The unexpected place: Brexit referendum and the disruptions to translocal place-making among Finns in the UK

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As EU citizens and a 'middling' migrant group in the UK, Finns have been able to exercise a relatively limitless existence in Britain. However, this freedom became threatened after the Brexit referendum. Through a digital ethnographic approach, this paper shows that the result of the Brexit referendum turned Finns' translocal place-making in the UK from being practiced by social bodies to being negotiated by political bodies and contributes to literature about translocal place-making as receptive to disruptions. The referendum disrupted Finns' translocal place-making processes on personal and societal levels, cutting through both active, embodied processes in the UK and virtual, imagined processes in Finland. The referendum imposed newly experienced otherness and conditionality to the ability to participate in the British society. It did, however, also create translocal attachments towards both the UK and Finland. Through its disruptive nature, the event of the Brexit vote embedded itself in the future place-making orientations and narratives of the Finns in the UK, potentially having an impact on their future translocal trajectories and imaginaries.

Keywords: Brexit, place-making, translocal, Finland, UK, disruption

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Introduction

After the 23rd June 2016 referendum that indicated the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union (EU), a set of uncertainties has emerged, cutting through people's everyday lives. Brexit, as the occurrence has become known as, threw the problematics related to place-making into the epicentres of people's everyday – for both British citizens and UK's many migrant groups. Thus, Brexit "circulates and takes on meaning and force in everyday life" (Anderson & Wilson 2018, 292). Due to the centrality of the notions of place and place-making in the Brexit-related discourses, for example, Finlay and colleagues (2019) have called for discussion about Brexit through the lens of place-making and ethnographic research. Scholars (e.g. Favell *et al.* 2017) have also called for more studies into the translocal experiences of middling migrants[1] from developed countries. There is also a need for more research into the ways translocal place-making of such groups is subjected to disruptions due to sudden societal changes in one situated locale and the subsequent impact across regional and national, and even global scales.

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This paper contributes to these needs by discussing Brexit and its disruptive effects on translocal migrants' everyday by addressing Finns, a middling migrant group in the UK. Through applying a translocal perspective to place-making and conceptualising the Brexit referendum as a disruption to it, this paper addresses the following question: *How did the Brexit referendum impact Finns' translocal place-making in the UK?* The focus of this paper is on the first two weeks in the aftermath of the vote, during which reactions to the referendum were voiced within a Facebook discussion group.

Place-making has been discussed as being the key in "understanding the situation that can motivate and enable a collective response" especially in occurrences of political nature (Pierce *et al.* 2011, 55). The types of reactions people have to major changes in the environmental, societal and political circumstances can also be seen as part of place-making (Vanclay 2008). I argue that understanding the locally experienced everydays is the key in understanding the impacts of larger scale phenomena, such as the impact of the Brexit vote, and adding a translocal viewpoint to place-making further enhances this understanding.

Translocal place-making has gained interest as a way of understanding migrants' experiences. While transnationalism is a widely applied conceptualisation to migration, it has lacked a more local-focused lens. Translocality is seen as a means to introduce a way to offer more insights into the embodied, agency-oriented subjective contexts of migrant place-making (e.g. Brickell & Datta 2011). In this paper, 'translocal' is discussed as co-presences: simultaneously participated, maintained and negotiated socio-economic, cultural and political processes in multiple localities, situated in several countries (e.g. Brickell & Datta 2011). Translocal place-making is, hence, considered as a process where an individual or a group, in managing several co-presences between localities, gains and creates, iteratively, several sets of place-specific understanding(s) and cultural and social capitals and negotiates place-specific everyday positionalities, such as status, rights, citizenship, identity, home and belonging (e.g. Longhurst *et al.* 2009; Thompson 2017). These positionalities are the core of translocal place-making and the development of translocal senses of place. Hence, the effects of the Brexit vote were felt through these positionalities, as will be discussed later.

Translocal place-making can be understood through four viewpoints. Firstly, it is processual in nature and reflects the time-space trajectories of migrants. Massey (2005, 141) describes places "temporary constellations", arguing that places are, in fact, transient due to the amount of changes that take place in the everyday lives of people. The problematics of continuities and discontinuities of places are, thus, a central theme in translocal place-making (e.g. Cloke & Conradson 2018; Datta 2008; Thompson 2017). Secondly, it is characterised by negotiations of power that manifests itself within the subjectivities of domestic spaces, everyday activity spaces and the imagined everydays of distantly maintained co-presences (Brickell & Datta 2011; Chacko 2011). Hence, translocal place-making is a balancing act between re-enacting one's culture of origin and creating place-specific, meaningful behaviours. Consequently, translocal place-making produces competing narratives of power (Brickell & Datta 2011) in terms of for instance identity, home, citizenship, and belonging by stretching the everyday positionalities from one place of identification to multiple sites of identifications (Oakes & Schein 2006). Thirdly, translocal place-making is framed by material and symbolic forms of mobility: physical travelling within and between localities across local, regional and national scales, participating in flows and networks (e.g. McKay 2006; Luedicke 2015), imaginaries of personal, societal and political links between several places, and the maintenance of these imaginaries through, for example, subjective choices of cultural expressions and consumptions (e.g. Main & Sandoval 2015). Finally, it is an intense form of place-making due to the multiplicities related to it. Translocal place-making multiplies the material and symbolic resources that link places together (Oakes & Schein 2006, 21) and the requirements for negotiating, maintaining and creating of everyday practises, performances, geographical imaginaries and emotional spaces (e.g. Daskalaki *et al.* 2016).

I argue that translocal place-making, in its complexity, is exposed to frictions either through migrants' subjective choices or through the specific place-imposed positionalities that migrants have negotiated and assumed through their place-making practises. Oakes and Schein (2006, 20) describe translocality as "deliberately confusing" the idea of local. By employing the concept of 'disruption' to translocal place-making, this study is able to show the impact of the Brexit vote on it. This paper adopts the view that 'disruption' is a situated friction in spacetime that triggers a set of re-negotiations within place-

specific positionalities. However, place-making is not stopped by disruptions, but faced with a shift in power relations between places and people, forcing new behaviours and new imaginaries of places.

What emerges from the findings of this study is the complex landscape of shifting power relations between people and place, and the sense of bewilderment towards the UK that will be embedded in the personal and collective narratives and trajectories of people. Virdee and McGeever (2018) have described Brexit as an 'emergency' – it is, hence, easy to understand how, from translocal migrants' place-making point of view, the disruptive effects of Brexit are vast.

The paper begins by discussing translocal place-making and Brexit through the conceptualisation of 'disruption' and proceeds to introduce the background of Finns in the UK and the study's methodology. I then address the specific disruptions to the Finns' translocal place-making in the context of the referendum. The paper shows how the result caused overall disruption in a multitude of personal, professional and societal positionalities in the Finns' translocal lives. These disruptions emerged through three main discourses in the data: a) positioning self and others, b) staying-leaving, and c) continuity-discontinuity.

Translocal place-making, Brexit and the geographies of disruption

Through turning points in one's life, places become markers for changes. Some of these defining moments are perceived in such a magnitude that they change one's perception of and subsequently, the relationship with places. These changes are often interpreted as disruptions: upsetting changes in people's place attachments due to transformations in people, processes, or place (Brown & Perkins 1992), the "loss of normal" (Fried 1963, 232), and the "impact of change" (Devine-Wright & Howes 2010, 272). Changes shatter routines, relationships, expectations and behaviours and impact the sense of continuity (Fried 1963). Therefore, disruptions threaten self-definitions and the sense of stability and impact multiple scales in peoples' lives – from domestic to local, regional and global (Brown & Perkins 1992). Disruptions are also tied to temporality – they alter the understanding of the time before, during, and after the change, impacting the interpretations of past, present, and future (Fried 1963; Brown & Perkins 1992).

Discussion on disruptions to translocal place-making has been conceptually diverse and often approached as representing temporal and emotional changes simultaneously: abrupt alterations in places as a result of, for example, environmental hazards (e.g. Call *et al.* 2017), or as gradually evolving transformations in either the physical or imaginary spaces as the result of affected access to places. Disruptions due to, for instance forced or voluntary relocation have been discussed as 'displacements' (e.g. Milligan 2003), whereas decay to translocal spaces due to their mutability have been conceptualised as 'discontinuity' (e.g Peth *et al.* 2018). Negotiating the moral economics of several identities and co-presences that require balancing between observing old and producing new cultural capitals have been discussed as 'ruptures' (e.g. Allard & Caidi 2018). Others have approached disruptions through the concepts of belonging (e.g. Ranta & Nancheva 2019), discussing the effects of the Brexit vote on EU nationals' sense of belonging, 'exclusion', (e.g. Landy & Bautès 2013), in their piece about being part of social networks that connect translocal spaces, 'detachment' (e.g. Walsh 2006), discussing a trajectory between the UK and Dubai, 'otherness' (e.g. Datta 2008), in her work about Polish workers in the UK, and 'disconnections' in the context of Brexit and EU-nationals' encounters of hostility in a previously familiar setting (e.g. Guma & Dafydd Jones 2019).

Thompson and Reynolds (2019, 2) have pointed out that through conceptualising a particular change as a 'disruption', it is possible to "accommodate and illuminate the messiness and complexity of reality". I argue that considering the first two weeks of the reactions to the result of the Brexit vote through conceptualising them as 'disruptive', where they are understood as interrupting the processes in place-making, enables a deeper "interpretation of situated experiences and sense-making" (Thompson & Reynolds 2019, 2).

The Brexit referendum's disruptive effects on translocal place-making can be seen in the multitude of the reactions they generated while finding their way through multiple scales in everyday positionalities, power relations, the material and symbolic mobilities and the continuities and discontinuities of places, highlighting the multiplicity of translocal place-making and its receptivity for

disruptions. Firstly, the result cut through everyday lives on different scales: domestic spaces, everyday mundane activity spaces, neighbourhoods, regions, and even nations. Brexit forced people to encounter the portrayals of populist movements and the energies that have surfaced from the underlying national narratives of for example (post)colonialism through the prism of belonging, regions and neighbourhoods (e.g. Botterill & Hancock 2019; Guma & Dafydd Jones 2019; Ranta & Nancheva 2019). Place-making in post-referendum Britain has been subjected to questionings through for example the definitions of home (e.g. Rzepnikowska 2019), re-evaluations of localities and regions from their voting preferences' point of view (e.g. Finlay *et al.* 2019), the concepts of 'race', 'foreigner' and 'immigrant', (e.g. Rogaly 2019), power divisions (Lulle *et al.* 2019), mobilities and relocations (e.g. Burrell & Badcock 2017) and division of regional and cultural identities (e.g. Hobolt 2016).

Secondly, the result challenged existing power relations (e.g. Anderson & Wilson 2018, 291). Power relations between migrants and the spaces they operate, both physical and virtual, are simultaneously about power and powerlessness (Brickell & Datta 2011, 26), as translocal place-making includes migrants both applying agency on their localities through difference, and producing "power, meaning and new identities" (Main & Sandoval 2015, 73). Place-making has become a dividing power in the Brexit debate (e.g. Anderson & Wilson 2018; Finlay *et al.* 2018). The setting echoes Massey's (2009) conceptualisation of 'power-geometry': several places in the UK could be seen as infused with power – the political and social tapestry in for example areas with the most Leave-voters suddenly appeared as having gained enormous influential power. Massey's theorisation (2009, 22) suggests that power has spatiality – it can be seen as spreading unevenly, highlighting inequalities. It can be argued that the Brexit debate is producing power as an unequally spreading social capacity that keeps creating divisions across physical and cultural spatialities, creating 'competing discourses of power' (Brickell & Datta 2011) within everyday lives – related to both 'us and others' and 'us as migrants 'here' versus us as citizens 'there'. Power-geometries are, hence, "coupled and shaped through migrant subjectivities and migrants' unequal positioning in time and space" (Lulle *et al.* 2019, 9).

Furthermore, it is important to understand that there are power inequalities between migrants in terms of the abilities to access the place-specific capital, participate in or create meaningful re-enactment practises, (im)mobilities or new translocally situated behaviours. Those who are less able to maintain physical translocal mobility, for example, rely increasingly on virtual communication and translocal imaginaries. This imbalance between embodied and imagined translocal practises has a strong impact of the translocal place-making orientations between different migrant groups. The Brexit vote, in pushing for the re-negotiations of translocal practises, further highlighted these inequalities by presenting questions related to the future ability to be mobile across the EU and having to navigate for instance the practicalities related to residence status.

Thirdly, the referendum forced translocal migrant groups into re-considering the continuities of their co-presences in several places, shaking their temporal, spatial, material and symbolic continuities. Pierce, Martin and Murphy (2011, 59) point out that the durability of places can be wiped away by for example an evolving political discourse. In the turbulence caused by the Brexit referendum, this has become significantly visible: the existing translocal place-making practises of many migrant groups were facing being pushed back by the newly justified practises of other groups, both other migrant groups' and those of British citizens'. As for example Gill (2010) has discussed, new migrants' entering into the existing translocal spaces of other groups (either physical or imagined) can disrupt other groups' place-making by 'pasting over' the existing, already negotiated practises.

Peth, Sterly and Sakdapolrak (2018) note that the continuity of translocal everyday practises that are maintaining their translocal specificity are subjected to decay due to changes in translocal practises, especially related to mobility and subsequent connectedness. In a case of changes in societal atmosphere, new and old migrants' experiences and preferences related to their translocal practises change, and specific translocal spaces fade away, transforming translocal spaces to reflect different narratives and trajectories. Connerton (1989, 6), in his discussion about social memory, speaks about how changes in the status quo could be seen as the everyday being "thrown out of the continuity of the temporal order". This reflects the aftermath of the Brexit referendum.

Understanding Finns in the UK

Research on Finns in the UK has addressed mainly labour market (especially nurses) and education. Recently, focus has been on Finnish highly-skilled labour and migrant cultural capital (e.g. Koikkalainen 2013a, 2013b; 2019). However, Finns remain an under-researched 'hidden' population (Gawlewicz & Sotkasiira 2020). Finns' settlement experiences in the UK from place-making point of view is not extensive in scholarly discussion, despite the UK being in the top five of Finns' relocation countries since the 1980s and the second most popular (after Sweden) during 2000s (Korkiasaari & Söderling 2003). In 2014, Estonia pushed the UK down to third most popular destinations of Finns moving abroad (Statistics Finland 2020). There are over 21,000 Finns living in the UK, the majority residing in the Greater London area (Eurostat 2020; Embassy of Finland, London 2020).

Even before Finland joined the European Economic Area in 1994 and the EU in 1995, it was possible for Finns to settle in the UK by obtaining Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) as a result of having been working or studying in the UK (for which one needed a work permit/student status) or due to a relationship with a British citizen or someone with a settled status (e.g. Hansen 2000). The increased freedom of mobility brought by Finland's EU membership, however, together with study- and work possibilities, intercultural relationships and the sense of adventure have contributed to many Finns' decision to relocate to the UK (e.g. Koikkalainen 2019). The majority of Finns who have moved to the UK from Finland has been women. Possible reasons include women being more mobile due to work possibilities in female-dominated fields such as health care and as au pairs (Björklund & Koivukangas 2008). The gender balance is also visible in the research data, with the majority of the discussants being female. It has to be noted, however, that in many studies related to Finns in the UK, females have been the most active to participate (e.g. Koikkalainen 2019; Gawlewicz & Sotkasiira 2020) and are more active to join networks such as Facebook groups that attract UK based Finns. Some of these groups are even aimed at females specifically.

Table 1. Finnish citizens' mobility between Finland and UK 1990–2018 (Statistics Finland 2020).

Year	Total	Men	Women
1990–1999	3,735	1,415	2,320
2000–2009	9,475	3,530	5,945
2010–2018	10,073	3,692	6,381

The essence of Finnish identity is often framed through a 'marginal discourse', explaining it as having formed in marginalised 'mindscapes' between Eastern and Western powers – Russia and Sweden (Browning & Lehti 2007). From this setting, discourses about having 'sisu', a Finnish national specialty that loosely translates into 'an embodied fortitude' (Lahti 2019) and the valuation of working morals and 'holding one's own' (Ollila 1998) have embedded themselves into the narratives of Finns. This mindset is visible also among the discussants in this study. For many Finns, settling down in the UK has meant a major commitment to the country, and many Finns see their contributions to the British society as a justification for their stay. As a result, perceptions of the UK had not included the idea of not having a say in the continuity of one's personal narrative in the country. The UK has, thus, been seen as corresponding to people's self-actualising needs and as a place where the high level of self-governance – the ability to be in control of one's trajectories with places – could be realised.

Methodology

This paper uses data from several Brexit-related discussion threads from a UK-based Finns' Facebook group, covering the first two weeks after the referendum (23.6. to 8.7.2016). The timeline was

narrowed to be able to grasp the first signs of disruptions related to the referendum. The group[2], the members of which are Finns who reside in the UK (including some that have lived in the UK and have since moved elsewhere or returned to Finland) was selected due to its large number of users of differing ages and backgrounds (over 3,000 members in June–July 2016) and the interactive atmosphere within it (frequent posts). The group has been active for several years and is a place for Finns to exchange experiences about translocal lives. The primary language is Finnish or a mix of Finnish and English. The raw data consisted of postings (i.e. someone starting a conversation) and comments (someone commenting a started conversation), with over 130 individual discussants. The data was harvested, using the Facebook search function, transcribed and analysed using thematic content analysis with Atlas.ti software.

The researcher assumed a passive positioning – the discussants were not invited to talk about their experiences, nor did the researcher participate in the discussions. This ensured the authenticity and extemporaneousness of the reactions. This act of 'passive analysis' (Franz *et al.* 2019) that looks for example into interactions in discussion groups is problematic due to issues related to data protection; not only from the 'harm-based' theory's point of view (Zimmer 2010) where anybody able to identify the data source would aim at harming it in some way, but also from the 'dignity-based' theory's point of view, where the information is removed from the "intended sphere of the social networking profile" (Zimmer 2010, 321.) For this reason, discussants' anonymity was given high priority. Firstly, all data were combined into one data set with all names of people, places and organisations removed prior to analysis. During this process, all contactable discussants were asked for consent about using the discussion material (individual discussants were also asked for consent for using individual comments). Because the collection and analysis were conducted after the discussion had already taken place, some discussants had left the group and/or Facebook and could not be contacted – in such cases, no quotations were used. Secondly, quotes were translated from Finnish into English and re-formulated in places to remove, for instance, any identifiable circumstances in the comments.

Social media data enables a broader access to data and to research subjects that are hard to reach. To evaluate the validity of the data, however, it has to be noted that it cannot describe the holistic views of Finns in the UK due to the limited number of discussants, the narrow time-frame and the inclusion of only one discussion group – it is to be noted, however, that many Finns are members of several Facebook groups for Finns in the UK. The data still provides an intriguing snapshot into the midst of translocal place-making and its receptivity to disruptions through the "socio-spatial relationships that have developed as the result of networking through a common place-frame" (Pierce *et al.* 2011, 54).

Using social media generated data also poses risks related to data reliability. In ethnographic research using social media, it is important to gain an understanding of the platform from both technical and cultural viewpoints, as knowledge of the setting is mandatory (Giglietto *et al.* 2012, 155). Keeping this in mind, it is justified for the researchers to be part of the social media community they are studying. For this study, the researcher did not specifically join this group; but had been a member of it for several years. Because the group shares experiences about life in the UK, the researcher had incorporated the interactions in the group as part of her daily life while living there. Because several years had passed since the researcher had been an active member in the group, the researcher's subjectivity was not considered a threat. It was, however, taken into account when analysing the results.

Discourses of disruption 1: positioning self and others

The Finns' reactions to the referendum result highlight the translocal landscape presented by the data. It consists of individual, yet also collective, perceptions originating in several domestic spaces and locales across the UK, touching different regions in the UK and reaching domestic spaces, locales and regions in Finland. These perceptions are being negotiated through reflecting the similar and differing experiences in them and the discussants' everyday ties (social, imaginary and mobile) to these places, demonstrating the multiplicity of situated but connected co-presences in their 'place-making portfolios' (Massey 2005; Brickell & Datta 2011). The disruptive nature of the referendum can be seen in the ways it was perceived as a situated, sudden twinge in the discussants' everydays:

> Sorry, [we are] so shocked [about the result] that nothing [makes us] laugh.
>
> Has everybody suddenly stopped using their brain?

This twinge triggered competing discourses of power (Brickell & Datta 2011) that started to quickly circulate around everyday positionalities of self and others.

Status and rights

While making the place for themselves in the UK, Finns had established access to basic societal structures, like public services (health care, banking), job market, housing, the ability to enter into ownerships and education, through which place-making had been enabled. This access was now compromised. Some discussants pointed out that the result had already caused landlords to not want to renew leases, or banks reluctant to discuss mortgages. Access to society was also discussed via the types of residency. While the discussants had, for the most part, been happy with retaining their Finnish citizenship and not been thinking about applying for British citizenship, it was now an option to be addressed. On one hand, it was seen as an insurance that would lift the consequences of Brexit in terms of rights to stay, but also almost as an insult; something that was being imposed on as forced. The Finns were faced with conditionality: in order for them to continue their place-making in the UK, they would have to fulfil pre-requisites; such as applying for a citizenship. The feeling of having to 'trade in' their ability to continue place-making by accepting a 'forced citizenship' was clearly a major disruption; echoing for example the observations of Pierce *et al.* (2011) that the durability of places can be destroyed by a political upheaval:

> […] If you have a citizenship, you are in the same position as a native Brit.
>
> So now the thing I feared the most happened – have to apply for a citizenship.

Justifications for one's right to continue life as it had been were voiced strongly. The discussants felt they had earned the right to be in the UK by contributing to the society by being reliable taxpayers and bringing in one's professional expertise. The 'right to belong' has also been discussed by for example Koikkalainen (2019) in the context of Nordic migrants in the UK post-referendum, who also saw their contributions to the British society entitling them a say about the situation. The feelings about being unappreciated despite these contributions were visible among the Finns, as well:

> [Number of years] working and paying taxes, and we still have to worry about what will happen to us as a result of these negotiations. […].

Similar observations have been made by Lulle and colleagues (2019) who note that the 'new' EU nationals (those who arrived after the 2004 EU enlargement) in the UK consider tax-paying as 'tactics of belonging' to justify the continuity of place-making and to show their value to society. For the Finns, however, the subtle difference appeared to be that while they also wanted to highlight the fact that their contribution to society should justify their staying, their perception of this 'worthiness' appeared to have its roots deeper than for example the 'new' EU migrants'.

Social dynamics

The referendum made the discussants reflect the notion of home, with many sharing experiences of having to guard the fact that their home was indeed in the UK and having to protect their voice from being 'pasted over' (e.g. Gill 2010) by othering viewpoints. The discussion culminated around the 'whose home is this' problematic, bringing in questions of belonging, with several discussants voicing their feelings of belonging being interrogated:

> For the first time this country does not feel like home anymore.
>
> If someone tells me to 'go home', I'll say I'm going – home to [UK city].

However, the problematics of belonging, interestingly, appeared to be addressed through questioning *who* belongs, or 'who gets to decide who belongs', rather than questioning 'do we belong'. The

discussants pointed out that the UK, itself, accommodated different national identities and as such, was not suddenly in a position to claim 'Britishness' as a single 'other' against other groups, as up until now, it had been doing the opposite:

> 'Britishness' has provided (im)migrants with a handy umbrella-identity, under which there's lot of space.

The perceived unfamiliarity of the situation continued to cut deeper as the reactions from people's social networks, namely family, friends, colleagues, neighbours and even random strangers were discussed. Many families with members from more than one nationality were presented with a whole new situation. Those that were already familiar with dealing with immigration issues related to non-EU nationals had to start thinking about the whole family needing to deal with residency issues, and those families with British citizens and other EU-nationals faced dilemmas about family members suddenly not having the same rights to reside in the country. These questions had often been shaking the family dynamics even outside the core family unit. Discussants shared opposite experiences of extended family members' behaviour towards them:

> [Some family members] are so upset, ashamed, disappointed and angry on behalf of the Brits.

> [Some family members] are avoiding us. Some of them voted to Leave.

These experiences were voiced also in relation to for example customer service professionals:

> A nurse asked my friend over and over what they were doing here, how long they had been here etc. and complained that there are so many Finns here (on top of everyone else) and that it's good to now get some control over it.

'Are we immigrants or are we Finns?'

The most striking theme related to the main discourse of positioning self and others was related to one's perceived positioning in the UK as compared to other immigrant or ethnic groups and to British citizens. Discussants shared experiences that had already taken place and contemplated on possible situations in the near future (after Brexit would have actualised). The experiences of 'whiteness' and being a 'white immigrant' were addressed. Especially during the EU-membership era, Finns have been able to perceive themselves as 'entitled to being in the UK', as opposed to people who needed a visa or work permit. Even if unintentional, Finns have viewed themselves as 'privileged Selves' as opposed to 'less-privileged Others' (Oxfeldt *et al.* 2017), a mindset that emerged in discussing the problematics of 'expat' and 'immigrant'. It appeared that the idea of being thought of as 'immigrants' or 'expats' or to go by any other type of categorisation had not been needed before:

> Before Brexit, I didn't feel the need to categorise myself as anything [immigrant or expat or anything else]. If someone asks, I'm from Finland.

When people especially from Poland started moving to the UK after the Eastern European countries joined the EU in 2004, some Finns wanted to maintain and reclaim their status as the 'good migrants'. The 'good migrant' status, however, was not regarded as gained while other migrant groups would be losing their status in the migrant hierarchy due to not being 'as good as' the Finns, but rather established via the high level of commitment and reputation:

> I have always replied [when it came to one's place of origin] that I am a Finn. People's behaviour changes at once. We have a good reputation even in the UK.

This mindset became clear when discussants shared experiences about everyday racist nuances they had been subjected to, heard of or witnessed. Facing racism personally – at least continuously or to a harmful extent – has been a relatively foreign, even if not a completely non-existent occurrence for Finns in the UK. However, racism towards Finns and other EU nationals was seen as being something that 'happened overnight':

> I am totally appalled. Overnight, the [closet] racists appear to have become empowered.

Several discussants reported racist behaviour towards them, someone they knew, or felt uneasy about the possibility of it happening:

> Earlier somebody told me without hesitation that 'you foreigners can go to hell'.

> I feel uneasy about my kids starting school… what will happen when [their classmates] find out that only one of their parents is British?

Discussion about what terminology and positioning should be applied to Finns took distinct turns. Some discussants felt that terms like 'immigrant' and 'expat' were not appropriate because they did not convey the right message about the Finns as a minority group, and others were of the opinion that 'immigrant' described their status perfectly as permanent residents, while 'expat' meant an elitist migrant who had been sent abroad to work for a few years but who did not have a clue about the 'real life' in the country. This reflected the inbuilt interpretation of the tense relationship between 'expat' and '(im)migrant' and the encoded social images of these concepts, where trajectories are perceived to be entitled differently (Kunz 2019):

> [I am an] immigrant. To me, expats are those who willingly live in fenced-up areas with other foreigners.

> Expat rather than immigrant. Immigrant […] sounds more like someone who relocates for low-paid jobs and a better quality of life […].

The discussion continued to evaluate the Finns' position as compared to other white minority groups, especially the Poles, with whom several Finns have had experiences of being compared to. Several discussants shared experiences related to racist behaviour towards the Poles, and a need for the Finns to stay as a distinctive group emerged. Being 'a Western European white immigrant' as compared to an 'Eastern European white immigrant' (Botterill & Burrell 2019) was used as another framework to clarify one's position. This tactic has been applied by other migrant groups as well, when they place themselves 'within a hierarchy of Europeanness' (Botterill & Burrell 2019).

> Some Polish guys started to explain that they work here. I feel sorry for the Poles [for having to be on their toes]. I wonder if we, too, will have to start introducing ourselves by clarifying our employment status first, just to be safe…

> The problem appears to be that the majority of the locals don't even know where Finland is in Europe. Or that the standard of living there is high. We are in the same boat with the Poles who nobody understands either. Not all of them have it so bad there [Poland], either.

The familiar discourse of 'whiteness' appeared to no longer function as 'a mask of protection' (Botterill & Burrell 2019). This took away the previously held 'novelty value' of being a Finn – a group that was perceived as having a good reputation in the UK. This suggests a subconsciously performed imaginary of 'nordic utopia' as "the best of all possible thinkable worlds" (Kangas & Palme 2005, 2). The feeling of being the embodied validation of the equality and solidarity that this imaginary represents for example in British media (Lister 2009) mirrors the whiteness discourse in Botterill and Burrell's (2019) work, where only those who live the discourse are aware of it, and construct subjectively perceived power relations. Narratives of 'us as 'good' migrants', 'us as immigrants just like others', 'them as immigrants, us as Finns' appeared to have lost their power in their previously assumed contexts and had become a rift-driving feature between the situation and the continuity of familiar positionalities in place-making by challenging the previously held perceptions of the ontologies of 'immigrant' and 'expat'. As Lulle and colleagues (2019), discussing Bhambra (2017) have noted, 'Brexit was turning (European) citizens into immigrants'.

Discourses of disruption 2: staying-leaving

The pre-Brexit era with free mobility and right to reside in the UK was the situation where most of the discussants appeared to have moved to (multicultural families with EU- and non-EU nationals are common among Finns living in the UK, keeping the questions related to right to residency important to many Finns, too, however). The questions of mobility and immobility frame translocal place-making

to various degrees and from the variety of them (physical mobilities and imaginaries within and between localities in several regions and countries) it can be understood that they enable experiences and understandings within several positionalities and contribute to the assemblages of identities that need to be re-negotiated across different spatialities (Brickell & Datta 2011).

Questions about the ability to maintain (im)mobile practises were now subjected to renegotiations. Several distinct lines of opinions emerged from the data related to staying in the UK or leaving it either for Finland or elsewhere in the world. The reactions could be categorised under four types of (im) mobilities: anchoring, dwelling, escaping or 'taking off' as a more passive-aggressive reaction to the questioned level of self-governance: 'I'll leave you to it'. These reflect the ideas of translocal (im) mobilities being understood as "personalised subjective temporalities" (Urry 2007, 122) that are parts of one's personal translocal place-making strategies (Brickell & Datta 2011).

People were either adamant to stay, anchoring themselves tightly to their life as it was; justifying their right to stay with the fact that they saw themselves as having earned the right to stay, and claiming their way back from the sudden displacement of their everyday:

> They haven't managed to deport convicted criminals; how would they succeed in deporting taxpayers that are here legally?

Others started to weight their options, dwelling on ideas about staying or leaving, wanting to see what the time would bring. For them, temporality appeared to be a comforting element:

> Seriously, they can't just shut up shop. Try to calm down.

> Stop panicking, [...] there are A LOT of EU-citizens here.

There were also discussants who had been considering returning to Finland and were now clear about their decision; others had not been thinking of leaving but now felt so betrayed or scared that saw returning to Finland as an escape route from the situation. Others, however, made it clear that leaving the UK would be the main thing, the destination would not matter so much. They emphasised that they would not leave out of fear or by force, but because they would be exercising their right to be in charge of their trajectories. Some, on the other hand, held the opinion that leaving the UK would be a likely option, but the destination should be anywhere else than Finland:

> Who wants to move back to Finland anyway?

Several discussants expressed that Finland should step in for them and clarify the Finns' situation in the UK. Finland appeared to be seen as a force behind being able to defend oneself, and something that would 'always be there', even if one did not want to ever return there:

> [I've told them] I still have a place to go to, you don't.

Discussants also trusted Finland to negotiate the status of Brits residing in Finland and in doing so, ensuring the Finns could stay in the UK:

> If they agreed with Finland... that the Brits living in Finland could stay there, it is likely to be a two-way street [and we can stay here as well].

In establishing the position that one wanted to maintain in terms of staying in the UK or leaving it (anchoring, dwelling, escaping or 'taking off'), the discussants produced power relations that would enable them to continue place-making in a way that would be meaningful for them. This did, however, plant a subconscious element of forced mobility – either physical or symbolic - into people's minds as they negotiated positionality through (im)mobility, highlighting the importance of agency and the disruptive nature of the feeling that the place suddenly had agency over the individual.

Discourses of disruption 3: continuity-discontinuity

The third main discourse was the reflection on the possible outcomes of Brexit and their impact on UK's continuity or discontinuity in the discussant lives. Continuities potentially turning into discontinuities were discussed, consisting of a set of evaluations and imaginary geographies of places; both the UK and its regions and Finland, and even extending to a global scale. Emotional aspects in the

imaginaries, including feelings of loss and displacement were evident, generating questions about the need to start altering one's behaviour to 'minimise difference' (Botterill & Burrell 2019, 25), and already showing signs of decay of translocal spaces due to changes in translocal practises (e.g. Peth 2018):

> I always speak Finnish to my kids. But dare I do that anymore...

> I have never faced this [e.g. having to listen to racist comments] before. And now somehow, I feel like an immigrant overnight.

Questioning the UK as a 'good host country' emerged, together with the feelings of betrayal by the place that had been, before now, in sync with most discussants' needs and expectations. While some appeared confident that time would provide everyone with a good outcome, others strongly expressed annoyance about having to wait for information and not being allowed any certainty over important questions related to their lives – again highlighting the importance of being able to control their translocal trajectories.

Speculations about the implications of any upcoming political decisions were discussed, including concerns over the hostile atmosphere that had already began to take shape. People started to evaluate the UK by comparing its regional differences based on how people had voted. Some discussants pointed out that everybody is entitled to vote according to their preferences, but several voiced concerns over the fact that not everybody had voted based on informed decisions and had just seen the referendum as a justification for racism. They compared the Leave voters' behaviour to those Finns who saw immigration and especially the 2015 refugee crisis as a problem insinuated by the EU's liberal mobility rights, and who made immigration the central cause to all the nation's problems. In Finland, the referendum result had been received with general disbelief, but had also caused division between people of differing opinions which appeared to circulate around immigration issues, not helped by the rhetoric used by opposed political parties. This was seen as happening in the UK as well, and the discussants were clearly worried about this type of atmosphere spreading even deeper into the society. Some discussants shared experiences from their localities – with staggering differences. While some had had apologetic looks and sympathy in areas with more remain voters, others had faced blunt racist outbursts. It was clear that these experiences had the potential for altering people's personal narratives with places:

> [...] many people have been hearing these [hostile] shouts and remarks, after living in peace for years.

> We have another kind of an experience with some locals [in a club] about the EU, being Finnish, and us living here. They welcomed us back there anytime.

Interestingly, the discussants continued expressing their concern about the UK's future global reputation. They worried about tourism declining and the UK becoming a 'country non grata', and appeared to be taking on an additional stressor of 'double consciousness', where they would "look themselves [or the UK] through the eyes of others" (Botterill & Burrell 2019; discussing DuBois 1994, 2):

> Think about [foreign tourists]. Nobody dares to come here on holiday anymore.

Despite all the negative experiences and worries, however, a lot of discussants spoke of the UK with a tone that implied their deep attachment to the place and being committed to it 'no matter what':

> My identity is strongly English nowadays... I belong here, nothing else matters.

There was, suddenly, a need to guard one's meaningful place-making trajectory from decay caused by other groups' trajectories (e.g. Gill 2010; Peth 2018). The discussants reflected on how much power one's narrative in a specific location had as compared to other locations, and indicated Finland's role as the back-up plan where it would always be possible to return, despite planning to do so or not. This imaginary of Finland as a producer of translocal power between self and place appeared to be an important coping mechanism in the situation. Two over-arching tones in the data: sarcasm and sisu, highlighted the importance of Finland-related imaginaries as influencing people's translocal place-making in the background.

The temporal aspect between the situation and place-making was seen as both enabling ('let's wait and see what happens') and disabling ('nothing is clear'). This stretched everyday positionalities within

specific timeframes ('for the first time, this does not feel like home'; 'I feel like an immigrant overnight'; 'now the time I feared has come, have to apply for a citizenship'). The role of time and temporalities in digesting the implications of Brexit is discussed extensively by for example Gawlewicz and Sotkasiira (2020) in their work about Finnish and Polish migrants in UK. Their findings mirror those of this study in arguing that in making sense of a disruption such as Brexit, time is a central element, and that it is crucial to understand the messiness of the responses to it in their particular timespaces.

The continuities and discontinuities of multiple places became subjected to forced reflections between maintenance and modification – a subconscious evaluation of the hierarchies and configurations in one's place-making portfolio (Massey 2005). Botterill, McCollum and Tyrrell (2019, 2) have stated that "Brexit is conceptualised as a relational process of continuity and discontinuity". The multiplicity and intensity of translocal place-making – the characteristics that make it unique but also prone to disruptions – caused the need to start re-evaluating several co-presences, continuities and translocal imaginaries (e.g. Oakeas & Schein 2006; Brickell & Datta 2011) simultaneously, intersecting both the active, embodied processes in the UK and the virtual and imagined processes in Finland. In doing so, the validity of multiple sets of cultural and social capitals, and the related emotional spaces, had to be considered again – resulting in a situation where several place-making processes were not only maintained, managed and re-negotiated at the same time on several scales (domestic spaces, neighbourhoods, towns or cities and regions in several countries) but also re-organised in terms of priority; causing new inequalities between connections and further intensifying the perceived disruption.

Conclusions

The result of the Brexit referendum pushed translocal place-making of a middling migrant group into a crossroad by creating a set of juxtapositionings and friction to existing positionalities that the group had not had to previously address. It displaced them from being social bodies that were making the UK a place for themselves based on exercising control over their personal narratives into political bodies that were, overnight, faced with having to justify their position.

The referendum triggered the need to start re-negotiating the ways daily lives were performed. The situation became a balancing act between power and powerlessness: previous and new and forced and voluntary, where the Finns were faced with several types of new otherness. This has also been discovered by Guma and Dafydd Jones (2019) in their study about EU-nationals in Wales: they argue that Brexit creates a continuous process of 'othering' by unsettling for example the pre-negotiated attachments and connections. The feelings of compromised ability to apply agency to place can be seen as a series of disruptive effects that emerged as competing narratives of power related to previously negotiated positionalities, (im)mobilities, temporalities and multiplicities in one's place-making trajectories.

I argue that these disruptions, through the accumulation of new otherness, fuel the formation of forced translocal imaginaries. For example, in evaluating their perceptions of the UK in terms of its future societal atmosphere, the discussants expressed embarrassment when thinking about how the UK would be perceived negatively by other countries due to Brexit. Higgins (2019) who, in studying EU-based Britons' reactions to the referendum, found discourses of 'bad Britain', consisting of feelings of shame, shock, and loss. These disruptions to emotional spaces could be argued to have extended far beyond the political and societal atmosphere of the UK to reach global levels, and culminating in an overall disappointment of the global social order – forcing not only translocal, but also global geographical imaginaries.

In addition to new otherness, however, the discussants appeared to have developed new, or intensified, translocal attachments towards both the UK and Finland. It appeared they wanted to carve out the timespace in which they had assumed a position in the UK where the UK was where they belonged to, and wanted to keep this feeling despite all the hostility and political developments. Simultaneously, Finland's role as a stabiliser appeared to be gaining space in the discussants' minds, in addition to the idea of Finland as a safety net in their lives. This finding resonates, interestingly, with Koikkalainen's (2013b) study about highly skilled Finns' identity negotiations in Europe that found that overall, Finns felt strongly attached to Finland regardless of where they lived, but among those who

lived in the UK, identification with the UK was the highest. This supports my view that strong identification with the UK was enabled by simultaneous attachment to Finland which enabled them to be independent form Finland but supported by the imaginary of it always being there for them.

These newly evolving translocal imaginaries will develop into new performative discourses in migrants' translocal place-making trajectories, meaning that previously experienced translocal spaces will have been copy-pasted over (as discussed e.g. by Gill 2010) and migrants who arrive in post-Brexit Britain will not experience a similar kind of continuum of, for example, Finnish translocal spaces to those who had arrived before the referendum. The fierce political, societal and cultural discourses that have circulated peoples' post-referendum everydays have imposed on them a new layer of aggravated, place-specific social imagination related to for instance migration. Eventually, these imaginaries will develop into collective, social facts (Appadurai 1996) and in doing so, impose specific ways of thinking onto the society and alter translocal spaces.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Brexit referendum has created an 'impression of a major event', as argued by Anderson and Wilson (2018). Even if focused only on the immediate reactions to the referendum, in a limited timeframe and of a relatively small number of Finns, the results indicate that the referendum set translocal place-making to a new path, embedding itself deeply into the individuals' narratives and the collective memory of disruption. The implications of the Brexit vote, like other historically remarkable events, will be manifested through people's actions for times to come and be featured in their communal memory (e.g. Connerton 1989) and performed according to their translocal imaginaries (e.g. Oakes & Schein 2006). It can be argued that the Brexit referendum disrupted existing translocal senses of place and forced new ones to emerge. It is too early to say what the longer-term impacts of Brexit will have on translocal place-making of EU nationals in the UK, but it is evident that it will need to be researched further.

Notes

[1] Conradson and Latham (2005) have defined 'middling migrants' as having a middle-class background with a good education level, occupying middling statuses both in their countries of origin and in their destination countries. I retain from using the terms 'immigrant' or 'expat' when referring to Finns in the context of this study, as these appear unfitting, as is explained later.

[2] The name of the group has been purposely left out to maintain the discussants' anonymity.

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