Ryazantsev, Gadzhimuradova 2021). Thus labour migration - besides marriage, family reunion and education-based migration are the most prevalent channels of relocation from Russia to Finland.

The intertwined histories and geographies of Finland and Russia are illustrated in some of the migration trends between the two. Immediately following the fall of the USSR, Finland

focused on the repatriation of ethnic Finns such as the Ingrians and Karelians. Up until 2016, a repatriation law granted privileges to these groups in applying for residence. Indigenous Finns were repatriated for the most part from bordering regions like Ingria and Karelia. Ryazantsev and Gadzhimuradova (2021) attribute this to geographical and linguistic proximity, similarity in mindset (perhaps cultural) and ties with family. Finland has additionally initiated various efforts for cultural and linguistic collaboration, particularly in border zones, through allocating funds to support the teaching of the Russian language and culture and the establishment of Russian schools among other things (Ryazantsev, Gadzhimuradova 2021).

Despite the prevalence of the Russian language, culture and history in Finland, the position of Russophones in Finland is obscure. According to Krivonos and Näre (2019), Russians face negative stereotyping and discrimination in Finland to this day, which is likely related to the tumultuous history between the countries. Moreover, they emphasize that the relationship between the two is marked by Finland's successful construction of “Europeanness” as compared to Russia’s reputation as “Europe’s Eastern Other”(Krivonos, Näre, 2019, p.3).

2.2 Russian warfare into the 21st century

After the initial persistence of Putin’s explicit denial of Russian military involvement in Ukraine, messaging on the invasion has remained vague. Throughout the conflict, Russia has persisted in characterising the conflict as a peacekeeping mission and a response to the oppression of ethnic Russians and Russophones (Allison, 2014). Similarly starting in the 1990s, Russia portrayed military backing of separatist groups in Georgia, Moldova and Tajikistan as peacekeeping and mediation missions, arguing that the presence of Russia was needed where post-Soviet security vacuums were causing conflict (Jackson, 2022). Military presence was already then described as protecting the Russian diaspora, as Russia backed up separatist movements in the name of protecting “their own” from discrimination in the former Soviet regions (Jackson, 2022).

In 2021 Russia began a large scale military buildup around its borders with Ukraine while Vladimir Putin went as far as to characterise the events with mentions of genocide and nazism, and questioning Ukraine’s statehood (Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 2021; Reuters, 2022). On the 21st of February 2022, the Russian Federation officially recognised Luhansk and Donetsk oblast following which the use of military force was authorised sending Russian troops into Donbas. A “special military operation” was announced by Putin on the 24th of February shortly after which

Russia launched missiles and airstrikes as well as opened fire in multiple border locations around Ukraine.

The invasion is theorised to be a response to the push seen in the Revolution of Dignity to become more closely integrated with Western institutions such as the European Union. Thus the invasion is understood as serving the purpose of a warning, a signal to surrounding countries to halt any similar attempts of a European political orientation (Allison, 2014). A similar objective was observed in Russian military involvement in the Chechnyan war, where the push for independence was feared to cause a domino effect of independence movements in the region. A more recent parallel was Russia's involvement in Syria which is seen as an attempt to roll back US influence (Sarotte, 2021).

The invasion was met with great condemnation from the international community. The United Nations general assembly and the international court of justice demanded Russia suspend the operation and Russia was expelled by the council of Europe (RFE/RL, 2022). Russia was met with large scale sanctions affecting the economy of both Russia and much of the world, and protests have occurred around the world including Russia, resulting in mass arrests. Russia has introduced strict policies aiming at incarcerating those who spread western media, which has targeted journalists in particular. Moreover, mass censorship has been enacted through threats of fines and jail time for treason (OHCHR, 2022). Al Jazeera (2022) reports on the 10th of March that 13 000 arrests had been made in Russia since the beginning of the invasion. Various polls have attempted to estimate the dynamics of Russian public opinion regarding the invasion, the validity of which is highly questionable due to the drastically different results.

Russians abroad have expressed their solidarity with Ukraine, largely through social media but also through demonstrations. Anti-war protesters have started using a white flag with a blue stripe as a symbol of their opposition. The flag was created as a symbol of Russian solidarity with Ukraine, as protesters felt the need to mark themselves as Russians against the war. This was in part due to fear of all Russians getting labelled as in support of the invasion (Sivtsova, 2022). The flag represents the flag of the Russian Federation, but with the red colour removed, as protesters associated it with bloodshed. The flag acts as a common identifier for Russians in protest of the regime, and in addition to signalling solidarity, creates a sense of collectivity among anti-authoritarian Russians abroad (Sivtsova, 2022).

Since the Cold War, Finland adopted principles of neutrality in its foreign policy. The narrative of neutrality has persisted even though Finland has been slowly creeping away from neutrality since the fall of the Soviet Union. Although Finland's joining the EEC in 1995 was met with disdain from Russia, Finland maintained balance by remaining unaligned in terms of the military (Taylor, 2022). The 2022 invasion of Ukraine however changed this neutral orientation. Polls on the Finnish public's support of NATO saw a rise from 28% in January of 2022 to 73% in May (Huhtanen, 2022). Despite Finland's disapproval of past conflicts, and the tension created by Finland and Russia's common history, Finland's NATO application has formally cemented Russia as the enemy in the eyes of the public. Thus the position of the large Russian diaspora in Finland has been faced with change. Not only is the diaspora faced with shifting public perceptions and thus possibly attitudes, but as I find in my study the invasion of Ukraine holds more symbolic significance to the Russians of Finland when compared to similar separatist wars. I find that due to the very close relationship between Russians and Ukrainians, as well as the commonality between them in the diaspora, the war has put the identities of Russians in crisis.

3. Literature review

This section first explores research on diaspora emergence, devoting special attention to homeland conflicts as catalysts for diasporisation. Examples are then given of "stateless diasporas" and how diasporas can transcend ethnic and national boundaries. The influence of homeland conflicts on diasporas is further explored by asking why some diasporas do not mobilise when faced with conflict in the homeland. A point is made that alternative responses to homeland conflicts deserve equal attention, and it is illustrated that the variability of responses can provide insight into how conflict affects migrants' experiences of belonging.

3.1 Diasporic imagination

Firstly, in order to understand what contributes to interpretations of belonging in migrant communities, it is necessary to gather an understanding of how diasporas are constructed. This is to understand the psychosocial reality of diaspora formation and membership that builds the context within which belonging is experienced. To be precise, according to Butler (2001), a diaspora takes form in three sites - the homeland, the hostland, and the diasporic community

itself. These sites form the potential building blocks for diaspora formation that delineate diasporic belonging together with global processes. To shine a light on how conflict affects perceptions of belonging, which is explored later in this section, we must first understand how it affects diaspora formation.

Building on the constructivist line of reasoning that rejects essentialist and reductionist views of diaspora formation, it can be argued that diasporas are collections of contextual processes. In other words, diasporas are to be viewed as *projects* and *practices* rather than pre-defined groups with a pre-determined essence (Feron, Vyotiv, 2021). As Brubaker comprehensively puts it, diaspora should be regarded as an idiom and a category of practice. “As a category of practice, ‘diaspora’ is used to make claims, to articulate projects, to formulate expectations, mobilise energies, to appeal to loyalties” (Brubaker, 2000, p.12). This is to say that migrant groups are not to be equated with diasporas and that not all migrants with a common homeland are part of a diaspora. As it is argued that diasporas are ever-changing and can evolve just as well as dissolve, there are also countless processes through which a transnational migrant group can become a diaspora. As is argued by many in the field, there is not a “one size fits all” trajectory for diaspora emergence (Baser, 2014; Smith and Stares, 2007; Adamson, 2012; Chow, 2010; Agnew, 2005; Bauböck, 2010). According to Bauböck (2010), transnational migrant groups become diasporas through deliberate processes that “invent” the diaspora and establish diasporic identity. The notion of diasporisation illuminates the constructivist approach to diaspora studies by proposing that diasporisation is not merely a matter of border crossing, but rather a matter of identity construction that is manufactured under numerous *situational* and *relational* conditions (Feron, Vyotiv, 2021).

Sökefeld refers to the formation of diasporic identity as “diasporic imagination” (Sökefeld, 2006) and illustrates his point by presenting the case of Kashmiri in the UK. He finds that Kashmiri migrants did not originally regard themselves as Kashmiri, but rather as Punjabis or as Pakistanis. Kashmiris’ collective identity came to be through insurgency in the home region which highlighted the need to re-assert distinctive Kashmiri identity and brought about a new way of imagining identity. Where there was not a sovereign nation, there was a push for a collective identity that received the face of the stateless, imagined Kashmiri nation. The same phenomenon of diasporisation under the purpose of driving for the sovereignty of an imagined home nation can be seen across a number of other diasporas such as the Sikh diaspora (Sökefeld,

2006; Axel, 2001). For the Sikhs, Khalistan became a site, a symbol, of Sikh identity, eventually becoming a newly imagined home nation (Axel, 2001). The Kurdish diaspora further illustrates the power of the imagined home nation in stateless diasporas, by uniting Kurds from four different nation-states under the imagined nation of Kurdistan. Eliassi (in Sigona et al. 2015) finds in his fieldwork that Kurds in Sweden did not feel represented by their nationalities of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, but instead found it important to construct a new national imaginary that bends the boundaries of nation-states. For the Kurdish diaspora, the Kurdistani region serves as a symbol of the existence of a Kurdistani identity, borne out of mobilisation efforts that were caused by political and economic deprivation in the region (Eliassi, 2015). What these cases illustrate is that diasporas are in fact, as is suggested above, projects. Eliassi (2015) interviews individuals who, quite literally, started a social media *project* to unite the dispersed people under a common identity. Although the described diasporas have an existing place of origin to align themselves with, without active mobilisation efforts Khalistan for many Sikhs would be simply a location. A geographical location does not produce a diaspora. Diaspora gains significance from the active construction of diasporic imagination. The Kurdish migrants did not immediately upon arrival to Sweden get *assigned* a Kurdistani collective identity. They, like all of us, have an array of commonalities to choose to align and associate themselves with. As Butler (2001) holds, this is why the *construct* of a homeland is essential in understanding diasporas.

Perhaps the majority of modern research in the field of diaspora research maintains this same position of self-conceptualisation as a key movement in diasporisation. The statelessness of a number of diasporas effectively illustrates, as this study suggests, that diasporas transcend national borders.

Yet, statelessness is not the only thing that the above-described diasporas have in common. Baser (2014), like Sökefeld and Axel (2006; 2001), finds in her research of the Turkish diaspora in Sweden that transnational migrant communities that have not originally emerged from conflict can become increasingly invested in homeland affairs and mobilise as diasporas in response to conflict in their state or region of origin. This argument can be taken a step further by arguing that diasporas can become re-invigorated as a result of distress in their land of origin (Safran 2007). This conflict can generate a sense of unity and a need for organization in the diaspora, leading to diasporisation (Safran, 2007; Demmers, 2007). The role that diasporas play in internal conflict has received increasing attention in academia not least due to globalising

factors that bring conflict closer to diasporas (Bercovich in Smith and Stares, 2007). Vyotiv and Feron (2021) propose that the deterritorialisation of conflict increasingly triggers diaspora formation both in terms of individual identity as well as in terms of motivating collective action while simultaneously contributing further to the deterritorialization of the conflict. Furthermore, both Bercovich (2007) and Vyotiv & Feron (2021) contend that diasporic response is triggered in particular by conflicts that touch on identity, cultural norms, and values.

Das (1995) refers to the kind of triggering factors such as those that motivated the mobilisation of the Sikh, Kashmiri and Turkish diasporas as “critical events”. Sökefeld explains critical events as “events that cause new modes of imagination and action to come into being” (2006, p.273). Demmers labels the same phenomenon the “diasporic turn” (2007, p.8). However, if we are to return to the notion of the discursive construction of diasporas and strategic identity construction, it is necessary to note that events or shifts alone do not lead to diasporisation. As stated by Sökefeld (2006), events are only critical when framed and perceived in a way that necessitates new forms of action and organisation.

3.2 Belonging and otherness

Conflict in the homeland however does not always lead to diasporisation or mobilisation of the diaspora. This does not mean however that they remain unaffected. Central to understanding the variance in how diasporas around the world react to conflict in the homeland is their different modes of belonging. The previous section has illustrated how diasporas can have a sense of belonging to a collectively imagined home nation. Diasporas, however, are far from internally homogenous and are defined not only by their orientation towards the home. Immigrants *negotiate* their belonging along the lines of multiple attachments, loyalties and communities. This section thus explores the ongoing academic discourse on different ways of belonging.

Migrants' narratives of belonging are negotiated along multiple axes of sameness (Salazar, 2021). Belonging, as my research suggests, should not be understood as exclusively a fixed membership in an array of groups accessible to all, but as a navigation of “different locations and contexts from which belongings are imagined and narrated, in terms of a range of social positions and social divisions/identities such as gender, class, stage in the life cycle and so on.” (Anthias, 2006, pp.21-22). As is implied in Anthias’ characterisation of belonging, it can

manifest and fluctuate in an interminable amount of ways. For instance, research finds that gender plays an important role in how migrants experience their belonging, and that migrant women often construct their understanding of home differently from men (Siu, 2005; Abdelhady, 2011; Baser, 2016; Smith & Stares, 2007). Women are found to often experience their belonging through practices and direct connections to places and close ones in the land of origin. Furthermore, women's belonging is often impacted by their role as "home-makers" and further the differences in cultural understandings of gender (Bhimji, 2008).

In her fieldwork with the Lebanese diaspora in Montreal, Paris, and New York, Abdelhady (2011, pp.41-88) finds that migrants formulate their belonging around an array of identifiers and collectivities and that the markers that individuals use to narrate their belonging are far from uniform. Depending on what was relevant to them personally and prominent in their experiences of difference, participants in Abdelhady's research would emphasise ethnicity, religion, political orientation and so on in their narratives of belonging. Some who emphasised ethnicity described belonging to a larger, Arab diaspora, while others, namely Lebanese Maronites, often distanced themselves from an Arab identity. What is notable in Abdelhady's findings is that many understood their experiences with migration as something that contributed to their disassociation from any of the societies they interact with. The research shows that the "other" category that many of these migrants occupy was not necessarily regarded as a lack of belonging or something unfortunate. Many believed it to be a rather liberating and enlightening social position (Abdelhady, 2011, p. 62).

As social contexts shift, they are reshaped, which necessitates active navigating on the behalf of the individuals that comprise a social landscape. Boundaries are recreated, re-drawn and insidership is negotiated. One factor that reshapes social formation, as is shown in my research, is political flux in the homeland and hostland (Gerharz, Land, 2017). Most obviously, the ways in which migrants are regarded by others in their place of residence affect the ways in which belonging and identity are navigated. As is shown by Abdelhady (2011), the attitudes of people remaining in the homeland have an influence on "where" migrants direct their sense of belonging. Gerharz and Land (2017) find that the Jumma diaspora in New York participates in such social navigation between markers of identity such as Buddhist, Asian and Bangladeshi, to seek support in coping with the harsh realities of their migration experience. The "Jumma" diaspora was found to largely attract individuals whose identity had largely been articulated as

non-Muslim and non-Bengali, and who are united through a history of oppression in Bangladesh. The Jumma diaspora provides a belonging built on sameness and commonality, but as Gerharz and Land found, participants would also express a “give and take” involved in the claiming of this diasporic formation. Belonging to a bounded collectivity requires active participation and guarding of boundaries. As such, Gerharz and Land allow us to understand how “home” is also actively created.

For many, attachment to land may be central to their narratives of belonging. As is shown above, the Sikh and Kashmiri diasporas for instance were mobilised due to the compromising by external actors of their people and their territorial attachments. Likewise, although Kurdish identity is dispersed over multiple nations, national imaginary is created in connection to a territory, more particularly to the region of Kurdistan in Iraq (Eliassi in Sigona et al. 2015, p.48). In addition, as Scholte (1996) points out, territoriality is of particular importance for indigenous peoples. Scholte finds that globalisation may have even encouraged the reassertion of indigenous territorial identities. Yet still, these belongings are not national in nature. Belonging is negotiated. Individuals possess an array of commonalities yet do not choose to align themselves with every commonality they encounter. Hence man-made borders and boundaries assigned to people such as nationality do not constrain how belonging is negotiated. Mutuality and commonality do not always seize to exist at the border inspection. Hence investigating deterritorialised identities proves not only necessary for understanding diasporas, but also for our general understanding of how belongings are contested and negotiated.

Research on diasporic return migration is particularly insightful when it comes to grasping the concept of belonging outside of national boundaries. Migrants often describe not feeling entirely a part of any of the societies they cross. This phenomenon is enriched in the narratives of return migrants who “return” to their imagined homeland although they might have initially emigrated as small children or perhaps were not born in the homeland. Karageozian (in Sigona et al. 2015) in his fieldwork with Armenian returnees from well-established diaspora communities to post-Soviet Armenia, finds that his participants felt like they were “the other” both in the diaspora and Armenia. Individuals he talked to did not feel like they belonged entirely to the diaspora nor Armenia. Return migration brought about a sense of disconnect from the diaspora community, while at the same time the returnees had a feeling of being “the others” in Armenia. Similar narratives have been gathered among other diasporic returnees such as the

Greeks (King, Christou, 2014). What is notable is that while distressing for others, some returnees reported that while they could embrace the othering, they experienced and felt comfortable in their cosmopolitan, globalised belonging. Like some of Abdelhady's (2011) interviewees, they felt that at times their otherness was a strength.

Brown (2011) contributes to the exploration of the subtleties in diasporic belonging by casting light on what she sees as an apparent divide among the Polish immigrants in the UK. She points out that migrants' sense of belonging is a dynamic and fluctuating process that greatly influences diasporisation. To illustrate this point, she compares the sense of belonging and identity of post-war and post-accession Polish immigrants in the UK and finds that while the subsequent waves of immigrants share a common culture of symbols, their emotional attachments to the homeland are experienced differently between waves of migrants.

Brown (2011) contends that all her informants share a connection to Poland but this connection takes on very different expressions. She distinguishes two modes of belonging in the diaspora - being and longing. According to her findings, post-accession migrants associate their belonging with current-day Poland and recent memories, while post-war migrants' longing takes on a form of "restorative nostalgia" for a homeland that is no longer accessible outside of the diaspora. The significance of Polish culture for post-war immigrants lies in cultural heritage that allows for connections between those in the diaspora and that can be passed down from generation to generation. For the post-accession immigrants, Poland retains the significance of home - not only the home in the past but also in the near future. Brown argues that these distinctions lead to disparate "emotional geographies". Although the Polish in the UK often attends shared culturally significant spaces, the meaning ascribed to these spaces and events is not shared and thus creates a sense of unfamiliarity between the migrants of the current day and past. Brown relates her discussion to "imagined communities" like many other researchers in the field and continues by arguing that the imagined community is created and reified through restorative nostalgia (Boyum 2001 in Brown 2011). In this sense, although they share common geography, they do not share a common homeland. Restorative nostalgia is a relevant concept to many diasporas, Skribs (1997), for instance, describes how the belonging of Croatians in Australia is strongly tied to a Croatia enslaved by the communist Yugoslavian regime and remains unaffected by any political or economic movements.

In her research on the East-Timorese diaspora in Australia during the 2006-2007 internal conflict in Timor-Leste, Askland (2014) examines homeland conflict through the lens of belonging. She found that in reaction to the conflict, levels of translocal activism unexpectedly declined. Although she found little to no effect of the war on the refugees' practical lives "it manifested itself in the translocal sphere in which the exiles' social worlds of home and exile meet, and in the affective dimensions that are integral to their conception and experience of self." (Askland, 2014, p. 210). The negative emotions the interviewees experienced caused their sense of self and social world to be disrupted and they in response showed an increased awareness of their positionality in the translocal space, meaning that their reflexivity to the situation transcended a sense of belonging at home and their place of residence. The case of East Timor illustrates the fluctuating and blurred boundaries of diasporic belonging and reifies the importance of moving analysis past homeland-hostland boundaries, as is illustrated in the subsequent sections.

The studies discussed in the preceding sections provide valuable insight into the various processes that construct, change and challenge diasporas, as well as the internal dynamics of diasporas that result in certain responses to conflict. The purpose of this section has been to illustrate the analytical insight that combining the two areas of research can provide. As seen in Askland's (2014) case study, the intersection of the two provides insight into both the topic of diasporas and homeland conflict as well as belonging and identity formation. Askland thus illustrates an intersection that can benefit from further research.

As shown, diasporas have been studied in regard to identity, but as the following section suggests, additional insight is needed into the modalities and rationalities of diasporic belonging and the processes which challenge and reproduce it. I argue that belonging, used as an analytical concept is more compatible with understanding such subtleties. Although the role diasporas play in peace processes has been extensively researched, and belonging has been theorised and applied to an extent, the intersection of homeland conflict and narratives of belonging in the diaspora seems to be a neglected intersection. Therefore with this study, I wish to expand on the potential of exploring this intersection.

4. Conceptual framework

4.1 Belonging

Belonging, according to Pfaff-Czarnecka (2013, pp.4-5) is “an emotionally charged, ever-dynamic social location, that is, a position in social structure, experienced through identification, embeddedness, connectedness and attachments.” It is a combination of individually obtained knowledge and experience, which is socially negotiated and affected by structural factors. According to Anthias (2002), belonging is experienced when values, practices and relations are shared between individuals. In its essence, belonging is inherently multiple and experienced as such by social actors. The concept does not reject the existence of social collectivities or bounded belongings but maintains that such groupings inherently always “compete” with other groupings. Moreover, it highlights the internal variability of such collectivities. In the same vein as intersectionality, belonging encapsulates the internal differentiation of groupings that occurs through individuals navigating different life-worlds (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013). Life-worlds or in other words social location, include the constellations of different identifiers within which individuals navigate their belonging among gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexuality, location, aspirations, skills and so on. Vigh (2009) refers to this as social navigation, bringing up specifically the way in which people cope with and manage situations of social change or uncertainty such as that experienced by migrants. Individuals navigate different combinations of these factors, which entails that though two individuals may share a common ethnicity, for instance, depending on other factors present in their constellations they experience different habitual forms, and possess different knowledge and orientations. Pfaff-Czarnecka (2011, p.5) succinctly put it “[belonging] is individually felt and embodied while collectively negotiated and performed”. Belonging thus should be understood as both negotiated and processual, undergoing continuous change. However, it should be noted that belonging can not be reduced down to any combination of identifiers. Anthias (2006) emphasizes that we must not focus on the intersections of social divisions in terms of fixed groups which determine a person’s lived experience. To do so is to undermine a person’s agency as a social actor. Individuals navigate throughout groups and stress different boundaries. Belonging, when used in the sense of “belonging together” - common identifiers notwithstanding

- means sharing experience, knowledge, meanings and joint cognitive assumptions (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013).

Using belonging as a concept allows for the untangling of groupist notions by bringing attention to social positionality. By positionality, I refer to Anthias (2002) concept of translocational positionality. Translocational positionality refers to an individual's position in relation to social structure and agency. It includes, but not exclusively, identification, but also the lived practices in which identification is signalled as well as the conditions for the existence of such practices (Anthias, 2002). Hence, I am using in this paper the concept of belonging as opposed to collective identity. According to Brubaker and Cooper (2000), identity as an analytical concept has become too ubiquitous, indicating strongly groupist and exclusionist self-understandings while also being used to indicate a much more open range of connections and affinities. Thus identity, more specifically collective identity, fails to capture how it itself is created through a range of multiplicities and contradictions (Anthias, 2002). It creates sharp boundaries and homogenising notions and is in itself a categorising concept. Pfaff-Czarnecka, (2011, p.6) characterises the difference between collective identity and belonging: “‘Identity’ highlights homogeneity of any given collective unit, whereas ‘belonging’ stresses commonness, but not necessarily sameness”. Identity is accepted as a steady indicator of sameness and difference. Even when using terms such as multiple identities, it is implied that identity is a property to be possessed rather than a process in continuous flux and negotiation (Anthias, 2006). Moreover, collective identity tends to fix the individual in space, time and process, which is problematic, especially in studying migration (Anthias, 2002).

Pfaff-Czarnecka, (2011) highlights that “regimes of belonging” as she calls them are denoted by not only social inclusion but exclusion as well. Anthias (2002) adds further that boundaries and the construction of sameness and difference are essential to the navigation of belonging. Furthermore, translocational positionality highlights an important aspect of identification processes which is the collective guarding of boundaries. Pfaff-Czarnecka, (2013) underscores that bounded collective units are not inherent to an individual based on characteristics or positionality, but “entry” into bounded collectivities is negotiated through displaying loyalty, commitment as well as certain trade-offs. This is central to the understanding that bounded belonging is actively created and maintained through inclusion and exclusion and that one does not passively “belong”.

The strength of belonging as an analytical concept lies in its connecting of social categories to their social relatedness, thus making it more suitable as an analytical concept to grasp the nuance of interrelating (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013). Authors however note, that to criticise the analytical validity of collective identity is not to say that it should entirely be abandoned. Anthias (2002, p.5) maintains that identity remains socially meaningful and suggests that the concept be examined with a focus on positionality to “problematize the epistemological and ontological status of identity” more effectively.

4.2 Diaspora

Despite countless attempts, scholars have yet to come to a common understanding of the definition of a diaspora. Some scholars, as is traditional, refer specifically to groups that have experienced a traumatic dispersal from their homelands such as the Jewish and the Armenians. Others have come to use expansive definitions that include even the concept of non-national diasporas such as the Muslim diaspora and the queer diaspora (Adamson 2012). The active debate has however focused largely on definitions instead of theories which as Bauböck (in Faist et al. 2010) argues may be considered futile, as trying to find two diasporas that meet the same exact criteria is a “pointless mission”. They are without doubt vastly diverse - characterised by different factors such as religion and language, facing different problems, relation to the home and host country and each of them “displays many generational, ideological and social differences” (Smith, Stares, 2007). In this study, the concept of diaspora is brought up not to attempt to validate or invalidate a definition, but as a particularly insightful tool through which to comprehend globalization and the deterritorialization of collective identities.

As discussed above, constructivist definitions regard diasporas as “imagined” transnationally organized communities. This approach argues that diasporas are socially and politically constructed through mobilisation and discursive construction by diasporic elites and homeland or hostland actors (Adamson 2012). Diaspora formation, according to this view, is a deliberate process of strategic social identity construction and diasporas have to be “invented and mobilised” (Bauböck, 2010) to become diasporas as opposed to transnational migrant communities (Baser, 2014). As such, instead of being rooted in normative, national forms of belonging, diasporas shine a light on supra-territorial ways of belonging. Butler (2001) argues that despite transcending national boundaries, the *construct* of a nation is central to a collective

diasporan identity. Furthermore, diasporas tend to illustrate this deterritorialisation of identity in their intra-group relationships with different segments of the diaspora that are geographically scattered. Abdelhady (2006) suggests that diasporic collectivities transcend national borders as diasporas construct narratives of home that can be rather different from those who remain in the home nation. As follows, diaspora are better characterised by various exchanges between and throughout spatially scattered segments of the diaspora.

Hall (1990) argues that diasporas should be delineated not by essence and unity but by heterogeneity and hybridity. In other words, diaspora can be conceptualised not as spaces that extend beyond differences but as spaces that exist through that very difference. Butler (2001) maintains that in order to use diaspora as a framework of study, a framework through which to examine global spaces, multiplicity and fluidity must be accommodated. To illuminate further Butler's approach, diaspora attachments extend beyond dichotomies such as their loyalties to the nation of residence and origin. As peoples move, identities and affiliations become multiple and intersected. This is to say that diaspora as a framework must accommodate people whose identities are multiple. As she puts it, to fix one's identity as a part of a bounded, exclusive diaspora "does not allow for the complexity of multiple identities, the salience of any of which at any given time is conditioned by socio-political exigencies." (Butler 2001, p.5). This very unboundedness allows an entryway for migrants to construct understandings of belonging and identity beyond traditional solidarities, and allows the researcher to understand the "global sphere of interaction" (Abdelhady 2006 p.7).

4.3 Cosmopolitanism

Although the existence of diasporas in the nexus of such triadic relationships between states and diaspora is central to the diasporic experience, drawing the analysis of diasporas along spatial and temporal lines does not adequately explain diasporic processes. Scholars have started to challenge conventional ideas of locality and question to what extent normative national forms of belonging truly describe the experience of migrants (Salazar 2021). The focus has thus shifted on supra- or sub-national ways of belonging, which many argue to be the primary state of orientation for a large share of migrants. The territorial fixing of a diaspora between two nations,

in a state of transnational existence, is argued to provide a narrow understanding of the extent to which processes of globalization impact identity and community formation (Abdelhady 2006).

Globalisation, defined by Scholte (1996) is a process in which the world, through a number of different means, becomes a boundless arena of social interaction. It has significantly impacted and transformed human experiences of social connectedness and proximity, and most importantly, perceptions of identifiable borders. Scholte describes globalisation as unfolding in a fourth dimension, a social plain of existence. Global processes do not take place laterally along spatial and temporal lines but can occur instantaneously, simultaneously and more relevantly - supra-territorially (Scholte 1996). This is in contrast to the transnational configuration that social processes are sometimes placed in. Abdelhady (2006) argues that transnationalism is grounded in nation-states, and in it, social processes are seen as crossing those state boundaries. Globalisation reveals the shortcomings of transnationalism in its fixation on national and cultural boundaries and is becoming to many a restrictive framework for understanding belonging and identity. Scholte (1996) contends that fixation on such boundaries neglects forms of identity and belonging that transcend such three-dimensional divisions. He continues to suggest that *how* one is connected is becoming more relevant than *where* one is connected.

A global frame of reference, or what is sometimes called cosmopolitanism, widens the scope of understanding such influences. The aforementioned multiplicity and complexity of identity can be argued to be better facilitated by a cosmopolitan approach that includes a transcendental aspect, moving the analysis from a rootedness in nation-states to a global, supra-national social space. Beck (2006) argues that cosmopolitanism not only impacts how individuals think and act but also the way they conceptualise nationality. Individuals are not born cosmopolitan, but processes of becoming take place through a search for contrast and the attraction of a concomitant sense of global belonging. A cosmopolitan susceptibility is thus likely to arise with increased cross-border mobility (Salazar, 2021).

Brubaker (2010) does however point out that despite the growing amount of criticism towards transnationalism as an analytical framework for diasporic studies, locality remains a central and formative factor as a part of the experience of belonging. Scholte (1996) establishes that globalisation, although transformative, has not impacted everyone to the same extent. Furthermore, he points out that simultaneously with global processes there are movements towards localisation. Although conflicting, it is to be noted that processes on the global level do

not necessarily dictate conditions at the local level such as households and districts. Additionally, he attributes localisation to the very phenomenon of globalisation by arguing that the increasing “placelessness” of identity may push individuals to seek familiarity. What is imperative to note in discussing localisation however is that localisation can be compatible with a cosmopolitan framework, as locality is not necessarily territorial. Schulte (1996) suggests that locality can unfold on a supraterritorial plane, which can be seen for instance in solidarities rooted in class, religion, gender and sexuality. This understanding of locality is in line with the previously touched upon social positionality. Christensen (2012) succinctly points out that rather than rejecting the notions of locality that are present in a transnational approach, they should be considered as a part of the multiple affiliations that comprise experiences of belonging. As she compellingly puts it

“[...]what determines cosmopolitan formations and mental orientations is not the existence or absence of attachments but the ways in which such attachments are enacted and how individuals navigate their lives across multiple domains of choice and (in)formally conceived reciprocal, unilateral and forced obligations and allegiances (e.g. familial and traditional boundaries)” (Christensen 2012, p.894).

The familiarity of the diasporic experience with the discussed global processes as well as localities is precisely illustrative of why diasporas are a perfect opportunity to view nontraditional solidarities and forms of belonging through.

In this section I have combined the concepts of belonging and translocational positionality, diaspora, globalisation and cosmopolitanism to comprise the conceptual and analytical framework of this study. I find that the concepts build upon each other in a manner that allows each of them to be applied coherently and subsequently to the subject of the study. While targeting different levels of existence, cosmopolitanism and belonging follow the same objective and line of reasoning. The specific take I have laid out on cosmopolitanism and locality facilitates an understanding of the concept of social location, thus indicating the utility of combining the two theories. They aim to facilitate analysis that transcends boundaries and allows the lived experience of individuals to be understood in all of its complexity and contradiction. In other words, translocational positionality is a compatible tool to understand how people navigate boundless social space whilst not negating the inherent complexity. Globalisation provides a context, while diaspora serves as a vessel for the analysis of said boundlessness.

As discussed above, globalisation does not affect everyone to the same extent. Studying diaspora is therefore an outstanding opportunity for social research to investigate the various processes that are so prominently discernible in diasporas. Furthermore, as stated, to fruitfully use diaspora as an analytical concept it must be understood to be delineated by its fluidity. This exactly is achieved by understanding the diasporic experience through the concept of belonging as opposed to collective identity which would (in its essentializing sense) contradict the notion of understanding diasporas as processes by treating diasporic identity as something to be possessed. In short, the combination of the discussed concepts creates a cohesive framework in which the case study can be situated.

5. Methodology

5.1 Data collection methods

The data in this study is collected through in-depth interviews. To fit the scope of the study, seven first-generation immigrants from Russia who now live in Finland were interviewed for approximately an hour each. The length of the interviews was not strictly predetermined, but interviews generally took between 60 and 90 minutes until the interviewees felt that they had covered all they had to say. Snowball sampling was used to find participants, meaning that the first participants, found through personal connections, referred other individuals who they believed may contribute to the research. Interviews took place over Zoom so that both the interviewer and interviewee could choose the setting that is the most comfortable. Meetings were conducted individually to allow space for individual experiences and to achieve a rich account of the interviewees' experiences.

It was necessary in some cases to have some direction in the interview, but interviewer involvement was generally kept to a minimum. The study is concerned with the narratives of individuals, therefore the design is flexible. This allows for unexpected outcomes in the data collection phase to alter the course of the study if necessary. As the previous literature does not provide conclusive backing to expect certain results, openness is needed in order to best explore the area of inquiry.

Interviews were supported with semi-structured, open-ended questions, the purpose of which was to guide the interviewee toward sharing what they themselves find is the most essential part of their past and present experiences as a part of the Russian diaspora in Finland. Thus, the questions asked in the interview were specific to each interviewee and the subjects that came about in the interview. They consisted mostly of requesting for the participant to elaborate on, or explain something they had said. To provide some boundaries to the interview, which were helpful in getting the participants situated in the interview, questions surrounding the topic of home, connectedness and the ongoing conflict were adapted depending on the interview.

5.2 Method of analysis

The method of analysis used in this study is narrative analysis, more specifically inductive narrative analysis of personal narratives. Narrative research aims to understand how individuals construct stories and narratives from their personal lived experiences (Creswell, 2013, p.54). Bell (2002, p.208) contends that “in its fullest sense, narrative inquiry requires going beyond the narrative as rhetorical structure, that is, simply telling stories, analytic examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that story illustrates.” As compared to thematic analysis, the strength of narrative analysis thus lies in its ability to convey intact stories. The aim of narrative analysis is not to distinguish truth from fiction, but rather to interpret how narratives are formed by individuals (Riessman, 2012).

Transcriptions of in-depth interviews included in the study were coded inductively by way of breaking the data into stories that comprised a narrative. Inductive narrative analysis in this way accommodates undisturbed, robust tellings of participants’ experiences. The goal of inductive coding in narrative analysis is to extract intact narratives that can be treated as individual pieces of data to be analysed (Riessman, 2012). As stories are not necessarily told by participants in an entirely coherent manner, narratives that were spread across each interview were grouped together to form a single unit of analysis. Narrative units were then contrasted between research participants to form a set of core narratives to be investigated.

Narrative analysis, as do all methods has its limitations. It is important to take into consideration in the analysis that the researchers interpretation of the analysed narratives is never quite free of the researchers own narrative. Bell (2002, p.210) finds it important to note that narratives illuminate the researcher in the same capacity as they do the researched. Riessman

(2012), in the same vein, emphasizes the importance of considering the contextuality surrounding the data gathered in narrative research, such as the position of the narrative in the interview.

5.3 Limitations

Firstly, snowball sampling can lead to a rather one-sided sample in some measure. The diversity of views of the Russians in Finland is thus not fully captured. However, the method has some significant benefits which contributed to it being chosen as the primary sampling method. It is chosen in order to establish a sense of trust between the interviewee and the interviewer. Due to the aforementioned political circumstances, there is reason to believe that interviewees would not feel comfortable sharing their views and experiences with a stranger unless there is a perceived personal connection. Through snowball sampling it is easier to establish trust through a common acquaintance, it gives reason for the informant to believe that the intents of the interview are in line with theirs and their common friends. The focus of the study on one part of the community is however not necessarily a weakness as it allows for an in-depth analysis of the unifying factors that bring the participants together. Moreover, as Butler (2001) suggests, more emphasis should be put on studying different segments of a diaspora and mapping the internal structures of diasporas.

Furthermore, significant limitation of the study is the lack of male participants. Despite the study being intended to include all genders, finding male participants proved unsuccessful, as none of the approached men were willing to participate. Many scholars in the field of diaspora studies put emphasis on the importance of gender in diasporic experiences and experiences of belonging (Abdelhady, 2011; Baser, 2016; Smith & Stares, 2007). Therefore it is to be noted that the findings of the study may not be generalisable across all genders. The refusal of the approached men to participate on its own may reflect a gendered dimension to the Russian diaspora experience.

Lastly, my being affiliated with the researched community has been a limitation to be addressed. While being an insider in the subject group as the researcher undoubtedly provides access to the community in terms of language, trust and relatability, it also comes with the risk of researcher bias. Biases may affect interpretations and the questions I ask, cause subconscious cherry-picking of data, and there is a risk of supplementing missing connections with personal

experiences and conclusions. Due to this risk, in particular, I find it important to bracket out my personal narratives in conducting the narrative analysis. This is so that I am able to compare and contrast the influence of my perspectives on the interpretation of data. With this choice of methodology, I aim to gain the aforementioned benefits of insidership while minimizing the possibility of it jeopardising the scientific integrity of the study.

5.4 Ethical considerations

Consent and confidentiality are the foremost concerns when conducting an ethical interview. Participants must be informed about the research they are participating in, its aim and what is expected of them. This implies that not only will the relevant information be provided, but that it is provided in a way that is comprehensible to the participant (Scheyvens, 2014, pp.164-168). Informed consent is imperative to protect the self-determination of participants, by providing all that is necessary for them to know in order to make an informed decision as to whether or not they desire to participate in the study.

In addition to informed consent, I consider reaffirming consent as an important method to best ensure the consensuality of the research throughout the process (Allmark et al. 2009). In order to reaffirm the participants' consent, they are reminded at multiple stages throughout the interview of their rights to withdraw without consequences. Reaffirming consent helps ensure that the participant is continuing the study out of their own desire, instead of a pressure created by their initial consent. This is particularly important in studies that are sensitive or may pose a risk to the participants' mental or physical safety despite precautions (Allmark et al. 2009). Not only do the interviews conducted in this study bring about difficult emotions, but participants may also wish to not discuss the topic for fear of their safety or freedoms being jeopardized. Due to this, it is also imperative to provide participants with a detailed description of what steps are taken to assure confidentiality and the safeguarding of the interview data. In addition to the ethical aspects discussed, assuring confidentiality and reaffirming consent serves to establish a better relationship and rapport between the interviewer and interviewee.

The well-being of the participants should always be the priority in research. Therefore, when conducting in-depth interviews on sensitive subjects, it is necessary to consider whether the interview questions may cause distress that the researcher is not equipped to mitigate (Allmark et al. 2014). For this purpose, I found it necessary to inform the participants of the

kinds of questions that will be asked so as to allow them to self-assess their emotional capacity to participate in the research. Research subjects were also informed of their rights to avoid certain questions or topics with no questions asked. Understandably, however, participants may not feel comfortable with asserting such boundaries in the interview setting, due to which I attempted to direct the interview away from topics that seem too distressing, as well as ending the interview on a rather positive note (Allmark et al. 2009).

6. Analysis

In this section, I present my findings from the seven conducted interviews and illuminate the ways in which the findings can be interpreted in light of the previously outlined conceptual framework. I bring forth the most central themes that arose from the interviewees' accounts and seek to draw connections between how the common themes reflect or are explained by the theoretical concepts laid out in the previous section and illustrate in practice the utility of my analytical point of view in scrutinizing the biographies of immigrant individuals. Henceforth I present the implications of the connections drawn and suggestions for further research.

6.1 Constructions of homeland

Central to the participants' narratives of belonging was the clear distinction they presented between Soviet Russia and modern-day Russia. All of the participants, being born and brought up in Soviet Russia and migrating to Finland during or shortly after the fall of the USSR, emphasized the discrepancy between the Russia they knew in their youth and the Russia they see today. When describing their initial move to Finland and feelings of homesickness, many of the participants explained to me that the rapid changes that they witnessed in Russia after leaving made their relationship with "home" difficult. Participants referred to the large-scale political and economic restructuring as well as societal shifts that Russia faced in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet regime. One participant, Maria, in describing what returning to Russia after moving has been like for her, said:

Russia and modern-day Russia are two completely different things. Sometimes I feel like everyone has gone completely insane, all of the values we used to be taught have been forgotten and this idea of the motherland has gone completely wrong. They used to teach us to be honest,

diligent and respect others around us but now it's all money money money, you can override all of that with money. It is a very dangerous thing. (All excerpts translated by author)

Other participants expressed similar experiences of discomfort when they visited Russia. They explained that they do not feel that what Russia is today represents their memory of their homeland. Alisa, 58, who moved to Finland prior to the eventual fall of the USSR, explained that this change was when she began feeling like an outsider. Many of the respondents, instead of saying that they do not feel represented by modern-day Russia, understood these shifts as their homeland ceasing to exist. Yulia explained that an integral part of her experience was that she no longer felt that she could speak on matters that concerned Russia, due to how much the country had departed from what she knew. She felt that she was not able to answer many of the questions that were asked of her about Russia, and felt that she had lost a kind of insidership. Thus she was left not feeling like an insider in both Russia and Finland. Of course, part of these experiences can be explained by the interviewees being physically removed from the Russian context, but only one of the interviewees saw this change as having to do with her personal perspective. All other participants framed the experiences as changes in the country.

This distinction the informants made between Soviet and post-Soviet Russia surfaced additionally in discussions of their involvement with other Russian immigrants and diasporic organizations. The common story in the interviews was that they had at some point in their lives in Finland stumbled across activities organized by diasporic associations, but were not able to relate to the other attendees. Yulia explained that many of the other immigrants she met had migrated to Finland very recently, and she felt that they had no common ground to stand on, nothing in common apart from language. As Yulia put it “I do not know their Russia”. What I found in these interviews suggests that despite having a homeland to associate with, the informants experienced their attachments to their homeland as attachments to the USSR, a nation that as such no longer exists. Such a distinction was made in Brown’s (2011) research in which she describes the disparate experiences of Polish post-accession and post-war migrants as “being” and “longing”. While recent Russian emigrants attach themselves to modern-day Russia, its people and practices, the participants of this study attached themselves to a Russia recreated in their memories through what Brown (2011) dubbed “restorative nostalgia”. In this sense, as suggested by the described inability of the participants to attach their identity meaningfully to the Russian Federation, their diasporic experience - or attachment to a homeland - lacks a home

outside of the restorative nostalgia that takes place in the diaspora. In other words, while the Russia the participants long for does not exist physically, it is recreated as an imagined nation in their collective memory.

Others felt that many of the older Russians did not share a similar outlook on life with them. Daria felt that the people she met were attached to Russia in a way that she was not. Sofiya purposefully attempted to include herself in diasporic communities, but quickly found that she did not feel at home and that she had a very different understanding of being Russian in Finland. Darya and Sofiya felt in their interactions with such people that they valued different things about Finland and Russia respectively, and shared a very different outlook on how one should live within the Finnish society. Both described in detail how they felt that the people they encountered were attached to an idea of Russian imperialism and superiority, and treated their existence outside of Russia as an opportunity to spread a sophisticated, enlightening Russian culture. Neither of the women subscribed to this standpoint, contributing to a lack of commonality and subsequently the sense of not belonging together. This is in support of Anthias' (2002) reasoning that belonging is experienced when values, practices and relations are shared between individuals. Further clarity can be found by referring to Pfaff-Czarnecka's (2013) building on Anthias' (2002) argument. Common identifiers such as language, ethnicity and religion do not necessarily facilitate a sense of belonging together. As seen in the case of the Polish diaspora, shared experiences, knowledge, meanings and cognitive assumptions are significant contributors to such an experience.

Here it is important to note Pfaff-Czarnecka's (2013), emphasis on the negotiation that takes place surrounding bounded collectivities such as diasporic organisations. The interviewees' experience encapsulates how entry to bounded social groupings is not granted based on attributes such as birthplace. "Membership" in such social spaces is actively sought for and contested. This can be seen in how the participants do not gain access to these social spaces passively, but to reap the benefits of inclusion would have to contribute to mutuality and display loyalties among other things. Many participants stated that they did not feel a need to participate in associations or to purposefully seek out other Russians to engage with. In fact, most of the participants found it a strange thought. They attributed this to being satisfied with their non-Russian social networks and the few Russian friends they had since moving. As will be discussed in detail in the

forthcoming sections, the commonality and mutuality the participants expressed had little to do with nationality.

6.2 Transcending boundaries

The individuals interviewed in this study were found to have established their social connections along the parameters of a shared experience of belonging and a similar way to view the world. Participants emphasized that the connections they have formed with friends of a common background were not so much built on nationality, but similarities in how they have negotiated their attachments in the multiple social and cultural worlds that they exist in. When asked about what exactly they had in common with the people they tend to gravitate to, it was revealed that the vast majority of respondents built connections around a shared outlook on the world and engagement or interest in various global social issues. Often these communities would include other people who themselves had constructed their identity through crossing multiple national, cultural, religious and social boundaries. This is reflected in Abdelhady's (2008) research on the Lebanese diaspora in which she finds that although migrants displayed interest in Lebanese social and political affairs, such interest was underscored by a belief in universal matters of equality and rights. Vera described her social connections:

My solidarity towards Russians does not stem from nationality but from values and outlook on life. I don't draw boundaries according to whether you're Polish, French, anything. It depends on how we experience life as people. This whole thing of sticking together as Russians is not for me.

As Vera's statement suggests, her experience is not best described through any geographically rooted sense of belonging. The social navigation and negotiation of varied life-worlds and their social relativity (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013), come back into the picture. The statement illustrates how an individual's translocational positionality can create forms of identification that differ significantly from traditional solidarities. Vera's experience as an Ingrian return migrant among other experiences grant her a unique constellation of social collectivities to navigate. As stated by Pfaff-Czarnecka (2013), individuals possess the capacity to switch between bounded collectivities and thus stress different boundaries. Although Vera may share the previously mentioned knowledge, practices and relations with the majority of Russians in Finland, her belonging is not assigned based on these factors. Belonging as such is not passively formed based on the number and prominence of commonality, rather, migrants are active social agents

engaging in more or less deliberate navigation of their life-worlds. It is to be noted that the social structures in relation to which belonging is negotiated are not devoid of power imbalances and hierarchies. Thus an individual may, but will not always, for instance, make deliberate choices in their navigation based on social cost-benefit assessments (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013; Anthias, 2002).

6.2.1 Language

In fact, all participants described their social circles as including people from all kinds of different nationalities and backgrounds. Although the interviewees claimed to not have a need for including themselves in diasporic associations, many did experience a yearning for speaking Russian. Anastasia explained that although she communicates in Finnish and English effortlessly, speaking Russian allows her to communicate her inner world more accurately. She added that she feels that she is her most genuine self when she communicates in Russian. Other participants mentioned similar attitudes towards the Russian language and felt that it was important for them to pass down the language to their children. Language was found to be a meaningful identifier to the interviewees, and they placed considerable significance on the emotion that it carries. Thus the Russian language surfaced as one of the parameters along which they created narratives of collectivity. In parallel to how Vera characterized her friendships in the above paragraph, many of the interviewees said to have Russian-*speaking* friends rather than Russian friends. Some of their social ties were formed around a common language, which was revealed to be a much more defining factor in the informants' identities than nationality. These social circles would include Russian speaking Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Estonians, and Belarusians and so on as much as they would include Russians. When discussing language as a unifying factor, the participants' narratives resembled that of diasporic self-awareness much more than when we discussed Russia as a bounded state. The informants would also commonly keep referring to themselves and their communities as Russian-speaking rather than Russian to the extent that the two categories seemed to at times become entirely interchangeable. Rarely if at all would participants use the collective “we” when discussing Russian nationals in Finland. This was however much more common when discussing Russian speakers in Finland. This was very conveniently illustrated in practice when one interviewee turned out to be a Russian speaking Lithuanian (brought up before Lithuania's independence). This interviewee was found through a previous participant, who was

fully aware of the demographic the study targets. The anecdote exemplifies first how the informants in this study constructed their identity along the lines of language more so than nationality, and second how they attach their sense of belonging to the USSR over the Russian Federation. I infer that language transcends nationality, and to the interviewees serves as a parameter of their belonging separate from any nationalist notions. The diasporic imagination (Sökefeld, 2006) then, in this case, concerns a community of Russophones.

6.2.2 Complexity

A majority of the informants revealed that negotiating their identity parallel to multiple cultures, nationalities and ethnicities was nothing new to them. At the very start of my interview with Alisa, as I was explaining the research, she asked how I define “Russian” in the study. She explained that some people have argued that she is not Russian. Alisa was born and raised in Soviet Russia, her father was Ukrainian and her mother was Finnish. She explained how the idea of belonging has been a complicated matter to her since childhood.

I had to seek that complete identity, you know, because they wouldn't quite take me as one of their own - not in the USSR and not in Finland. In the USSR they would always remember that I have a foreign mother, and would regard me with a kind of reservation. The Soviet Union was after all quite a closed-off society. In Finland on the other hand, I was a Russky. The fact that I was a little bit of an outsider everywhere bothered me then.

This quote by Alisa illustrates the negotiated nature of identification processes. It suggests that belonging is in fact a process and something to be actively constructed and contested in relation to the outside world (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2020). Alisa often felt that her belonging was characterised by being “the other” anywhere she went. She did however add that later in life she came to terms with her complex experiences with belonging, and explained to me that she came to understand this complexity as an asset that provided her with a unique outlook on the world around her. The same kind of appreciation of a globalized sense of belonging was observed in the research of Abdelhady (2011, pp. 41-88) and Karageozian (in Sigona et al. 2015 p.72) where they found that individuals do not always regard a cosmopolitan frame of existence as a lack of belonging. Other participants had diverse backgrounds, many of who have roots in Ukraine and other surrounding countries. One interviewee was an Ingrian repatriate, which she felt affected

her sense of belonging even during her youth in the USSR similarly to the return migrants discussed previously. Participants described a collection of national, ethnic, religious and linguistic influences they felt comprised the context in which they negotiated their sense of belonging and identity. However, rather than seeing their identity as a pie chart of the nations and collectivities the interviewees had crossed, while also not “giving up” aspects of the identifiers important to them for an idealised kind of integration, the range of influences interviewees described made up a cosmopolitan sense of belonging.

Alisa’s experience demonstrates how belonging is constructed outside of geographical boundaries. As is discussed in the theoretical framework, national identity and belonging may at times be a lens which stops us from exploring the full range of identity formation that goes beyond attachments to man-made categories. For Alisa, her description suggests that her identity does not reside partly in Russia and partly in Finland, but rather outside of such a dichotomy. To constrain Alisa’s identity to the two countries is to deny the complexity of her experience in navigating her belonging.

As Alisa explained, central to many of the respondents’ experiences was not being Russian, but being “the other”. This is reflected in how many participants told me that they feel that their experience is more defined by being an immigrant than being Russian. Many migrants, regardless of origin, shared experiences of othering and “other” belonging - not fully anywhere definable. “Otherness” for the participants in this study arose as the foremost defining experience. Migrants, as suggested by Scholte (1996) may feel belonging in the space that is left beyond insidership, they may locate themselves in the boundless social space beyond spatial and temporal movements. This space I argue is exactly what I talk about when I talk about the “diasporic experience”. Sub-national ways of belonging, as brought forth previously, may thus be seen as the primary state of orientation of many migrants. This description of the participants’ sub-local identification illuminates the weaknesses of transnational approaches to belonging. Transnationalism, as previously argued, fixes the analysis to nation-states even in analysing migration. Migrants are seen as simultaneously being rooted in and crossing nation-states, which in the light of the findings fails to encompass the nature of migrants belonging (Abdelhady, 2006). As Brubaker (2010) stresses, transnationalism, as it is understood in contemporary politics of belonging, does not transcend statist conceptions of belonging but rather adapts the nation-state model in what he calls “transborder nationalism”. As can be understood from

Brubaker's choice of words, transnationalism allows us to understand the mobility of migrants but fails to move the analysis to a post-national framework that would allow us to better understand what Alisa means in her statement. In Salazar's (2021) view, cosmopolitanism involves a process of becoming. This becoming occurs through an openness toward difference and contradictions which comprise the attraction of "otherness". Alisa in her interview spoke of "seeking" and "becoming" speaking directly to Salazar's "cosmopolitanisation".

The experience of otherness described by my participants is likely perpetuated by the lack of a home nation, further situating their sense of belonging beyond national borders. When I asked Yulia what she answers when she is asked where she is from, she said:

I know what kind of impression I will give people if I tell them that I am Russian, and that impression is not something I feel represents me. It's not that I am afraid of that part of my history, or afraid of stereotypes. I just cannot say that it is a *part* of my identity. I no longer feel that I am Russian, but I recognize that I will never feel Finnish either.

Yulia specified that she does not mean that nothing about Russia has influenced her identity. She rather wanted to express that she cannot draw boundaries between what is Russian and what is not, her identity is as she put it "just me". The critique of transnationalism is further exemplified here, as Yulia illustrates that her sense of belonging cannot be defined by shared loyalties between the societies she interacts with. When we discussed her notion of home, Vera told me that when she travels to Russia she says that she is going home, and when she is returning to Finland she says she is going home. Vera felt she was unable to create any distinctions in her sense of belonging. Thus I find that the participants do not shift their loyalties back and forth between countries, as implied in a transnational approach, but their sense of loyalty is complex while at the same time simultaneous (Abdelhady, 2006).

6.3 War and diaspora

6.3.1 Attachments

The Russo-Ukrainian war, for some now and for others in 2014, was an exacerbating factor in terms of their disconnection from Russia as a state for many. When asked about their personal experience, participants told me that the war has been very damaging to their relationships with their loved ones in Russia. Those who did not have this experience expressed feeling very lucky

to share a similar view on the conflict with their family and friends and told me that the vast majority of their Russian friends have struggled greatly with their personal relationships in Russia. The participants in this study felt strongly about the conflict. Their disapproval of the Russian invasion caused friction in their interactions with many of those still in Russia. Maria said about the matter:

It's very tough to see friendships that I have had for 40 years wither because of disagreements. I thought for a long time that we were on the same wavelength, which is the foundation of your relationships you know, but now I see that that has not been true for a long time.

Maria said that they try to avoid discussing the topic because they know it will lead to a fight, but even so, knowing that her friends approve of something that is in such stark contrast to her values eats away at her relationships. She adds however that she tries to find some kind of forgiveness towards her close ones, she understands that propaganda is doing its job and it is difficult to think independently when impartial information is so scant. Yulia has a similar comment:

I feel like I have been robbed of the ability to connect with my close ones back in Russia, robbed of the ability to share my thoughts and feelings. And that has been more damaging to my relationships than what I could have ever imagined.

Even though Yulia said that she already knew there were things she disagreed on with her family in Russia, the past months have weighed surprisingly heavy on her. According to many of the interviewees, these relationships they have with family and friends in Russia are their last connections to Russia that keep them visiting and somewhat engaged. Anastasia told me that she had decided it is more important to openly show her solidarity with Ukraine by donating, housing refugees, protesting and speaking on the matter publicly than it is for her to ensure being able to visit Russia safely. Many other participants felt unsure about being vocal about their solidarity in terms of traceable forms of support to Ukraine. Yulia felt that as she is already a citizen of what Russia has labelled a "hostile state", not keeping her head down may be detrimental to her ties to Russia in terms of property and applying for a visa among other things. Sofiya told me that those who have vulnerable close ones in Russia do not have the opportunity to risk their ability to travel to Russia. However, some of the participants said that they have been

very active on social media in terms of expressing their opinions, much of which was engaging in debates in Facebook groups geared toward Russians in Finland.

6.3.2 Diasporisation

Some of the participants stated that they no longer consume Russian media and their engagement with those in Russia has become limited. Although the participants used words such as “them” instead of “we” in talking about those who remained in Russia throughout the interview, this positioning became significantly more emphasized when the war was being discussed. In some interviews, participants mentioned that during the last months they had abandoned any dreams they might have had of returning. Although none of the participants said to have had actual plans to return apart from recently after moving to Finland, some did express that they did wish that Russia would one day become a place in which they could imagine living. The war for them cemented the doubt that Russia might never be a place they would feel at home at.

In contrast, nearly all of the participants told me that they had become more involved than they had been in decades with the other Russians in Finland. As Yulia eloquently put it “Many of us have lost our friends and family in Russia, which is a powerful factor that unites us who have left”. Yulia too, despite saying that she had never felt a need to engage with Russians in Finland purposefully, started attending meetings that were organized as a kind of support group with those Russian-speaking people who found these times difficult. Anastasia who organises some of these meetings told me that she has observed a very urgent need for people to connect in this way, and the meetings have indeed attracted many new participants.

For many of my respondents, their experience as a Russian in Finland had been rather individualistic. They often talked of themselves separately from other Russians in Finland, and would rarely refer to themselves as part of the Russian community. Participants did however indicate that there was such a thing as a Russian diaspora in Finland but did not tend to relate to it. It was clear that the informants felt themselves to be outliers outside of the Russian diaspora. For some, the experience of engaging with the diaspora has awakened new perspectives on the Russian diasporic community. Yulia explained that she was surprised at how Russians around the world had quickly come together as one voice. She referred here to the many protests in Europe organized by Russian emigrants to express their solidarity with Ukraine, even going so far as creating a remake of the Russian flag to symbolise the resistance of Russians against the regime.

This observation inspired Yulia to reach out to the Russians she knew in Finland and seek out a space to connect. Sofiya said that she had not been aware of how many Russians there were in Finland who had a similar outlook on their belonging and diasporic experience. These findings resemble discussions of critical events and the “diasporic turn” (Demmers, 2007) presented previously in relation to homeland conflict. Although participants were not necessarily involved in activism, processes of mobilisation could be argued to be rising their head.

What was clear in all of the interviews was that the participants in this study had done a great deal of reflecting on their identity and sense of belonging in these recent months. The contrast between the stories I was told from before the 2022 invasion (for some 2014) and the recent stories was at times rather stark, and it was clear that many of the participants were still in the process of exploring how the different narratives they put out in the interviews intertwined. The narrative that was described to me originally was one of full immersion in the Finnish society and how it is impossible to relate to “the other Russians”. Perhaps this narrative had been rooted in a very literal understanding of national identity and diasporas. The interviewees, as is still relatively common in diaspora studies, rooted the concept of a diaspora into national boundaries and identity. Their insisting that they are *not* part of the diaspora seems to stem from the fact that they feel their experience cannot be constrained to that of “Russian in Finland”. Participants intellectualised their experiences by attempting to understand the complexity of their diasporic experience as somehow belonging in one of the two states, or perhaps partly in each state, but encountered difficulty constructing such a narrative.

Between such statements, as is illustrated by the various quotes raised in this section, a different picture began to unfold. Participants narrated their belonging along multiple axes of difference, and rather than describing what they are and where they belong, they felt more secure in explaining what they are *not* and where they do *not* belong. More importantly, the interviews seem to suggest that informants are themselves beginning to understand their identity beyond the mould that traditional national identity provides for them. Similarly to what Askland (2014) found in her research on the East Timorese, conflict increased awareness of the participants positionality in the translocal, post-national space. Furthermore, the war in Ukraine seemed to have awakened a kind of diasporic self-awareness, although not necessarily in the traditional sense. Conflict, while increasing the gap between the diaspora and Russia, served to unify Russian speaking individuals who found mutuality in a cosmopolitan way of belonging. Hence, I

infer that conflict has the capacity to bring about new modes of imagination both in terms of cosmopolitan orientation and diasporisation. Perhaps then, as is suggested by the literature cited in this study, the use of diaspora as a concept that is characterised by its two-way attachments to nation-states, is not a favourable way to understand identification processes. If we are to understand diaspora as it is conceptualised in a cosmopolitan framework, we can observe that what characterizes the diasporic experience of the individuals in this study is the complexity of their attachments and belonging, and their experience of “otherness”.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this study has been to illustrate how belonging, diaspora and cosmopolitanism intersect in the context of conflict in this case study. Through narrative analysis of participants’ personal narratives, I have found that the war between Russia and Ukraine has given way to new modes of imagination when it comes to participants’ sense of belonging. I argue that in contributing to the deterritorialisation of participants’ identities, the conflict has awakened self-awareness of the migrants’ post-national understandings of their belonging. Participants found commonality and mutuality not in nationality, but in language, values, and non-traditional solidarities. This illustrated how processes of identification transcend the level of the nation-state, and how migrants’ experiences were found to be better understood within a cosmopolitan frame of reference. The biographies of the participants in this study show how belonging is not only based on shared values, experience, knowledge, practices, and attachments but is simultaneously an actively negotiated process. The participants in this study demonstrate how individuals are not passively subjected to a certain fixed identity, but construct their belonging along multiple axes of sameness and difference.

From the participants’ narratives, it was evident that the conflict had driven their identities into crisis and illuminated the problematic aspects of fitting one’s belonging into a landscape divided by nations. Messaging on the war had made the individuals reflect on what the significance of nationality for them was. As participants saw their land of origin as no longer existing, it was found that nationality for them was not a distinction that they negotiated their belonging in reference to. Rather, they located their belonging in the space beyond dichotomies such as home state and host state. This space, I find to be delineated by experiences of “otherness” and difference. These findings thus illustrate the utility of moving past

conceptualising the existence of diasporas as three-dimensional spatial loyalties, as well as the benefit in using the intersection of diaspora and conflict to gather insight on social navigation of translocational positionality.

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