

ACTA

Maria Petäjaniemi

(UN)BECOMING
AN ASYLUM SEEKER

*NOMADIC RESEARCH WITH MEN
AWAITING AN ASYLUM DECISION*

UNIVERSITY OF OULU GRADUATE SCHOOL;
UNIVERSITY OF OULU,
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

E

SCIENTIAE RERUM
SOCIALIUM



ACTA UNIVERSITATIS OULUENSIS
E Scientiae Rerum Socialium 210

MARIA PETÄJÄNIEMI

**(UN)BECOMING AN ASYLUM
SEEKER**

Nomadic research with men awaiting an asylum
decision

Academic dissertation to be presented with the assent of
the Doctoral Programme Committee of Human Sciences
of the University of Oulu for public defence in the OP
auditorium (L10), Linnanmaa, on 20 May 2022, at 12 noon

UNIVERSITY OF OULU, OULU 2022

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Acta Univ. Oul. E 210, 2022

Supervised by
Professor Maija Lanas
Associate Professor Mervi Kaukko

Reviewed by
Professor Michalinos Zembylas
Professor Kirsi Pauliina Kallio

Opponent
Professor Sari Pöyhönen

ISBN 978-952-62-3300-0 (Paperback)
ISBN 978-952-62-3301-7 (PDF)

ISSN 0355-323X (Printed)
ISSN 1796-2242 (Online)

Cover Design
Raimo Ahonen

PUNAMUSTA
TAMPERE 2022

Petäjaniemi, Maria, (Un)becoming an asylum seeker. Nomadic research with men awaiting an asylum decision

University of Oulu Graduate School; University of Oulu, Faculty of Education

Acta Univ. Oul. E 210, 2022

University of Oulu, P.O. Box 8000, FI-90014 University of Oulu, Finland

Abstract

This research focuses on what becoming an asylum seeker awaiting an asylum decision in Finland means. This “becoming” is perceived as a dynamic, never-ending process. This research explores the boundaries and possibilities faced by asylum-seeking men in their everyday lives after arriving to Finland in 2015.

The data consist of nomadic hanging out and in-depth interviews with nine asylum-seeking men conducted in 2016 and in 2018. Theoretically, this research builds on feminist-informed poststructuralism. It utilizes the concepts of subjectification and subject position to look at how asylum-seeking men tell, retell, and negotiate the position they occupy. This research asks the following question: *How does one become subjectified as an asylum seeker?*

The findings suggest that waiting for an asylum decision creates a temporary, existential context for asylum seekers’ subjectification. As the waiting prolongs, the subject position becomes more recognizable for people occupying the position, in turn leading to shifting subjectification. Detecting, meeting, and negotiating discursive expectations are embedded in the process of subjectification. For asylum seekers, these expectations are often paradoxical and contradictory. The findings address how the study’s participants submitted to, mastered, and resisted the expectations.

Based on this research, becoming an asylum seeker is formed through three layers that constitute and reconstitute this position: the *fundamental basis* of needing a safe place, the *legal category* of an asylum seeker, and the *societal expectations* targeted at the position of an asylum seeker. In the discursive constitution of an asylum seeker, people become asylum seekers throughout these layers in the ongoing process of subjectification within the position of an asylum seeker. However, perhaps paradoxically, in the process of becoming an asylum seeker, the purpose is to unbecome an asylum seeker.

Keywords: asylum seeker, becoming, nomadic research, subject position, subjectification

Petäjaniemi, Maria, Kuljeskeleva tutkimus turvapaikanhakijuudesta ja odotuksesta.

Oulun yliopiston tutkijakoulu; Oulun yliopisto, Kasvatustieteiden tiedekunta

Acta Univ. Oul. E 210, 2022

Oulun yliopisto, PL 8000, 90014 Oulun yliopisto

Tiivistelmä

Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan turvapaikanhakijuuutta ja turvapaikkapäätöksen odotusta Suomessa. Staattisen olemisen sijaan turvapaikanhakijuus nähdään dynaamisena, jatkuvasti liikkeessä olevana prosessina. Tutkimus tarkastelee turvapaikanhakijuteen kytkeytyviä rajoja ja mahdollisuuksia, joita Suomeen vuonna 2015 saapuneet turvapaikanhakijamiehet arjessaan kohtavat.

Tutkimuksen aineisto koostuu vuosina 2016 ja 2018 toteutetuista syvähaastatteluista sekä kuljeskelevasta hengailusta yhdeksän turvapaikanhakijamiehen kanssa. Teoreettisesti tutkimus nojaa feministiseen jälkistrukturalismiin. Tutkimus hyödyntää subjektifikaation ja subjektiposition käsitteitä katsoessaan, kuinka miehet kertovat ja neuvottelevat asemaansa turvapaikanhakijoina. Tutkimus kysyy: *Miten turvapaikanhakijaksi subjektifikoidutaan?*

Tulosten perusteella turvapaikkapäätöksen odotus luo väliaikaisen kontekstin turvapaikanhakijan subjektifikaatiolle. Odotusajan pitkittyessä turvapaikanhakijan posiitiosta tulee tunnistettavampi, mikä tekee subjektifikaatiosta ajassa muuttuvaa. Ympäröivien yhteiskunnallisten odotusten paikantaminen, niihin vastaaminen ja niistä neuvotteleminen ovat olennaista subjektifikaatiossa. Turvapaikanhakijoille kohdistetut odotukset ovat tämän tutkimuksen mukaan usein paradoksaalisia ja ristiriitaisia. Tulokset kuvaavat, kuinka tutkimukseen osallistuvat miehet usein samanaikaisesti sekä täyttävät nämä odotukset että vastustavat niitä.

Tässä tutkimuksessa turvapaikanhakijuus muodostuu diskursiivisesti kolmena kerroksena. Näistä ensimmäinen, *perustavanlaatuisen tarve turvalliselle paikalle*, luo pohjan turvapaikanhakijuudelle. Tämän päälle kerrostuvat position *lakiin kirjatut perusteet* ja niiden tulkinta sekä positioon kohdistuvat *yhteiskunnalliset odotukset*. Tutkimuksen mukaan turvapaikanhakijan subjektipositioon subjektifikoidutaan jatkuvasti liikkeessä olevassa prosessissa näiden kolmen kerroksen kautta. Prosessi kuitenkin paradoksaalisesti tähtää siihen, ettei turvapaikanhakija olisi enää turvapaikanhakija.

Asiasanat: nomadinen tutkimus, subjektifikaatio, subjektipositio, turvapaikanhakijuus

For the men in my study

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want to thank the amazing participants of my study, the men who let me into their lives and shared their thoughts. I owe you more gratitude than any words can express.

I cannot thank enough my supervisors Professor Maija Lanas and Associate Professor Mervi Kaukko for encouraging and supporting me during these years in the academic life. Maija, this thesis would not exist without you. You believed in my abilities way before than I did, and a lot more. I have been enormously lucky to have you as my mentor, and I will be eternally grateful for the chance to have worked with and learned from you. Mervi, you were always there for me with kind advice when needed. Thank you so much for sharing your invaluable insights and knowledge on research with asylum seekers. I truly wish I will get to continue working with you both in the future.

The pre-examiners of this thesis, Professor Michalinos Zembylas and Professor Kirsi Pauliina Kallio, you have provided extremely valuable comments on my work, for which I wish to express my gratitude. I feel as I have passed a very tight review in the hands of these experts whose work I greatly admire. And Professor Sari Pöyhönen, the opponent in defense, thank you for accepting the invitation. I am honored.

This thesis was funded and made possible by Eemil Aaltonen's Foundation, Niilo Helander's Foundation, Finnish Cultural Foundation, Oskar Öflund's Foundation, the University of Oulu Support Foundation and the Faculty of Education. Thank you. And Maija and Mervi, I am beyond grateful for the numerous statements you wrote to accompany my grant applications.

I wish to thank our amazing research group SAFE for the inspiring discussions and rants on research and life. You are great! Special thanks to my intelligent and brilliant colleague-friends Iida Kauhanen, Anne Väisänen, Eveliina Puutio, Kaisu Alamikkela, Kili Kauppi and Suvi Kauppi. Thank you for your friendship and the support you provided me during this research process. I also wish to thank the interdisciplinary research group Mobile North for all the interesting discussions related to migration. My heartfelt thanks go also to Annamari Martinviita, Siinamari Tikkinen and Antti Miettinen. Without your admirable example, as well as kind and encouraging words, I may not have started this at all. I am also grateful for Salih Tosun for his company during the MiReKoc summer school and the intense theoretical discussion we had on the streets of Istanbul. Let us meet again!

Virve Keränen and Katariina Mertanen, thank you for reading and profoundly commenting on the earlier draft of this work. After you shared your excellent remarks, this thesis took huge leaps forward. I am sincerely grateful for Sonja Lutovac and Raimo Kaasila for believing in me and hiring me to do research with them, while allowing time to also work on my PhD. It was indeed valuable. I am also grateful for all the support that I received from my follow-up group members Elina Lehtomäki and Katri Jokikokko. I wish to thank Veli-Matti Ulvinen as well, for spending hours and hours copyediting my text.

Sorbatatska, Fredrikan hätävара and Cassiopeia – thank you for bringing joy, laughter, music, and bubbly in my life. Elisa, Annamari, Pikku-Ellu and Sara, *semper avarus eget*, now and forever. Eveliina, Paulus, Valtteri, Maikki, Arttu, Katri ja te kaikki muut huiput, vappu tulee! Eija, Suvi, Anni and Eveliina, I am forever grateful for that you took me in with open arms. How lucky can one be! I continuously admire your incredible ability to create most memorable moments. I cherish all of them and with excitement wait all yet to come. Kaaka, Kati and Sohvi, it is a privilege to have had you in my life since childhood. Thank you for staying and holding on in the manifold phases of life. Elina, Valtteri, Iikka, all of you mentioned here and many more, thank you for the countless bottles of wine, bright summer nights and heartwarming sympathy you have shared and hopefully continue to share with me. I am immensely lucky to have such funny, wild, and caring friends. I hereby wish to thank each and every one of you and tell you how much you matter.

A huge and heartfelt thank you to my family for your love and support. You have been a constant joy in my life, especially Hilla. I consider myself lucky to have you. Äiti, isä, veljet, mummi ja Laura, olette tärkeitä.

Anni ja Eveliina, näin kokonaisvaltaisen kiitollisuuden ilmaisuun on mahdotonta löytää sanoja (—täytyisi ehkä lainata Tovelta tai Antilta). Kanssanne olen saanut elää monta virvoittavaa hetkeä niin keltaisessa kolmiotalossa kuin kaupunkien valoissa. Olen saanut juurtua ja lentää. Kiitos viisaudesta, vilpittömyydestä ja uteliaisuudesta. Kiitos lukemattomista kriittisistä, inspiroivista keskusteluista, tarkkanäköisistä, oivaltavista huomioista ja keskeneräisten ajatusteni loputtomasta ymmärtämisestä. Kiitos iloista, itkuista ja lempeistä katseista. Kiitos aivan kaikesta tuesta, horjumattomasta kannustuksesta ja rakkaudesta.

In Oulu, April 2022

Maria Petäjäniemi

Abbreviations

Migri Finnish Immigration Service

UNHCR United Nations High Commission for Refugees

List of original publications

This doctoral thesis is based on the following original publications, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

- I Petäjämäniemi, M., Lanas, M., & Kaukko, M. (2018). Osallisuus turvaa hakevan reunaehdoissa: Hätamajoitusyksikössä asuvien nuorten turvapaikanhakijamiesten kertomuksia arjesta. [Participation as part of the boundary conditions of an asylum seeker: Stories of participation, inclusion and exclusion of young male asylum seekers living in a temporary shelter]. *Aikuiskasvatus*, 38(1), 4–17. <https://doi.org/10.33336/aik.88118>
- II Petäjämäniemi, M., Kaukko, M., & Lanas, M. (2021). Confined in waiting: Young asylum seekers narrating in and out of temporary shelter. *Young*, 29(1), 62–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308820904271>
- III Petäjämäniemi, M., Lanas, M., & Kaukko, M. (2021). How to be a “good asylum seeker”? The subjectification of young men seeking asylum. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 11(3), 284–300. <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.389>

As the first author, I have designed and conducted the research described in each article. I set the initial research questions, generated and analyzed the data, made the theoretical choices, and wrote the outline of the articles. As the first author in all articles, I had primary responsibility in writing them. The co-authors, who were also the supervisors of my doctoral thesis, supported me in all stages of the research process, giving ideas and insights in designing the research, as well as in making the analytical and theoretical choices. In each article, they have taken part in the writing process lead by me.

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1 Introduction

When one makes the decision to leave their country of origin to seek protection from another state, one becomes an asylum seeker. Therefore, legally, an asylum seeker is someone who has left their country of origin, has applied for recognition as a refugee in another country, and is awaiting a decision on their application. Although this legal definition is clear, the discussion around asylum seekers does not always reflect this definition.

Different international conventions ensure that states respect and protect the rights of asylum seekers. However, how states interpret these conventions vary, which generates negotiations on whether some asylum seekers are, in fact, “undeserving” of the protection. Moreover, sovereign states can exercise the power to exclude certain people, which is often justified by producing certain asylum seekers as a “threat” to public safety. Overall, in advanced, globalized market economies, public attention and political pressure is often focused on the costs and financial drain associated with granting refugee status to asylum seekers. Within these economic discourses, the discussions concerning asylum seekers often include words such as “economic migrant” or “asylum shopper.” In addition, othering words such as “bogus,” “illegitimate,” “illegal,” and “unwelcomed” regularly appear in media discussions.

Not only do people become asylum seekers in relation to the fear they face in their country of origin, but, in addition, they must negotiate their “being” in relation to, for instance, these abovementioned external labels. Asylum seekers become produced in the crossfire of the multiple different meanings asylum seekers give themselves and are given by others, namely, different institutions, humanitarian organizations, media, politics, citizens, and so on. Through these meanings, asylum seekers are continually constituted and reconstituted and are reconstituting themselves. The asylum seeker self is thought, spoken and acted into existence through these discourses.

The practices of bordering, which include, for instance, the requirement to obtain various permits to arrive, to stay, to study, to work, or to be with one’s beloved ones, lead to institutionalized delays in these and influence how the subjectivities of asylum seekers become formed (Khosravi, 2020). Where people happen to be born and with what citizenship is a matter of chance; however, these affect people’s access to opportunities and rights (Fine, 2013). The citizenship status determines people’s mobility around the world, largely turning the world system of political borders into a manifestation of inequality (Kolossoff & Scott,

2013). Borders are no longer viewed as static lines “containing” populations. Rather, the understanding of “bordering” has shifted towards something that transcends borderlines and influences everyday life, shaping social relations and migrant subjectivities (see e.g., Könönen, 2018; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Tervonen, Pellander & Yuval-Davis, 2018).

In this research, I explore the “asylum-seekingness” of men, who arrived in Finland in 2015, and were awaiting their asylum decisions. By asylum-seekingness, I mean occupying the position of an asylum seeker. In other words, this research examines what becoming an asylum seeker means. This process of becoming is here seen as dynamic, continuous and always taking place in relation to something (see also Holquist, 1990).

1.1 Aim and the research question

The aim of this research is to generate knowledge on what “becoming an asylum seeker” means. I examine the boundaries and possibilities faced by asylum-seeking men in the Finnish society in their everyday lives during the asylum decision waiting period. The context of this research is the increased forced migration in 2015, and it focuses on the experiences of men who arrived in Finland during that time.

Everyday encounters and experiences, being undetachable from the surrounding discourses, continuously shape the asylum seeker subject. I regard the subject formation of asylum seekers as an ongoing process whereby one is placed and takes place in the discourses of asylum seeking. Throughout these discourses, asylum seekers become agentic, speaking subjects while being subjected by the constitutive force of the discourses (see also Brunila & Siivonen, 2014; Laws & Davies, 2000)—they become subjectified as asylum seekers. This is what this research focuses on, asking: *How does one become subjectified as an asylum seeker?*

By formulating the question in a way that it encompasses both “becoming” and “subjectification,” I intend to emphasize how people are constituted, reconstituted, and reconstituting themselves as asylum seekers through continuous processes in relation to the conditions they live in (see Lenz Taguchi, 2005). The research question became formulated during the research process.

1.2 Storyline of the study

I conducted a three-year research utilizing nomadic hanging out and in-depth interviews with nine asylum-seeking men. By nomadic hanging out, I mean spending unplanned time with the participants without documenting the shared time in detail or using it as data, which would be common in ethnographic research. In this research, nomadic approach does not only refer to hanging out, but depicts the research holistically. Nomadic could be described as rhizomatic, unpredetermined movement (see Deleuze & Guattari, 1988), which in this research is portrayed through theoretical, methodological, and relational streams (see Subchapter 4.1). Nomadic describes the nature of this study also through the participants: Becoming an asylum seeker is fraught with uncertainties and is often rapid. Unexpected changes in life are embedded in the position of an asylum seeker, and therefore, for this research, I needed to release control over the process of “conducting research” and become open to the unexpected while following the participants’ lives. The interviews were conducted at two time-points—one in 2016, when the participants were living in a temporary shelter, and another in 2018, when they were staying in rental apartments.

I was a volunteer before I was a researcher. I got to know the people participating in my study while volunteering at the shelter. All the research participants were relatively young men, as were most of the asylum seekers arriving to Finland in 2015. Approximately 80% of the people seeking asylum from Finland were men, and approximately 60% of the arrivals were 18–34 years old (Finnish Immigration Service, 2021). The shelter I volunteered at was a place meant for only male residents.

This research was nomadically formulated, as the hanging out guided which topics I focused on. The participants’ asylum processes and the other changes in their life situations informed the three sub-studies (referred here as the Articles I, II, and III). Based on the time we spent together in the temporary shelter, the research initially focused on participation (see Article I). The participants kept busy during the days in the shelter by participating: cleaning, cooking food, ploughing snow, volunteering in schools, or providing care to the elderly. However, the structural barriers started to become more visible. After two years of waiting, the participants described how they were no longer participating in the planning of their own lives. This began the second phase of the research, turning the focus of the research on waiting and the sense of confinement it engendered (see Article II). At the same time, the participants began describing common everyday experiences

increasingly as constraining, describing, for example, more and more racist encounters. Thus, in the third and final phase, the research became focused on the conditions and possibilities of what the asylum-seeking men can and should be and become (see Article III).

The three phases of this research now enable me to focus on the process of becoming an asylum seeker, the subjectification of the men seeking asylum. In this research, the long wait of an asylum decision in a Nordic welfare state, Finland, created a temporary, existential context for becoming an asylum seeker. The context was destabilizing, as the asylum seekers were present, but deportable.

In this compilation-based thesis, I suggest that within this precarious context people become asylum seekers through three layers—the legal category, the societal expectations, and the fundamental need of being in a safe place—that constitute and reconstitute the position. *The legal category* of an asylum seeker reflects how the position is legally constructed and with what conditions. It materializes in the encounters of asylum seekers and the bureaucratic border and is impacted by the rapidly changing policies that affect asylum seekers' rights as humans. The *societal expectations* targeted at the asylum seekers are paradoxical and contradictory. They require one to be patient, active, positive, grateful, as well as being ready to accept prejudices, racism, and being viewed as a less worthy human being. These unjust expectations can, however, be recognized, mastered and resisted to an extent. The *fundamental basis* of needing a safe place is why people decide to seek asylum in a first place, albeit it tends to get forgotten within the domination of the other two layers. Overall, the process of becoming an asylum seeker is not stable, but constantly shifting in response to particular situations and conditions.

This research suggests that the ultimate goal of being an asylum seeker is to no longer be an asylum seeker. All the three layers aim to undo the position. Legally, the position is undone when one becomes either deported or receives an asylum decision. Societally, the position is being undone as asylum seekers are repeatedly told that they should “go back home”—that is, to go anywhere but Finland. And, finally, the fundamental need of being in a safe place also aims at no longer seeking but being in a safe place and holding the place. In other words, in the process of becoming an asylum seeker, the purpose is to unbecome an asylum seeker.

2 In search of a safe place

In this chapter, I define the concept of an asylum seeker in reference to prevailing definitions and related concepts. In addition, I discuss the increase in forced migration witnessed in 2015 and how it was dealt with in Finland. This year is relevant, since all the participants of this research arrived in Finland during that time. In the last section of this chapter, I introduce some theoretical perspectives on waiting, as in this research waiting is seen to be the context of the ongoing process of becoming an asylum seeker. This research contributes to the critical discussion that makes visible the experiences of people who are kept waiting (e.g., Brekke, 2004; Brun, 2015; Fontanari, 2015; Ghorashi, Boer & Holder, 2017; Haas, 2017; Kohli & Kaukko, 2018; Mountz, 2011; O'Reilly, 2018; Rainbird, 2014; Rotter, 2016; Thorshaug, 2019; Verdasco, 2018).

In the Finnish language the word, “asylum seeker,” translates as *turvapaikanhakija*. It means someone who is in search of a *safe place*. In addition, searching for a physically safe place, asylum seekers are searching their places as humans both globally and within multiple new communities. According to the 1951 Refugee Convention of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), asylum is granted to a person who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country” (UNHCR, 1951, Article 1/2). Although, according to the UNCHR (2021), asylum seeker is someone whose request for sanctuary is yet to be processed, they also note that people do not simply “become” refugees after their asylum application has been accepted. Instead, it is their justified fear that makes them refugees. This is why these categories are often intertwined in research.

Migration scholars have long problematized the clear and easy distinction between different types of migrants and have argued for the need to move beyond opposing binaries (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). For instance, the distinction between “refugees” and “migrants” does not reflect the manner in which migratory processes actually work, since they fail to consider that an individual may change status or simultaneously fit into two or more pre-existing categories (Collyer & de Haas, 2012). The construction of these categories can lead to homogenization and over-simplification of the experiences of the people they contain (Gupte & Mehta, 2007).

Seeking asylum is often characterized by nonlinearity and uncertainty (Griffiths, Rogers & Anderson, 2013). The uncertainty related to the process of asylum-seeking stems from the entanglement of multiple matters—for internationally displaced people, it is an assemblage of the situation in the country of departure, the journey, and the migration governance of the destination country. The journey itself is viewed as an interplay of waiting and movement, comprising different speeds and various journeys to different directions, in addition to crossing of borders. At some point during this journey, whether in a country of destination or in a transit country, asylum seekers apply for international protection. Receiving the asylum decision takes time—often years, and sometimes decades. In scholarship, waiting is often described as an experience of “liminality” (Malkki, 1995a, 1995b; Turner, 1964), that is, the transitory stage between two social positions and between two stages of life. In Liisa Malkki’s (1995a) famous words, asylum seekers and refugees are “betwixt and between”—detached from an old status but not yet incorporated into a new one, leaving their status socially and structurally ambiguous. However, as she carefully highlights, the liminality that accompanies the status of asylum seekers and refugees is not necessarily translated into their empirical experiences but is dependent on how they themselves make sense of their situation. Being an asylum seeker means that one is both legally present and deportable; one is simultaneously a citizen-in-waiting and a deportee-in-waiting (Haas, 2017). Asylum seekers must prepare themselves for at least three very different outcomes: settling in the new country, returning to their country of origin, or resettling in another country.

2.1 Increase in forced migration in 2015

Presently, globally over 70 million people have been forced to move from their homes. This figure includes internally (i.e., forced to move within national borders) and internationally displaced persons (UNHCR, 2020). Approximately 90% of refugees tend to stay in countries close to where they left from, countries like Iran, Ethiopia and Jordan (Betts & Collier, 2017). In 2015, however, more than 1.25 million asylum seekers arrived at the borders of the European Union (EU), many of whom were in need of international protection from war, violence, and persecution in their countries of origin. The majority of people came from Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Syria. In media and politics, the dehumanizing discourses of “mass influx,” “waves,” or “flows” of refugees where they were compared with natural disasters gained widespread popularity. That time period

was and is still referred to as the “refugee crisis.” Like Perre, de Vries, Richards and Gkliati (2018), I would rather consider the events leading to the increase in forced migration in 2015 as a crisis of protection, solidarity, and humanity than a crisis of refugees. Moreover, this “crisis” was a political crisis shaped by the failure of the EU to advance a common policy (Wahlbeck, 2018).

In the 21st century, the number of asylum applications in Finland has varied between 1,500–6,000 (Finnish Immigration Service, 2021). In 2015, the number increased to 32,477. The initial reception of asylum seekers in 2015 was organized in adherence to existing laws and international agreements. However, the new government formed in 2015 adopted a more restrictive policy than earlier governments; it abolished the nationally defined residence permit citing humanitarian reasons and introduced stricter criteria for family reunification (Wahlbeck, 2018). In their research, Saarikkomäki et al. (2018) studied the Finnish Immigration Service’s (hereafter Migri) decisions regarding the international protection received by Iraqi citizens of 18–34 years of age in 2015 and 2017. In 2015, the decisions for 14% of the applicants were negative, whereas in 2017, the percentage grew to 79%. Based on Migri’s arguments, asylum seekers’ fear was no longer objectively justified (Saarikkomäki et al, 2018). The decisions concerning whether those forced to leave their homes and countries should be provided protection under the Refugee Convention are and always have been intensely political (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). However, in Finland, the policy changes of 2015 made this especially obvious.

All of the participants of this research arrived in Finland in 2015. Some of the participants have received temporary residence permits (on the basis of subsidiary protection or employment), one of them has gone back to his country of origin, and one has been forced to leave Finland and is now seeking asylum from another country in Europe. Some of them were still in 2021 waiting for their final asylum decisions and from one of the participants I have not heard of in couple of years.

Finland is a Nordic welfare state with a large public sector and a developed bureaucracy, which makes the provision of a range of services to both asylum seekers and refugees possible. Nevertheless, in August 2015, it became clear that urgent measures were required to increase the reception capacity quickly (see Wahlbeck, 2019). Asylum seekers arriving in Finland are usually first placed in transit centers, where they wait for their first asylum interview, after which they are transferred to a reception center to wait for the decision. As the number of asylum seekers arriving in Finland increased tenfold within the span of year, reception centers across Finland filled up and temporary shelters had to be established. The

temporary shelters were commonly characterized by relatively low living standards and were often located in former institutional buildings, such as closed schools and hospitals and other abandoned properties. They were maintained by Migri, municipalities, and nongovernmental organizations and companies, and they offered the same services and operated according to the same principles as the reception centers.

As the number of asylum seekers arriving in Finland reduced in 2016, temporary shelters were gradually closed, and people were relocated to reception centers across the country. Some of the people decided to rent their own apartments for stability. Asylum seekers over 18 years of age who live outside of a reception center receive monthly reception allowance worth 263,78 € (Finnish Immigration Service, 2019). However, if the asylum seeker has received a deportation decision, they can no longer stay at the reception center and will no longer receive the reception allowance or other services, such as health care. Finland also has two detention units that confine people to wait for a deportation rather than a residence permit. The places in which people wait differ strongly in terms of their level of freedom and confinement: Some can have locked doors and bars on the windows, whereas others are homelike institutions that allow residents to move freely. All of the people participating in my study first lived and waited in a temporary shelter, after which they moved to private accommodations.

2.2 Waiting in the context of asylum-seeking

Waiting constitutes one of the central concepts of this research. In refugee research, waiting has been interpreted from a variety of theoretical viewpoints, including that of governance, which I will first introduce. I continue with that, although waiting is geopolitically, institutionally, and socially produced, it is also actively encountered, incorporated, and resisted amidst the everyday spaces that asylum seekers inhabit (see Conlon, 2011).

Shahram Khosravi (2014) refers to waiting as expecting something coming from others and perceives keeping others waiting as a technique for regulating social interactions—a manipulation of other’s time. Letting people wait and making them slow down, while simultaneously setting the parameters of time to that of those with no stress, that is, the privileged, as the norm, is ultimately, domination (Djampour, 2018). As Bourdieu (2000, p. 228) highlights, “making people wait—delaying without destroying hope—is an integral part of the exercise of power.” Therefore, a strong relationship exists between power, the state, and the

management of time (Griffiths et al., 2013). The slowness and uncertainty fabricated by migration bureaucracies become a source of anguish for asylum seekers and functions as a tool of governmentality (Griffiths, 2014). For instance, time is seized when irregular migrants are detained, time is monitored at the reception centers, and time is suspended during asylum claim processing—all of these temporal dimensions demonstrate how time is politicized as an instrument of exclusion and control (Brux, Hilden & Middelthon, 2019). Indeed, research on the governance of forced migration indicates that governing practices, stretching on the borders and streets of the societies, work relentlessly to contain, control, and organize where and the manner in which refugees may appear worthy (Ehrkamp, 2019; Hyndman, 1997; Mountz, 2011; Spathopoulou & Carastathis, 2020).

The spaces in which refugees and asylum seekers wait are often portrayed as static holding places where time and people stay still (Kohli & Kaukko, 2018). Such spaces are often geographically distant from the rest of society. For example, refugee camps tend to be located in isolated areas to keep those waiting out of sight (Hyndman & Giles, 2011). Thus, the camp can be viewed as a specific spatial formation—a (bio)political tool that manages and contains selected individuals “in custody” and separates them from the rest of society, not for what they have done but for who they are and what they represent as a “population” (Martin, Minca & Katz, 2020).

Current debates on the nature of the spaces in which people wait have been significantly influenced by the literature of the philosopher Giorgio Agamben and his notion of “the camp.” For him, the camp is a space that opens up when the exception starts to become the rule (1998). He argues that the camp is a space linked to the law despite being outside of sovereign territory. Therefore, it is “included through its own exclusion” (1998, p. 170). The camp actualizes a permanent state of exception, “as individuals are submitted to a separate regime of power that suspends ordinary law for an indefinite time and deprives them of their rights as citizens” (Fresia & Von Känel, 2016, p. 253). Researchers studying how asylum seekers are accommodated in Europe often refer to Agamben’s writings, as large camp-like mass accommodations with poor housing standards have adapted camp-like characteristics and are thus associated with the camps in the border areas. According to Abourahme (2014), Agamben was not trying to develop an analytical tool for studying camps but was rather attempting to employ the figure of the abstract camp to conceptualize the state of exception (not vice versa), and this might have been misinterpreted. However, the camp is generally associated with humanitarian emergency and the physical and mental suffering that both the media

and, to a certain extent, academic research have contributed to (Fresia & Von Känel, 2016).

A strong counterargument against Agamben's philosophy of the camp, originating especially from the feminist branches of refugee studies, claims that viewing camps simply as spaces of exclusion is an overly universal view that overlooks the experiences of the people inhabiting them. According to Mountz (2011), Agamben's theory is missing the detail that comes with specification, localization, historicization, and geographical contextualization: "The camp" appears to always be the same, regardless of place, context, person, moment, or state of exclusion. The theory focuses on the legal-political structure of "the camp," and not on the events that take place in it (Abourahme, 2014). The so-called "post-Agambenian" camp studies emphasize, for instance, how camps' spatialities, especially when concerning the management of displaced populations, are also crucially transformed by the agency of their residents, often generating new forms of political and social identities (Martin et al., 2020). According to Fresia and Von Känel (2016), "the camp apparatus" may function as much as a device of exclusion from the political community of citizens as a space of citizenship-making.

Brun (2015) emphasizes the capacity of asylum seekers to act in the present everyday by referring to "active waiting." She suggests a movement "away from understanding the protracted displacement as static, and toward a notion of it as fluid" (2015, p. 20). In addition to being active and fluid, waiting is relational, as discussed by Ramsay (2019, p. 404), "We deny the coevalness of refugees by describing them as "stuck" in the present, and ignoring the ways in which they share particular temporal rhythms with other people." A shared experience of waiting can build a sense of communality and relatedness, and, in turn, create a temporary sense of certainty (Verdasco, 2019). Social networks and affiliations in the places in which people wait can offer an alternative support mechanism in circumstances marked by public hostility, precarious entitlement, and conditional rights (Sigona, 2015).

The focus of the research on asylum seekers' lives may often turn towards the future, as people are waiting for something to be decided and received in the future. In her research, Karlsen (2020) explores endurance or "waiting out" as a particular means of inhabiting the temporal category of waiting that emphasizes living through the present conditions rather than finding pathways to a desired future. "Waiting out" denotes how one waits to see what happens or for something bad to end rather than waiting in anticipation of a specific future event (Hage, 2009). Karlsen (2020) suggests that "waiting for" and "waiting out" together form the

continuing imperative of staying in an unfavorable condition rather than leaving. “Waiting for” relies on the understanding that the “queue” is actually moving, even if it is infinitely slow (Hage, 2009), whereas “waiting out” denotes a mode of governing the self in times of crisis that functions by positioning waiting as something that can be done well or poorly (Karlsen, 2020). The complexity and heterogeneity of asylum seekers’ “now” is critical and should be conceptualized as a constellation of interrelations that are biological, material, legal, and affective in nature and are informed by relations of power (Drangslund, 2020). For people who are exposed to bordering practices, the waiting has no end; rather they have to withstand an endless struggle in their demand of the right to take part (Khosravi, 2020).

3 On becoming a subject seeking asylum

In this chapter, I will explain more thoroughly the process through which people become asylum seekers, as it is seen in the feminist-informed poststructural theories (e.g., Braidotti, 2011a, 2011b; Butler, 1995; Davies, 2004, 2008; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). To do this, I lean on the concept of subjectification. It enables me to examine what kind of asylum-seekingness the waiting produces, according to the participants of this research. To examine how the asylum-seekingness becomes told and negotiated by the participating men, I utilize the concept of subject position. In addition, I focus on the gendered aspects in occupying the subject position of an asylum seeker.

3.1 Subjectification

The process through which people become asylum seekers, or the occupiers of any other subject position, is here referred to as subjectification. The concept of subjectification enables an understanding of the process of subject formation through which people become recognized as asylum seekers. It enables looking at the boundaries and possibilities faced by asylum-seeking men in their everyday lives. It sheds light on how the men read and interpret the surrounding discourses and one's own possibilities in them and how one's readings and interpretations further produce surrounding discourses. By discourse, I mean complex interconnected webs of being, thinking, and acting, that are in constant flux and often contradictory (Gannon & Davies, 2014). Discourses are the bodies of ideas that emerge within and reflect specific power relations; they render some ideas as common sense and others as nonsensical (Youdell, 2006). Thus, some manners of thinking, speaking, and being are viewed as appropriate, while others are not. Discourses reach into the very "matter" of bodies, shaping desires and intimate modes of being in the world (Butler, 1993). Becoming an asylum seeker is bound to the surrounding discourses and power relations that alter people as subjects. Power relations constitute human beings within discursive formations that are only *descriptions*, albeit sometimes powerful descriptions with very real material effects (St. Pierre, 2013). The descriptions may not be rational, intentional, ethical, or progressive, but they are producing us and the world (St. Pierre, 2013).

For asylum seekers, the material effects of the discursive formations constituting them are very real. For example, not only are the circumstances of departing one's country of origin challenging and possibly inhumane and

traumatizing, but the host country presents its own challenges: Gaining access to asylum is increasingly difficult and possibly unfair (Hambly & Gill, 2020), access to national health systems is complicated (Tuomisto, Tiittala, Keskimäki & Helve, 2019), and the right to education and employment may be denied (Dunwoodie, Kaukko, Wilkinson, Reimer & Webb, 2020). Moreover, media narratives, public discussion, and political discourses tend to negatively portray asylum seekers as threats or a burden to the receiving societies or, alternatively, as victims (Smets, Mazzocchetti, Gerstmans & Mostmans, 2019). The descriptions constituting human beings have, over time, become so transparent, natural, and real that it is forgotten that they are fictitious—they are accepted as the truth (St. Pierre, 2013). This truth produces certain life circumstances, boundaries, and possibilities and affects how life as an asylum seeker should unfold and how the subjectivities of asylum seekers become formed.

I follow the feminist-informed (e.g., Braidotti, 2011a, 2011b; Butler, 1995; Davies, 2004, 2008; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) poststructural (Foucault, 1977; 2000) understanding of subject formation. French philosopher Michel Foucault is often considered and referred to as the “first reference” of the concept of subjectification (or subjectivation or subjection or *assujétissement* in French). In this understanding, a subject is constituted through discursive practices, that is, the meanings through which the world and the self are made knowable and known (Foucault, 1977). Discursive practices refer to the practices of knowledge formation by focusing on how specific bodies of knowledge (discourses) operate and the work they do (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014).

Being, or rather becoming, an asylum seeker is understood as socially constructed in the discourses of migration and asylum seeking. Throughout these discourses, people become “subjected, categorized, classified, hierarchized, and normalized” as asylum seekers (Foucault 1977; Kurki 2019, p. 20). Bronwyn Davies (2004) discusses how there is never freedom from the discursive constitution of self or autonomy in the sense of being an individual standing outside social structure and process; however, one has the capacity to recognize such constitution and resist, subvert, and change the discourses through which one is being constituted. Power presumes counter-power, which, in turn, creates new life forms capable of disrupting hegemonic forms, even potentially overwriting them (Davies, 2004).

Foucault (2000) discusses how subjects are subjects to someone else owing to power, control, and dependence but are simultaneously tied to their self by a conscience. According to him, “both meanings suggest a form of power that

subjugates and makes subject to” (2000, p. 331). Therefore, in subjectification, the relation between the subject and power is critical; the subject is always understood as both *constituted*, viewed as determined by external social forces, and *constituting*, perceived as acting against structures (Bilge, 2010). Therefore, power is not only oppressive, for it constrains individuals’ freedom, but also productive, because it is constitutive of subjectivities (Hekman, 1995). This places the ambivalence of mastery and submission at the heart of becoming a subject (Davies, 2006), as Judith Butler (1995, pp. 45–46) stated: “The lived simultaneity of submission as mastery, and mastery as submission, is the condition of possibility for the subject itself.” One is both subjected and simultaneously made into a self-knowing subject through available discourses and positioning within those discourses (Laws & Davies, 2000). The asylum seeker subject, therefore, is not only the one who is already preconfigured and labelled but also the one who actively makes the world.

It is now clear that the concept of subjectification provides an insight into how we become who we are and what we are. The process is always ongoing and incomplete: The subject is never fixed but always in the process of becoming (Jones, 1997). The effects of subjectification are neither determined nor predictable (Bacchi, 2017). Subjectification can be understood as a positioning, shaping, and reshaping of self in relation to others and social structures (Davies et al., 2001; Green & Reid, 2008; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Lenz Taguchi, 2005; Youdell, 2006). In subjectification, an individual detects, negotiates, meets, and contests the surrounding expectations (Davies et al., 2001). Although done by an individual, subjectification arises not so much from the individual but from the condition of possibility (Butler, 1995)—the discourses that prescribe not only what is a desirable form of subjectivity but also what is recognizable as an acceptable form of subjectivity (Davies et al., 2001). Thus, subjectivity is significant only as long as it is implicated within a discourse. Subjectivity must not be confused with individualism or particularity; “whereas identity is a bounded, ego-indexed habit of fixing and capitalizing on one’s selfhood, subjectivity is a socially mediated process of relations and negotiations with multiple others and with multilayered social structures” (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 4).

The subject in becoming “is as much outside itself as in itself—webbed in its relations—until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 3). The notion of “becoming” involves a destabilization of being, with an emphasis on the “in-between.” It signals the nonfixity of the categories shaped through ongoing, contested, and contingent processes or practices (Chia,

1996). Thus, the “becoming a subject” in a poststructuralist sense means that the idea of a subject does not entail an idea of a self that has an inner essence that remains, or should remain, stable through different situations (Davies, 2004). It rather enables “the subject to see itself in all its shifting, contradictory multiplicity and fragility, and also to see the ongoing and constitutive force of the multiple discourses and practices through which it takes up its existence” (Davies et al., 2004, p. 363).

The feminist-informed poststructural understanding of subjectification taken up in this research is not the only way in which subjectification can be seen. My use of subjectification in this research notably differs from how for example Gert Biesta has discussed subjectification in education. In his work, Biesta (2020) separates socialization from subjectification whereas in feminist-informed poststructural theories, such distinction is not made. Subjectification, as feminist poststructuralists use the concept, encompasses both, subjectification and socialization. Biesta views subjectification as the interruption of socialization, whereas feminism-informed poststructuralists see them as essentially parts of the same process. Biesta (2020, p. 100) argues that “subjectification should not be understood as a process of becoming, as a development *toward* being a subject. Rather, we might say that subjectification is what always interrupts our becoming. It is an event that occurs in the here and now.” According to the feminist-poststructuralist perspective I utilize in this research, the becoming of a subject is not pre-determined, and thus it cannot be interrupted; becoming is in constant motion, taking multiple directions or forms. Becoming does not take place *toward* being a subject, as the subject already exists and re-exists in encounters with the world. Biesta (2020, p. 97) discusses an “infantile” and a “grown-up” way of trying to live one's life, of which the latter would be more advisable. From the point of view of feminist approach, one's life would appear as complex interplay of both and many other ways of living. Overall, feminist-informed poststructural theories pursue not to lean on binary logics, which is a suitable approach for this research, in which I wish to avoid and break down binaries.

The concept of subjectification—“becoming” being an essential part of it—provides tools to explore asylum-seekingness as constant movement in relation to the world. When discussing the lives of asylum seekers in the context of protracted waiting, asylum-seekingness often becomes depicted as static and asylum seekers as staying still with their lives on hold. The concept of subjectification allows me to focus on the movement in this apparently static phase of life and the discursive constitution of asylum-seekingness in its societal context. It allows me to take into

consideration its simultaneous reconstituting and reconstituted nature and to focus on which kinds of layers of asylum-seekingness become produced and negotiated within the situational framework of this research.

Subjectification happens within the subject position, that is, within all the subject positions one occupies. Although people exist in the intersections of different subject positions they occupy, in this research, I focus on the process of subjectification within the subject position on an asylum seeker.

3.2 Subject position

As stated above, in this research, I focus on how one becomes subjectified as an asylum seeker. To do this, I need to look at the subject position of an asylum seeker. With “position,” I refer to “subject position.” “A subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 48). This means that once a person takes up the position of an asylum seeker as one’s own, a person inevitably views the world from the vantage point of asylum-seekingness and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines, and concepts that are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned (Davies & Harré, 1990). This applies in all the subject positions people occupy, which means that the participants of this study view the world from all their positions, not only from the vantage point of asylum-seekingness.

Asylum-seekingness, here, is understood simply as occupying the subject position of an asylum seeker. It translates from the Finnish word “turvapaikanhakijuus,” which I see as a phase of life, a state of living on politically produced borders that form a spectrum of circumstances. It is also related to the idea of “refugeeness,” that Malkki (1995) discusses as a social, political and legal construction.

Everyone occupies various subject positions in their lives. The people who occupy the position of an asylum seeker have occupied and continue to occupy positions from an unlimited list of possibilities, for instance, fathers, mothers, wives, husbands, employees, students, Christians, Muslims, queers, heterosexuals, politicians, activists, and so on. The different subject positions that an individual holds in life may also conflict each other. For example, one may be a Christian and a homosexual in a context in which the two positions are politically constructed as mutually exclusive (Mikulak, 2019; Young, Trothen & Shipley, 2015).

Since people exist at the intersecting points of multiple discursive practices, that is, subject positions, an individual is not fixed at any one of these points or locations; not only does the individual shift locations or positions, but what each location or position might mean shifts across space, time, and contexts (Davies, 2004). Thus, individuals may exist as much at the intersecting point as they do on the curved line of movement between them (Davies, 2004). Therefore, subject positions are fluctuant, processual, overlapping social categories of self-perception and societal structures (Davies, 2008).

Subject positions provide us with the content of our subjectivity, with a particular, limited set of “concepts, images, metaphors, ways of speaking and self-narratives that we adopt as our own to make us secure as social-beings-in-the-world” (Dagg & Haugaard, 2016, p. 401). Whereas subject positions of relative power, for example, that of a teacher or a company owner, may be actively sought, the positions with less power, for instance membership in an oppressed minority, are often occupied with birth—although they may still be embraced. An asylum seeker is rarely a sought-after subject position; people become asylum seekers by necessity, by force. Furthermore, this position limits an individual’s access to positions with relative power. Individuals tend to enter the position of an asylum seeker only when the other plausible positions have even less power or exert an even more negative impact on their life (e.g., a victim of violence).

The meanings attached to different subject positions are partially determined by how each group is represented. In media narratives, the dominating frame is to portray asylum seekers either as voiceless victims or political, economic, religious, or cultural threats (Smets et al., 2019). This is the case in the Finnish context as well, especially after the increase in forced migration in 2015 (Kuusisto & Tuominen, 2019). This means that, on the one hand, asylum seekers are presented as a threat to national belonging and security while, on the other hand, liberal and humanitarian discourses of citizenship portray asylum seekers as human beings in need of protection (Papastergiadis, 2006; Zembylas, 2010).

The intersecting point, when occupying the subject positions of an asylum seeker and a man is rather relevant in the discourses of asylum seeking. In social media, at worst, asylum-seeking men are portrayed as terrorists, if not rapists (Rettberg & Gajjala, 2015). A gendered association exists between danger and boredom in context of young asylum-seeking men who have received negative asylum decisions (Griffiths, 2015). They are often brought up in racialized discourses, and, as young men, are particularly vulnerable to being xenophobically stereotyped (see Hubbard, 2005). As an objection to these representations,

alternative “hero”-narratives have emerged in host societies. This has created pressure for asylum-seeking men to present themselves as diligent, grateful, responsible, and education-oriented (Wernesjö, 2019).

With the above-mentioned representations imposed on them, asylum seekers have no choice but to negotiate within them. During the time of waiting for an asylum decision, the participants of my research had taken up multiple subject positions. They occupied positions such as an asylum seeker, a rejected asylum seeker, a black person, a brown person, a man, a son, a brother, a father, a husband, a boyfriend, a single man, a friend, a roommate, an Atheist, a Muslim, a Christian, a bisexual person, a heterosexual person, a student, an intern, an employee, an unemployed person, and so on. At the intersection of these positions and many more and within the representations, possibilities, and boundaries informing these positions, the people participating in this research negotiated their subjectivities.

4 Producing knowledge nomadically

The research at hand is nomadic. Nomadic means the creation of spaces and manners of thinking that open new directions and routes in research practices and resist codified or normalized modes of thinking and acting (Braidotti, 2011a; Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). In this research, nomadic knowledge production enabled and was enabled by “the constant movement between and within different theoretical approaches, between and within the production of a wide range of data and the constant movement and change during the research process in researcher’s thinking and positions” (Ikävalko, 2016; Kurki, 2019, p. 26). The constant movement of the research eventually invited the idea of the nomadic, although I did not initially use the word. I consider this research nomadic, as it moved with, circulated within, and shifted with the changing life circumstances of the participants across several years. The approach of nomadic research differs from longitudinal studies in the way that data is not gathered according to a predeterminate plan to consider the particular stages or cross points of the participants’ lives. Rather, the research focuses on the becomings of the events, stories, and notions that shaped the participants’ lives.

In this chapter, I discuss the methodological, ethical, and analytical choices made in this research. Next, I explain how this research became nomadic through three streams, namely theoretical, methodological, and relational.

4.1 Three streams of the current nomadic research

Nomadic research builds organically, with time and motion. Knowledge is seen to be constructed rhizomatically within the movement between different times and places (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). In this research, the nomadic aspect can be explained through three streams: “theoretical,” “methodological,” and “relational.” Instead of referring to these as stages, I use the word stream to emphasize their continuous, mobile nature. The distinction between these streams may, to some extent, seem artificial, as they are very much overlapping.

Considering the theoretical stream, nomadic refers to the movement within and between different theoretical approaches. Different approaches can be applied or tested. They can be discussed or even argued upon without the need to reach a final conclusion (Ikävalko, 2016; Kurki, 2019). Contradictions can be left visible. When research does not have a pre-existing research design, method, process, procedure, or practice, it begins with the concepts of poststructuralism (St. Pierre, 2021). In

my research, the theoretical framework accumulated as the research proceeded, continuously guiding the research focus towards the intensities that appeared meaningful in the process of nomadic knowledge production. Nomadic thought is also embedded in the main concepts of this research, as subjects are perceived as nomadic, subject positions as shifting, and subjectification being in constant motion, in becoming.

Considering the methodological stream, nomadic denotes how different sets of data are open-ended and without clear borderlines (Ikävalko, 2016; Kurki, 2019). When conducting research for years with people whose statuses are not very stable, data production becomes inevitably nomadic. As the asylum-seeking men moved within the conditions of possibility, grasping openings and changing directions when facing boundaries, my research followed them. It could not have been fully planned beforehand. Even the temporary shelter offered a nomadic glimpse. It emerged and disappeared quickly only 11 months after its construction. The idea of nomadic knowing makes it possible for me to take into account the knowing that exists simultaneously in different locations, times, and spaces: the temporary shelter many years ago, the places in which we used to hang out with the participants, the room where I now sit in as I am writing, our text messages, the research interviews, my memory of the process, and so on (see Hohti, 2016a). Following Rosi Braidotti (2002, p. 173), this study employs nomadic thinking because it is “moving on, passing through and creating connections where things were previously disconnected or seemed unrelated.”

When considering the relational stream, I am referring to all the relationalities that affected how the current study unfolded. I also mean the relationships between me and the men participating in the research. First, our positions were nomadic, overlapping, and transforming with time. The relationships began with me being a volunteer worker, and them being unknown newcomers, residents of the shelter, and asylum seekers. At the very beginning, we were not allowed to exchange any contact information or be in touch through social media. I was not allowed to be alone with the men according to the rules of the organization I volunteered for. Later, our positionalities changed as I became a researcher, and they became research participants. At some point, in between or after occupying these positions, we also became friends. Some of the men became more important to me than others, and for some men, I became more important than for the others. Once, I lent Ali my apartment, as he did not have one, and I was out of the country. As is witnessed in life in general, the relations in this research were manifold and fluctuating.

The idea of nomadic as relational naturally includes my thoughts, feelings, and acts, as they are always relational. It acknowledges that my thinking and feeling have been affecting these previous streams intentionally or unintentionally, shedding light on some parts while leaving others blurred. This stream continuously meets with other streams, passing through every area. It reflects the nomadic, untraceable thought that generates this research, dictating what becomes seen and what attention is paid to. This subjective research includes all the different positions I have occupied in relation to this research and the intensities and emotion arising within them. When writing this summary report, carrying myself as a researcher within the text has been a challenge. It felt difficult, as this is not about me. However, similar to everyone, my subjectification in different overlapping subject positions has been nomadic. This research process has evoked a range of emotions from horrifying to happy ones. I will not forget how it felt as I waited to hear how a difficult surgery went, or when Zain called me from the train saying that he will go back to his country. During this research process, I got familiar with being sad, worried, and powerless. But also, I will not forget the faces and voices of the people I bumped into on the streets: How we first slowly remembered each other from the temporary shelter, after which they joyfully yelled that they received a positive asylum decision.

4.2 Nomadic research with asylum-seeking men

In September 2015, I started volunteering at a temporary shelter located in Northern Finland. At that time, I did not know that some of the residents of the shelter would also become the participants of this research, or even that I would become a researcher. At first, we cooked food together, played sports, and went on long walks to the city center. During hanging out, the participants got to know their new neighborhoods and we got to know one another. After six months of spending time together, sharing mundane and mattering stories during our walks and in the corridors of the shelter, I started thinking about research. The stories I had heard needed to be heard outside of the shelter's corridors. I asked if Kokab, Mahammed, Zain, and Yusuf (self-chosen pseudonyms) would also like to share their thoughts in form of a research interview. They agreed, and that could be considered the official start of my research.

In the summer of 2016, the temporary shelter was closed down. The residents were offered accommodation in reception centers all over Finland. Busses filled up and left the driveway, leaving dozens of people waving. Both sadness and

excitement were conspicuous. Many of the residents decided not to relocate once again, having spent almost a year in one place. Disappointed by the long wait, Zain eventually decided to return to his country of origin to take care of his child. Yusuf relocated to Southern Finland. Kokab and Mahammed wanted to stay, and they moved to rental apartments. In the spring of 2018, I asked if they wanted to participate in new interviews with me. In these two years, we had been hanging out together on and off. This was also the time I asked other asylum-seeking men I knew from the shelter and through mutual friends if they would like to share their thoughts as well. That was when Saleh, Navid, Ali, Fathi, and Emad joined the research. By that time, all of them lived in rental apartments with other people. Coincidentally, some of the people from the shelter secured an apartment in the same building in which I lived, which meant that we continued to bump into each other, albeit in different corridors now.

Kokab, Mahammed, Zain, Yusuf, Saleh, Navid, Ali, Fathi, and Emad had come to Finland from Iraq, Syria, and Somalia. They were between 23 and 39 years old when they joined the research. Their journeys had begun in different places, but they were similar in many ways after their arrival. Their time of waiting featured the same cornerstones: their arrival alongside thousands of others in the fall of 2015, their settlement in temporary shelters, and their move to rental apartments. In addition, many of the men received negative asylum decisions and appealed against them.

In this type of research, the participants are often presented carefully, with an aim to bring them closer to reader. Here, the participants are viewed not as the objects of the research, but as the narrators of the subject matter of this research— asylum seekers' subjectification. To discuss the issue in its societal context, I wish to avoid individualizing it in relation to specific participants. This means that I will not describe the sexual orientation, skin tone, marital status, personal background, occupation, hobbies, education or anything else of the participants. These details may appear in the findings, if the participants have deemed them relevant for their narration, as for example Ali did when he described a racist attack. This kind of information of the participants is relevant only to the extent to which it is relevant to the findings—and when it is, this is explicated in the findings. I will explain this more thoroughly in the Sub-chapter 4.5 *Relational ethics*, as the problem of individualization and the question of “To what kind of knowledge are we entitled?” need more ethical considerations.

Nomadic thought is a process that privileges change and motion over stability (Braidotti, 2013). This nature of inquiry seems particularly fitting when doing

research with people who constantly experience the tensions between the nomadic and the sedentary, movement and wait. The life situations of these people place them in a state of involuntary nomadism. They cannot start building their more or less “permanent” lives in the places of their choosing. Waiting time is defined by geographical detachment, since the people are legally present but deportable. The places in which asylum seekers live, nationally or internationally, and the legal status granted to them may change rapidly. The knowledge these asylum seekers possess with regard to their own lives is under constant negotiation, as is their definition of a “safe place.” Therefore, the nature of the knowledge produced in this research is essentially nomadic.

All in all, this research followed, or perhaps, travelled with the changing life situations of the asylum-seeking men during their first years in Finland. Thinking the research in nomadic terms enabled me to go along with it, be open to the unexpected. It enabled me to follow the fluid and changing realities that unraveled while the participants awaited their asylum decisions.

4.3 Nomadic hanging out and in-depth interviews

The research is grounded in hanging out. It means that I and the participants hung out whenever we felt like it, where-ever we felt like. In the beginning of this research process, when the details of my research design were only developing, I began to call our time spent together “ethnographic hanging out” (inspired by Pyyry, 2015; Tani, 2015; see also Kaukko, Korkiamäki & Kuusisto, 2019). These were also the terms used in the sub-studies. The words were not inaccurate, as the hanging out was initially, especially in the temporary shelter, *ethnographically oriented*. Like often observed in feminist ethnography, the hanging out provided a possibility to embrace the everyday experiences of people, especially those forced to live on the margins, as being epistemologically valid (Davis, 2013). However, the hanging out did not classify as ethnography; the aim was not to produce research material and I did not write observational notes of our time. This hanging out became a foundation of this research, but not data for it. It enabled conducting interviews in a more focused manner, and more ethically.

Later, as my methodological understanding grew, I chose to align the research with nomadic research instead of ethnographic research. Ethnographic research can be a part of nomadic research, but nomadic research here is viewed more holistically as a methodological, as well as a theoretical and a relational movement. I began to call the hanging out nomadic instead of ethnographic, as it better

reflected what we had been doing with the participants, most importantly because it was purposefully lacking any schedule, structure and observational notes.

The space in which the research is conducted is often called a field. In this research, there was not a unitary field, not a separate place that I could enter and leave as a researcher. The field travelled with us on the streets, as we took walks together, to coffee places, to the temporary shelter, to our homes and to all the other places we hang out with the participants. The field became built organically together with the participants, and it was constantly in motion as their lives were impacted by, for example, asylum decisions, moves, racism on the streets, and increasing frustration. Therefore, the field in this research was considered in nomadic terms. Reflecting on the concept of field, Elisabeth St. Pierre (1997, p. 368) refers to her inability to separate space and time when conducting nomadic research: “It is not just that I don’t know where the field is, I don’t know *when* it is either.” Similarly, in this study, as the research took place in multiple places, the contours of the field were flickering, if not invisible. With time, the field gained more layers. It became more complex as I was invited to birthdays, weddings, and other meaningful events. I did not intend to leave the field after the “research period” was over (for ethics of leaving, see e.g., Duncombe & Jessop, 2002; Heyl, 2007; Kaukko et al., 2019; Murphy & Dingwall, 2007).

Because of the nature of both the “nomadic” and the “hanging out” it is not possible and probably not even reasonable to provide detailed information on the duration or the quality of our time spending. Overall, the most active time span of hanging out lasted three years. During the first year we often hung out in the temporary shelter with other volunteers and residents. After the men moved to rental apartments, the amount of time spent with the participants differed; with Zain, for instance, we used to spend hours studying together (the matters of our own) and with Yusuf it was just occasional coffee moments quite rarely. At some periods of time, with some men, we hung out weekly, sometimes even daily. At times, we only saw each other a couple of times a month. We also kept in touch through social media. At times, we ran into each other at pubs and ended up chatting.

The nomadic hanging out was significant for this research in two ways. First, it provided me with some knowledge and understanding of the everyday life of asylum-seekers and enabled me to recognize and ask questions to which I would have otherwise been blind. Spending time together enabled me to understand the situations of these men in a more profound level. Second, the hanging out made trustworthy relationships possible. It was particularly important in the context of

this research, in which the participants were in many ways positioned in the margins of the society.

It was important for me to ensure that the participants could control which parts of their everyday life are used in the research, and what kind of knowledge is created about it. Therefore, I conducted in-depth interviews, which comprised the data to be analyzed for this research. The trust required for the in-depth interviews, and the contextual knowledge to ask questions were possible because of the hanging out.

I conducted 10 in-depth interviews with nine men. Initially, four interviews were conducted in 2016 (Kokab, Mahammed, Zain, and Yusuf). In 2018, the data were complemented by six more interviews with seven asylum-seeking men (Navid and Saleh together, Ali, Emad, Fathi, Kokab, and Mahammed). Each of the interviews lasted from 40 minutes to 1 hour and 40 minutes. I audio-recorded and later transcribed them. Navid and Saleh chose to be interviewed together at their home, whereas others were interviewed separately at my home, as that was their choice. All the 10 interviews were conducted in English, with occasional Finnish words and sentences from the participants. The interviews were loosely structured and open. While some supporting questions were asked, the participants were encouraged to talk about anything that felt significant to them. Some of the questions emerged based on the hanging out, which formulated each interview differently. I interviewed Kokab and Mahammed at two different points in time to address the act of waiting and the passage of time. At this point, I also invited new research participants to get more views on waiting in the context of asylum-seeking. Some of the people joining the research already were my friends, some of them were people that I had been hanging out together with mutual friends. Some of the men invited themselves to be the participants of the research, saying that they have stories to tell.

4.4 Process of analysis

The process of analysis comprises four phases, as this research proceeded iteratively in cycles. Each component of the analysis deepened the empirical and theoretical understanding of the discursive boundaries and possibilities experienced by the asylum seekers participating in this research. Overall, the data were treated with a focus on affective intensities. I dwelled on them and considered each instance with the data as an encounter rather than rising above it (MacLure, 2018), as I detail below.

The research initiated with the questions arising from “the field,” the temporary shelter, as the four participating men reflected on the possibilities of them taking part in their communities and, more broadly, in the Finnish society. The first round of research interviews took place during the phase of life in which the men were just embarking on their journeys in Finland, and I was beginning my journey as a researcher. The starting point of this research was primarily empirical, as the questions asked arose from the time spent together with the participants at the shelter. The aim of the first phase of analysis was to identify what assumed centrality when the asylum-seeking men talked about their lives in the temporary shelter. Therefore, overall, I examined the data to pinpoint this by asking “what do the participants talk about when they describe their experiences of participation, and lack of participation?”, and arranged the data thematically. This type of empirical approach was needed and cardinal, as I wanted to grasp the issues that were relevant to “the field.” In its generality, this approach led me to seek more in-depth knowledge on the experiences of the asylum-seeking men and their waiting time, as the time kept passing without the men receiving the desired asylum decisions.

After the closing of the shelter and the men moving to rental apartments, I, together with the nine participants, produced the second part of the research material in form of interviews. This enabled me to attain a more in-depth understanding of asylum seekers’ waiting time. In this research, as in postorientation, truths are seen as always partial, and knowledge as always situated, as knowledge is produced by and for particular interests, in particular circumstances, and at particular times (MacLure, 2013). To respect this kind of knowledge of asylum-seeking men, and to do justice to this knowledge, the second phase of analysis focused only on the stories of two participants. I analyzed the participants’ interviews by utilizing narrative and poststructural tools, with the focus on the situated and fluid experiences of asylum seekers during the lengthy period of waiting. These stories were arranged according to the themes that were central in their interviews conducted at two different time points during their waiting (2016 and 2018). The stories were constructed through a slightly modified form of narrative emplotment. Traditionally, emplotment refers to meaning production in a story (Polkinghorne, 1995). However, instead of re-establishing significant relations between the participants’ life events, I identified central themes related to waiting and its confining aspects. I focused on what gets addressed in the context of speaking about these themes. Through this process, I identified how confinement became described as the men talked about their lives. Thereafter, the

next organic step was to overall strengthen the theoretical contribution of the research, which led me to the next phase of the process.

In the third phase of analysis, the interview data were included in the analysis as a whole for the first time. I employed the concept of discourse as an analytical tool, not only as embedded in language but also as a productive and regulative practice that exerts real material effects (Foucault, 1977). During the analysis, thinking of the material effects of the discourses, I looked for descriptions of the explicit or implicit discursive expectations of the participants as asylum seekers. I extracted all such descriptions as long quotes that included not only the content of what was told but also how the content was told. Moreover, I focused on the participants' descriptions of their own actions, emotions, and thoughts. As experiences are, in this research, understood to be constituted through multiple discourses that give rise to wavering understandings and emotions, space is granted to recognize ambivalence and contradiction (Davies, 2004). For example, being called "a racist slur" was described as a mundane everyday occurrence, accompanied by comments such as "but there is racism everywhere," and "I am thankful to be here." Overall, I examined the data by asking "What kind of asylum seeker subjectivity emerges in the telling of these stories and in the way in which they are they told?"

Finally, these three phases of analysis led me to think about the process of becoming an asylum seeker, which became the topic of this compilation. The starting point for the fourth phase of analysis was to firmly think with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). In this phase, I considered all the data produced during the years of conducting this research. I printed hundreds of pages of interview transcriptions, read them over and over, dwelled with them. Together with this data, I was thinking with feminist-informed poststructural theory and with the concepts of becoming a subject, subjectification, and subject position. Thus, in this compilation, I focus on how one becomes subjectified as an asylum seeker, based on which I examine the layers of asylum-seekingness.

4.5 Relational ethics

Fixed ethical guidelines that inform ethical practice usually raise questions concerning respect, beneficence, and justice (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). These ethical principles form the basis of many human research ethics committees at universities, professional organizations, and national policies and legislations. In

some countries, all research conducted under the auspices of universities must be approved by such committees (Gillam, 2013). However, this is not the case in many European countries such as Finland. Research ethics have been found to need contextual, temporal, and social flexibility, which is often too complex for ethical preassessments to address (Kaukko, Dunwoodie & Riggs, 2017). Mere procedural ethics are not sufficient to ensure long-term ethical engagement with research participants in their changing situations. Researchers shoulder the responsibility to ensure that their own research practice is ethical. This research follows the guidelines of The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity for the responsible conduction of research. Moreover, ethics in this research were perceived as a never-ending, dynamic, and relational process that is shaped by the interaction between the researcher and the participants in the space and time they share (Lanas & Rautio, 2014).

If research ethics are considered only as protecting the vulnerable participants, the research would end up producing passive victims in need of protection and run the risk of reproducing the same fixed, marginalizing categories. Butler (2004, p. 30) argues that we should “critically evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others, and thus certain human lives are more grievable than others.”

Sara Ahmed (2000) suggests research to be appraised as an ethical encounter in which the researcher cannot undo the power relations that made their position as a researcher possible; however, they can, and should, understand their significance. The power relations in this research were implicitly obvious, but also often explicitly stated or acted. The relations became explicit, for instance, when I interviewed Mahammed at my home, and he disclosed that his dream was to someday live the way I live—like a person who lives in a house and goes to work. Or when Kokab apologized for criticizing Finland, as I was a citizen of the country and he was not. Or when Ali surreptitiously gave money to the bouncer as we left the bar, so that he could get in the next time too. Or when he asked me to translate the letter he received from Migri, as the information was not provided in a language he could understand. Or when I was not the one towards whom the racist comments were targeted on the streets.

When colonial powers considered their subjugated people, they often employed what is termed the “colonial gaze”; they saw the colonies through eyes that were blurred by misconception, misinformation, and stereotypes (Hunt, 2003). This is a critical issue in the present research as well. As Edward Said (1985, p. 4) stated, “The act of representing others almost always involves violence to the

subject of representation.” My gaze was formed as the gaze of a white able-bodied middle class academic Finnish woman. It influenced what I focused on in the research, the kind of questions I asked, how I understood the situations and the thoughts of the participants, and how I wrote about those issues later. My background is inevitably a part of my research. We are, after all and ultimately, as Tuuli Kurki (2019) reflects, white researchers who offer their stories about “others” and thus maintain old, colonial, and neo-colonial understandings of “us” and “them.”

I have been repeatedly asked why I chose not to utilize my own observations or write field notes as data, as during the years of hanging out I surely had witnessed many moments and issues I could use as data. It was an ethical choice. The recorded research interviews enabled the participants to choose which parts of their lives they wish to submit to the research. In the interviews, I asked about the issues I had witnessed, and they chose if and how these events would be worded for the research. This way, the participants were the narrators of their own lives. Due to this choice, I had to leave out some aspects that I found interesting, but the participants chose not to discuss. However, with a thorough analysis of the experiences the participants chose to share, it was possible to obtain significant research findings.

Like asylum interviews, research interviews may re-traumatize the interviewees. For this reason, I avoided asking personal questions, for instance, about family members that stayed in the countries the men left from. Certain questions I felt not having the right to ask at all. I never asked why these men were seeking asylum. Many told the reasons anyway. I later realized that justifying their right to be in this country does not only apply in Migri but extends to other situations as well. The constant justification is the debt attached to the position of an asylum seeker, expected to be paid in social encounters.

In the asylum-seeking process, the personal lives and even painful experiences become public property. Furthermore, these experiences can be questioned at any time. I chose the topic of this research so that it does not require passing information about the participants. However, we agreed with the participants that it is reasonable to provide their gender, age range and countries of origin. The reader does not have a right to these people. Instead, the reader has a right to understand, throughout the stories these people have chosen to tell, how the process of subjectification within the position of an asylum seeker may happen. The problem of individualization is that it centralizes the personal and detaches the context; in this research, the focus is on how the position of an asylum seeker becomes constituted within the context, within the social structure. Individualization also

includes the risk of portraying stories of heroes and victims (see Migrant Voice Report, 2020).

The choice of not individualizing the participants creates another ethical challenge: a possibility of the false assumption that the lives of these people were somehow similar. To mitigate this risk, I will, in a general manner, state that the participants were all different. For example, their likes ranged from going to gym, parties, cinema or football games to writing poems. Their dreams ranged from being a photographer, a pilot, a lawyer, a lecturer to falling in love or reuniting with the existing family. Their education ranged from being an archeologist or an engineer to having no education. The list goes on. After the research period, their lives have unfolded from establishing two businesses to being deported.

The positions of the people involved in this type of research are continually rethought (Cole, 2013). A research (or any kind of) relationship is not something that is established once—it is constantly “done” (Lanas & Rautio, 2014). For some of the men in the shelter, I was a volunteer worker, who became a researcher, who became a friend. The intertwining of these positions was not always easy. According to Wanda Pillow (2003), qualitative research would benefit from uncomfortable reflexivity that yields more “messy” examples that may not always be successful, examples that do not seek a comfortable end point but leave us in the uncomfortable realities of performing engaged research. Following her suggestion, I will in the next section, provide an example of a messy moment we encountered during data production. This example demonstrates how an approval from an ethics committee would have kept me safe as a researcher, but not necessarily the participants. The so-called research consent they gave needed to be fluid rather than fixed; the participants needed to have the right to withdraw their consent any moment, if they felt like it.

4.6 “Troubling” interview as an ethical tool

Maria: *How are you doing?*

Ali: *Should I say yes, or no?*

Maria: *You can say whatever you want.*

Ali: *I don't know.*

Maria: *You don't know?*

Ali: *Yes.*

Maria: *Is it because of ...?*

Ali: *Stop. I'm not ready. Please.*

[Interview stops.]

The purpose of conducting the interviews based on the hanging out was to ensure relational ethics. The above example, taken from the beginning of an interview, portrays how conducting interviews led to new ethical challenges; although it felt natural for me to shift positions, it was not always easy for all the participants. Before pressing the record button, we had been drinking coffee and were talking about the mentioned issue (which is removed from the transcript for ethical reasons) for half an hour. It was normal for us. It did not occur to me that Ali wanted to talk about that matter with me only as a friend, not as a researcher.

Ali was one of the men I spent the most amount of time with. He was also the one who experienced the most unease during the interview. I assume it was because of the intertwining of our positions as friends and participants of the research. Therefore, in this research it was ethically crucial to conduct interviews. It developed a joint understanding of which parts of Ali's and the other participants' lives I could and could not consider as data. The questions asked in the interviews enabled the participants to choose what to answer, when to stay silent, and when to "pause the research," as Ali did.

However, the fact that Ali suddenly felt nervous about talking to me in the capacity of a researcher sheds light on how problematic interviews can be. Me placing the recorder and the paper with supporting questions on the coffee table reshaped the material-discursive elements in the room, simultaneously reframing our positions. The *interview* was about to begin. And, due to the same reason, the interview was about to end very soon. After pausing the recorder, we went outside for a break, and I assured him that we really did not have to continue the interview. Despite my efforts, he was determined to continue. We ended up performing the interview under new conditions; he took the paper with the supporting questions, read them out loud one by one, and answered the ones he deemed fit. At the beginning he, in a way, interviewed himself. This portrays in an interesting manner how Ali resisted his position as a research participant—the "object" of the research. His agentic shift was to become the active subject of the research. He chose the questions to be asked and answered. He gave himself time to think. As the interview

progressed and we got used to our new positions, it became more like a conversation.

According to Lisa Mazzei (2009), the voices that are “given a hearing” are censored and disciplined even before we ask a single research question or record a single response. They are disciplined in ways that eliminate “a silent voice,” as it does not make easy sense and overshadows the voice that we are accustomed to hearing, knowing, and naming (Mazzei, 2009). Ali’s voice was shaped by his recognition of what was and was not safe to say to a recorder when occupying the position of an asylum seeker. On that particular Thursday evening, Ali happened to be in a difficult place regarding his asylum process, and his thoughts were anguished. In another time or space, the interview might have taken different turns. Therefore, instead of seeking a voice that can furnish truth, fixity, knowledge, and authenticity, we should focus on voices that challenge such truths and authentic meanings (Mazzei, 2009).

St. Pierre (interviewed by Guttorm, Hohti & Paakkari, 2015, p. 18) discusses how Foucault’s work was not grounded in the “thinking, knowing, conscious, speaking subject, but in the discursive formation in which the subject is produced and can speak certain things.” In her own research, St. Pierre did not privilege the voices as primary, as she could not write about the research participants as individuals, but rather used the interview data as a tool to think about subjectivity. Similarly, I examined the situated, partial, and fluid narratives of the men during the period of life when they were occupying the subject position of an asylum seeker and were able to speak certain things from the point of view of being in that position. Before I move on to address the findings, I will briefly introduce the Articles I, II, and III, from which the findings draw.

5 Overview of the articles

This doctoral thesis consists of three sub-studies, each of which is reported in a published article, and the compilation at hand. Each sub-study was conducted by me and is based on my time with the participants. The research participants' experiences and descriptions of them directed the research. Each article in which the sub-studies are reported is written by me and supported by the two co-authors, Maija Lanas and Mervi Kaukko, who gave insights to the analysis and theoretical choices and took part in writing.

In the research-process, the sub-studies were built on one another so that the second sub-study (see Article II) asked questions raised by the first sub-study (see Article I), and the third sub-study (see Article III) asked questions raised by the second one. This means that in the final research report compiled here, the three sub-studies do not have an equal role. The findings presented in this compilation draw more heavily on the third sub-study than the first two.

Article I, *Participation as part of the boundary conditions of an asylum seeker: Stories of participation, inclusion, and exclusion of young male asylum seekers living in a temporary shelter*, focuses on the social participation experienced by asylum-seeking men in a temporary shelter or the lack of it. The analysis draws on interviews with four men who had lived at the shelter and had been in Finland for six months. In this article, we focus on what becomes relevant in the early stages of asylum process in a new community at the shelter. As the men talked about their sense of participation, their speech revolved around the hopes they harbored for their future, their (very limited) possibilities of influencing the immediate and broader surroundings, close relationships at the shelter and globally, the experiences of one's own significance, and the welcoming and unwelcoming encounters with Finnish people.

In Article II, *Confined in waiting: Young asylum seekers narrating in and out of temporary shelter*, we look at what unraveled as time went by and things changed, not always in the desired direction. The article addresses the waiting and confinement experienced by young asylum seekers during and after their stay at a temporary shelter in Finland. We focus on the stories of Kokab and Mahammed. Through two sets of interviews conducted in 2016 and 2018, we looked at how their everyday lives unfolded in course of the changing situations from being at the temporary shelter to living in regular rental apartments. First, the findings highlight that while the time spent at the temporary shelter resembles physical, punitive confinement, it is also experienced as a warm and social time. Second, the article

argues that the confinement of young asylum seekers extends beyond physical confinement, as they are, for years, confined by forced movement and indefinite waiting and othered as a number in the system.

In Article III, *How to be “a good asylum seeker”?* *The Subjectification of Young Men Seeking Asylum*, the focus is on the subjectification of young asylum-seeking men. The underlying question is: If someone wants to fulfil the position ascribed to them, that is, be a “good asylum seeker” and respond to the surrounding demands to be the best of their abilities, what would then, entail a “good asylum seeker”? The data consists of interviews and hanging out with nine young asylum-seeking men throughout their asylum process. On the basis of their reflections on the discourses of the surrounding society, a “good asylum seeker” is patient, active, positive, and grateful; he normalizes the racism he faces and accepts the prejudices towards himself. A “good asylum seeker” also accepts the position of a less worthy human being, acknowledging that in an ideal situation he would be entirely away, out of sight, or in another subject position. Our findings showcase the sheer impossibility of successfully occupying the asylum seeker subject position, as the requirements are unrealistic. Paradoxically, one can say that a “good asylum seeker” is no longer an asylum seeker.

6 Subjectification of people positioned as asylum seekers

The research findings describe what kind of subjectification the research participants told and retold as they were positioned as asylum seekers. Overall, the subjectification happens in relation to the surroundings, which, in case of asylum seekers, were often fabricated, and, thus, experienced as difficult. The findings address the participants' manifold encounters with different institutions and other society actors within the multilayered context of waiting. The participants' experiences in Finland were diversified by the differential treatment they received on the basis of their class and ethnicity and their consequent unequal access to economic, social, and cultural resources.

The findings describe the subjectification of these men, as it appeared in this research, throughout the analysis. The subjectification happened in the context of waiting, meaning that as the waiting continued, the subjectification shifted with time. The process was cumulative, as the people continuously became increasingly familiar with their position. Throughout the waiting, the men began to recognize the expectations, sometimes paradoxical and contradictory, that were targeted at them. The findings address how the research participants submitted to, mastered and resisted the expectations.

In this chapter I will focus on what subjectification may be like for asylum seekers. After this, in the next chapter, I will look into the layers of asylum-seekingness, through which people become asylum seeker.

6.1 ... is shifting

The continuous process of subjectification was not static, but constantly shifting in response to particular situations and conditions. In addition to these small, ongoing shifts, the act of waiting created more easily perceivable, powerful shaping of subjectification. The men described an agency-limiting shift: The initial sense of freedom instilled by the decision-making power after deciding to seek asylum was followed by feelings of being punished and confined due to migration control in form of prolonged waiting.

In the fall of 2015, the asylum-seeking men experienced the excitement brought about by change and freedom as they had finally physically arrived where they aimed to be—in safety (see Article I). The men had filed their first asylum applications and were still getting acclimatized to life in Finland. The atmosphere

in the temporary shelter was hopeful; negative decisions for asylum applications had not yet been received and a safe future seemed possible. People were waiting, but they were waiting for something good to happen, as recalled by Navid about this time at the shelter:

It was beautiful time. When I was there it was so amazing time because in that time, all those guys in the shelter, no one had negative [decision], because we were just new in Finland. We don't do interview with immigration. So, you can see no one feel sad. No one feel bad. We just like waiting and we all thinking, we hope to get that ID, the permission. Okay so we always were cooking together, playing together, playing football, we always had fun. And we were always helping each other, and it was like one family of 300 persons. (Navid, int. 2018¹)

Malkki (1997, p. 35) discusses how displacement can become a form of “categorical purity” at the point where people are neither citizens of the present nor citizens of the past. This type of liminal state generated the “freedom of in-betweenness” (see also Ghorashi et al., 2017). The men had left their countries of origin by choice, which intertwined the sadness caused by leaving something behind with feelings of joy, excitement, and hope at the threshold of something new. By *choice*, I mean the discursive constitution of these asylum-seeking men as the authors of their own multiple meanings and desires, to the extent that they had taken on as their own in the discursive positioning they had access to (Davies, 1991).

After years of waiting for the asylum decision to come through, the in-betweenness started to feel less like freedom and more like confinement (see Article II). The waiting time turned the sense of hopefulness for a better future into a sense of being stuck and confined. Their position shifted from “the one who seeks” to “the one who waits,” which changed the tempo of movement within the position. These different shades were visible in the interviews conducted at two different points in time. The discursive shift entailed, for instance, a different outlook towards the future. In the first interview, all the men described their hopes for their futures (see Article I); however, during the second interview, the discussion revolved around how planning for life had lost its meaning. The different phases of the asylum-seeking process require different kind of subjectification.

To confine is to “keep or restrict someone or something within certain limits of space, scope, or time” (The Oxford English Dictionary, 2019). Since the focus of

¹ “Int. 2018” or “int. 2016” marks the year the men were interviewed.

this research is on the asylum seeker subject position, I have not explored the other positions occupied by the participants. Hence, I do not mean that the lives of the men participating in the study was completely stagnant or confined, as Kokab also describes below. The sense of confinement was fluid and situational, and its weight fluctuated. However, occupying a position in which one is seeking asylum and awaiting permission to stay or to be granted legal recognition as a citizen rarely takes place independent from the other positions in one's life.

Sometimes I feel I'm Finnish or something, because I'm going a lot. Go out and go to another city and visit camp there and visit many places near here. Sometimes I don't feel like I'm a refugee, but sometimes I really feel like I'm shit or something, because of what they are doing, what us ... Many bad things.
(Kokab, int. 2016)

The participants were hoping to fill the “in-between,” yet predominant subject position of an asylum seeker for a much shorter period of time. Because of prolonged occupation of the position, their space and scope had started to feel restrictive. Mostly, for the participants, it was a question of time, which had turned from a promise to a threat (see also Jefferson & Segal, 2019). The participants described how the feeling of “wasting one's life waiting” intensified as years went by, and how the feeling of being “trapped” amplified, even if they were not completely and literally confined (see Article II). Thus, although the men were not confined physically (except for inside the borders of a nation), they were confined to the position of a “waiter” until an external decision about their future was made—one that would allow them to move on to other positions in the society and in their lives. As time went by, the temporariness of waiting started to morph into the experience of waiting indefinitely.

6.2 ... is paradoxical and contradictory

This section addresses subjectification through the construction of an “ideal subject.” I explore the expectations that an asylum seeker should aim to fulfil to be considered “good enough.” These surrounding social and societal expectations, which impact subjectification, are paradoxical and contradictory. According to the participants they should ideally be **patient, active, positive, and grateful**. They should also **accept the prejudice and racism** they face in their everyday lives. Furthermore, they should internalize that they are **less worthy** due to all they cannot be. Most strikingly and paradoxically, considering the first four desired qualities,

they should accept that it is best if they would be **“away,”** that is, leave the country or take up a position other than an asylum seeker. Each of these perceived expectations are briefly elaborated below. The findings reported in this chapter are based on the sub-study III, and also reported in Article III. These findings are revisited here in order to be able to next address the layers of asylum-seekingness.

People become asylum seekers through multilayered social and institutional structures, that is, the process of asylum-seeking. The particular temporality of the asylum system produces subjects who are required to be **patient**. They needed to “stay quiet and stay strong,” as Mahammed (int. 2016) stated.

The participants described immersing in work as a survival strategy for enduring the long wait and avoiding focusing on the past. Furthermore, they viewed being **active** by working important for “integrating” into society and for feeling useful. For these reasons, working was so critical that the participants commonly undertook work outside their own fields of expertise or education. Some also worked for free and illegally, like Emad did, since he did not like “sitting at home” (int. 2018). This also created the risk of exploitation, as asylum seekers were willing to work for free or take on undesired work just to keep busy. The participants also felt that, as asylum seekers, they had to be grateful for any work they were given. Paradoxically, they ended up expressing gratitude for being exploited. Fathi (int. 2018) was also told in the Immigration Service that work was a privilege that asylum seekers did not necessarily deserve: “If there is Finnish people who don’t have work, they should take them to work and then us”. This reiterates Olivius’ (2014) account of how established rules governed the kind of activities asylum seekers were approved to undertake, as their participation was expected when told so in ways defined by others. Notwithstanding, the participants were empowered by work, not simply oppressed by its unfair conditions.

At times the participants described the pain of missing their families, as well as tough living conditions. Interestingly, these statements were often followed by **positivity**. Zain (int. 2018) started by describing how he had no control over his own life at the temporary shelter, how he was nothing and he had nothing in this country, not even an ID. He explained how everything was decided for him: the time he washed his clothes, the time he cooked and so on. The only thing he could decide himself was when to go to toilet. However, he ended with the statement that he loves Finland: It was the place where he could make his dreams come true. These sudden mood shifts were commonly observed in the interview responses.

The participants’ declaratory positivity was perhaps targeted to the Finnish researcher at the moment but, in general, to the Finnish society as a whole. The

positivity was strongly connected with being **grateful**, as mentioned above in the context of working. Despite the fact that waiting for an asylum decision was painful and meant living under oppressive conditions, the participants even expressed gratitude for having the permission to wait.

Encountering **prejudice and racism** was common for the participants. Although they knew that they did not need to tolerate the injustice, they also described having no choice but to accept the racism they encountered. They downplayed it by repeatedly stating how racism is not only a problem of Finland but is present everywhere. However, the men cited multiple examples of situations in which they had experienced racism and, to ensure their safety, had to remain calm and accept prejudice. This meant that the verbal abuse or threat of violence forced them to participate in the discourse of normalized racism. This happened, for example, in the marketplace where Saleh and Navid (int. 2018) were hanging out. A man, in the midst of his running exercise, suddenly came to ask Navid, if he had a bomb in his bag. Navid open his bag and showed its content: his gym clothes. By opening the bag and submitting to the street harassment based on his looks, he accepted the unjust power relation.

Looking as “Finnish” as possible (which the participants explained as meaning white-skinned) was a key to ensure safety in public places. Ali (int. 2018) described not feeling any pressure to change his appearance, because he looked “different from Arabic guys”. According to him, he looked “European”. He explained it was the reason why he had remained safe from physical, racist violence. The attacks were targeted towards his friends “because they have beard and black hair, or different skin or something” (Ali, int. 2018). Ali was able to make himself readable as privileged from a discriminated positioning, which is referred to as “passing” (see Tudor, 2017). It is a powerful tool for distancing or disidentifying oneself from the subject position one occupies (Krivonos, 2020). Ali passed as white and escaped racialized violence. Kokab and Emad, however, with their dark beards, did not. The participants of this research were, within the social construction of race (e.g., Frankenberg, 1993), produced as racialized subjects. This means that, as a part of their subjectification, they were forced to negotiate how to deal with racism. For example, regardless of the pressure to do so, Kokab refused to change his looks by shaving his beard or head. Instead, he decided to avoid spending time at the city center in which the problems often emerged.

As is shown above, occupying the position of an asylum seeker is the basis for social and institutionalized othering, discrimination, degrading treatment, prejudice, racism and violence. Together they produce the experience of **being “less worthy”**.

For Zain (int. 2016) the experience of being invisible and irrelevant in the eyes of others felt dehumanizing: “I feel like no-one sees me... Sometimes I feel I’m not a human”. A specific passport had become a concrete marker of being “less worthy” for Saleh (int. 2018): “Until you get the citizenship... You are a human because you have a really strong passport”.

The discourses surrounding asylum seekers indicate that, while waiting for the asylum decision, they should settle into the “less worthy” subject position. Oftentimes this settling is not enough, as the cumulating message from the host society suggests that a better fitting, more suitable place for asylum seekers is “away”. This became clear as Fathi (int. 2018) repeated the words he sometimes hears on the streets: “The bad things, you know: ‘You should go home.’ ‘Why are you here?’ ‘We don’t need you,’ and like this.” Asylum seekers are still waiting to be legally accepted in their host societies. Yet, there is no “home” or “back” to which they could return. Kokab meets the requirement of being active while waiting, as he is actively working for his money by having a job. However, it is not enough. There is an additional requirement to be active somewhere else, preferably in the country he left from. Combining the discourse of “being in the wrong place” with the paradox that there is no right place is shameful for asylum seekers, as Kokab (int. 2018) describes: “I’m always feeling shame because I’m here... If I had a choice, I would go back. But I can’t.” The final requirement of **being “away,”** does not contain the possibility of submitting, as it is fundamentally contradictory.

6.3 ... is mastered and resisted

Thus far, I have described some of the challenges that come with being positioned as an asylum seeker. People who occupy the position of an asylum seeker are well aware of the unjust discursive norms, expectations, and requirements that they are expected to fulfil in their everyday lives, and they are often very capable of navigating them. The subjectification is recognized, as Ali (int. 2018) incisively stated: “I know what it means to be an asylum seeker.”

In addition to knowing what one should be, it was critical know what one should not be. Asylum seekers end up to dangerous situations solely because they are asylum seekers. To secure their own safety, they must act as if the situation was acceptable and normal. Saleh (int. 2018) gives an example of such situation. He explains that he was at a park with Navid and their friend, when eleven men from the anti-immigrant, white-supremacist group Soldiers of Odin (hereafter SOO)

came to chat with them. Saleh recognized the group from their jackets. “Do you want a banana?”, asked the group with a purpose to insult.

Saleh: We said no thank you. And then they start to ask, “Where are you from?” and something like that. Of course, I didn’t say I’m from [country of origin], because they don’t like, it’s a problem. Yeah so, they asked me “Why are you here?” I said, “I’m studying here for two years, then I go back to my country.” And they asked me: “What are you studying?” I said, “to be nurse.” Until they asked me that question, “Are you a Muslim or a Christian?” We were three, me and my two friends. We said, “We are Christian.” Then they said, “Okay, we are sorry and have a nice day.” Then they leave. (Article III, p. 293; emphasis added)

Saleh’s discursive reading within the situation is interesting. Unlike he claimed, he is not in Finland for education. Moreover, he is not a Christian. Saleh strategically framed himself as a desirable migrant to avoid the possibly violent attack. Thus, he accepted the insult with which the encounter was initiated, as the power-imbalance of the two groups was so strong. Saleh, being familiar with the anti-refugee societal discourses, knew that in SOO’s interrogations, there were certain wrong and right answers. As analyzed in the Article III (p. 293): “Coming from a country of war, being an asylum seeker, and hoping to stay in Finland would have all been wrong answers. Coming from a safe country, studying, planning to leave soon, and being a Christian were the right answers.” Saleh claimed to study nursing, a harmless feminine field. He assumed it may trigger less racism than a masculine field would. It was aptly assumed, as SOO’s actions stem from the “anxieties from the diminishing status of white heterosexual masculinities” (Aharoni & Féron, 2019, p. 87).

The above example makes visible how asylum seekers are able to shape even an unreasonable situation and gain relational power through becoming part of their own subjection. Agency, according to poststructuralist theories, is not simply a product of individual intention or will. Instead, it emerges in the condition of possibility that provokes new thought (Badiou in Davies, 2010). In that particular moment at the park, Saleh’s condition of possibility was to simultaneously submit to and master discursive expectations targeted for an ideal migrant. He avoided physical violence, as he was able to control the situation in which he was subordinated. As feminist theorists (e.g., Laws & Davies, 2000) argue, the agency and subordination were not an either–or question, but a both–and question. Precisely through the subjection, Saleh became an agentic, speaking subject

In their everyday lives, asylum seekers encounter policies and discourses that posit them as governable subjects. The question of resisting subjectification is linked to the entwinement of governance and agency in context of what kind of agency asylum seekers are able to negotiate in relation to governance. Some of the research participants along with many other asylum seekers and their supporters protested against the visible forms of power by organizing and participating in the “Right to Live” demonstration in 2017, which started in Helsinki and took place in other cities too. The asylum seekers were protesting against the tightening of the asylum regime and deportations. Undoubtedly, the protesting was agentic. In poststructural terms, this can be viewed as an asylum seekers’ discursive constitution of having presence rather than absence, that is, having access to a subject position in which they have the right to speak and be heard (Davies, 1991). Similarly, Navid’s decision and possible future actions regarding deportation can be seen as a form of resistance against visible forms of power:

I need only to stay here in Finland. Even if they didn't give me any permission. Even if I'm here without any ID. I just want to stay here. I can work and I can take my money by my hand. (Navid, int. 2018)

Mahammed (int, 2016) had come to the same conclusion: *The decision I made was that I will never go out of this country, while I'm still scared of what I have seen before* (see Article I). The men knew that there was no possibility of them returning back, although they had both received negative asylum decisions. These bureaucratic processes yielded violent outcomes. Administrative or bureaucratic violence destabilizes the agentic decisions asylum seekers make to uphold their rights as humans.

Asylum seekers become attentive to the need to perform in specific ways, for instance, by employing certain narratives (Häkli, Pascucci & Kallio, 2017). As described before, many of the research participants expressed gratitude to the Finnish society in multiple ways. For instance, they were grateful for the chance to work despite unfair conditions, or for the possibility of being able to seek for asylum, which is a fundamental human right. Many also portrayed Finland as a place where dreams come true, a country to be loved. This is an important storyline, as ungrateful asylum seekers are perceived by host societies as undeserving, unwelcomed others who are not entitled to “climb the steps toward properly authorized citizenship status” (Moulin, 2012, p. 55). Kokab (int. 2018), however, did not employ such a narrative but spoke against the prevalent discourse: “Even though I get the permission, to be honest, I hate this country. I’m sorry.” The

speaking subject can move within and between discourses and see precisely how they are subjectified within them (Davies, 1991). Since Kokab apologized for his words, it can be assumed that he was aware of the discursive expectation that asylum seekers should be grateful for their host societies. He did not submit, but rather resisted.

6.4 ... happens in the context of waiting

Occupying the position of an asylum seeker often involves waiting in multiple locations with varying tempos. Waiting, in addition to being an individual act, is a governmental tool to keep some people waiting. A forced waiting refers to not only the waiting time at the actual state borders but to all waiting times that noncitizens and racialized citizens are often pushed towards (Khosravi, 2020). Therefore, in this research with these men, I consider waiting as the forced context of the ongoing process of becoming an asylum-seeking subject. Such waiting is imposed by bordering practices with consequences of destabilizing lives and bodies.

Most of the findings draw on the experiences of all participants. In this section, however, I illuminate the findings by focusing on Navid's experience of waiting during a crucial moment: an encounter with the institution that possess the decision-making power regarding his future. This could be referred to as an example of encounters with the bureaucratic border, that is, the state, its immigration policies, and their implementation (Näre, 2020). These encounters not only determine the future possibilities of asylum seekers but also keep producing their subjectivities as asylum seekers.

I get some paper from Immigration. And after one year and three months if you get something from Immigration that means it's positive, not negative. Because if the police they send for you your paper, that's negative, because the police they give negative. But the Immigration they always give positive if they answer you after a long time. I be so happy, me and Saleh we just thinking like when I get it we will do some small party. Because I'm so happy because long time I'm just waiting for that. They send for me some paper in the post and said some interview with immigration. So I just go and I just like sitting there and I just waiting when they give me that permission. (Navid, int. 2018)

Asylum governance is a material matter, an issue of things, associations, collectives, and their multiple entanglements, through which asylum seekers are continuously being made and remade by a confluence of discourses and materials (Darling, 2014).

The letter that Navid described as “the most important thing,” as it was often referred to during research interviews, constitutes a materialization of the state that labels him and others seeking asylum as accepted or rejected, deserving or undeserving (see also de Vries, 2016). Before the asylum decision, the asylum seekers cannot fully arrive in the country; they are kept on hold, in a state of “arrival-in-between” (Thorshaug, 2019, p. 207). After the long wait, knowing the meaning of receiving a letter from Migri, Navid was about to be granted permission to fully arrive, to actually live in Finland.

So I'm just sitting there, I'm just waiting my permission there and they started to talk with me and they put for me some translator. And they start to interview and they start to ask me and I stay there like for five hours. And after that they said for me go to waiting again. After that I go back to waiting and just thinking that what happened. After one year and three months they again interview with me for the third time. And five hours they asked me more than 220 questions. So my feeling it was really bad when they ... The hard thing when you're waiting for something so important in your life. When you're waiting something will change your life. The waiting it's not easy really. You wait now for ten minutes and you feel bad. I wait one year. Really. And I'm waiting about something so important for me. (Navid, int. 2018)

According to Schweizer, universally waiting is “to have time without wanting it” (2008, p. 2). “You wait for ten minutes and you feel bad,” said Navid, referring to how he was late for our interview. I had been waiting downstairs for ten minutes for him to open the door, and wittily scolded him for being late as I entered the apartment. How foolish of me, given the context. At the time when the interview was conducted, Navid had been waiting for three years.

Instead of receiving the residence permit that Navid was certain of, he was again placed on a chair, next to the translator for five hours and was asked 220 questions. Thereafter, he was sent back waiting. The participants’ stories highlighted the ways in which restrictive immigration policies and institutionalized othering had become normalized. Häkli and Kallio (2020, p. 14) discuss how refugees in hierarchical encounters are placed into a subordinate position as bodies—“bodies that are similar to each other, or particular in the sense of ultimate subjectivity; bodies that manifest conflicts carrying evidence of torture and violence; bodies that are kept at a distance, looked at and individuated; and bodies that should perform in particular ways but otherwise remain passive.” The dehumanizing effect of such subordinate positioning was intensified during

Kokab's encounter with an immigration official, as he was considered as a number rather than a human. He was explicitly told that that the appointments are given to numbers, not for people (see Article II). "You feel like you are nothing," said Kokab (int. 2018) when reflecting this event.

The confinement induced by prolonged waiting, with no notion of when it might end and with what outcome, intensified as time accumulated into one meaningless event after another. The sensed and lived "stuckness" was not simply an expression of physical confinement and spatial closure but was indicative of the way people responded to the confining dynamics and practices (see Jefferson, Turner, and Jensen, 2019). The men's lives were brimming with all possible kinds of important matters, such as work, school, friends, relationships, weddings, parties, hobbies, hopes, and dreams. However, "paused," was how they still sometimes viewed their time. They did not imply that their time or life was inherently bad. Rather, they expressed that the sense of waiting was constantly present, no matter how filled their lives were with different activities or happy moments. Therefore, I consider the act of waiting an overarching, far reaching act. It could be described as an embodied state of becoming in which the "waiting for" and "waiting out" (see Karlsen, 2020) are not binaries but constant, sometimes even simultaneous, situational, and shifting orientations.

In addition to the sense of being "stuck," asylum process requires abrupt activity called by the bureaucratic border, as the waiting is pierced by sudden bursts of action when the asylum seekers are required for interviews with little warning (see Article III). The waiting is circular—sometimes progressing slowly and sometimes accelerating with asylum application activities (see also Kohli & Kaukko, 2018). During these bursts of action, asylum seekers are expected to act quickly and deliberately. Being simultaneously confined in waiting and movement (see Article II) meant that the participants were kept on hold but were also expected to be ready to move (see also Thorshaug, 2019).

Navid (int. 2018): After that they answer, and I was sleeping here in this home and the police call me and they said we want to see you today at nine a clock at morning. They call me at eight a clock. I just take my clothes, I go to that police station and they do that small interview with me and they said for me that we believe everything you said at Immigration and we believe your story but can go back to Iraq and you can continue your life in Iraq. And they said that's the reason about your negative. I didn't say anything. And they asked me about that if we come to take you and send you to Iraq, what will you do. I said

it's not possible. And after that, they take my paper and I didn't want to see, I didn't want to say anything.

Saleh: *I had never seen Navid like that. It was a sad day.*

Navid: *Yeah.*

The reason why Navid did not want to see the paper had to do not so much with what the paper *is*, but what the paper *does*. In this case, it performs actions, it produces effects, and it alters the situation; Bennet (2004, p. 366) calls it “thing-power,” referring to the not-fully-humanized dimension of a thing as it manifests itself amidst other entities and forces. Surely it is not the paper as such that acts, but the play of forces together, the way things, events, and discourse are made to function in conjunction with one another (de Vries, 2016). For Navid, the paper functioned as an oppressive force shaping his life towards a strongly unwanted dimension—one where he was to remain in the position of the one who waits, with an added sense of fear caused by the negative asylum decision, the fear of being involuntarily sent back to Iraq. The number of negative asylum decisions was viewed as an indicator of how much hope it was reasonable or sustainable for one to harbor (see Article II). The number of denied applications represented the direction of the participants’ future, as the asylum system shaped their future horizons. As subjectification happens not only in relation to the present but also in relation to future possibilities, for the asylum seekers participating in this study, it often happened in relation to the legal label “rejected.”

7 (Un)becoming subjectificated within the subject position of an asylum seeker

This research explores the subjectification of nine asylum-seeking men. Focusing on their lived experiences, this research makes visible what asylum seekers' subjectification could be in a broader sense.

In this concluding section, I will deconstruct the research question posed in the introduction. Considering each part of the question separately enables me to finally answer the question. In this kind of nomadic research, reaching a whole fixed and complete circle of "asking, answering, and closing" the question is not possible. Such a process does not fit the paradigm. Therefore, in the findings, I have first portrayed a large picture of how the lives of the asylum-seeking men used to look like in terms of subjectification. After analyzing the findings, the meaning of the research question shifted. The "answer" was not to be "found" outside the question but rather emerged from the question itself. Hence, in this section, I will unfold the intertwined concepts of the **subject position of an asylum seeker**, **subjectification** and **(un)becoming** in relation to this research, based on the stories narrated by the men positioned as asylum seekers. The purpose is to explain how these concepts should be reconsidered when looking at them from the point of view of asylum-seekingness.

Based on this research, the broadest contours of the **subject position of an asylum seeker** can be sketched relatively stably. However, how one enters and occupies the position is not a stable process at all. I suggest that the subject position of an asylum seeker contains different layers that constitute and reconstitute their position. These are here referred to as the *layers of asylum-seekingness*. The insights provided by these layers are overlapping and in motion. Furthermore, they can shift and hold different weight at different times. The layers also allow for resistance, as the participants of this research demonstrate. I conclude that the subject position of an asylum seeker is formed through the *legal category* of an asylum seeker, the *societal expectations* targeted at the position of an asylum seeker, and the *fundamental basis* of needing a safe place. In the discursive constitution of asylum seeker, people become asylum seekers throughout these layers in the ongoing process of subjectificating within the position of an asylum seeker. Next, I will elaborate on these layers.

The *legal category* of an asylum seeker is inherently political in nature. How the category is constructed and with what conditions affect asylum seekers rights as humans and even their survival. How people are defined has not so much to do

with their backgrounds or lives but more with the rapidly changing policies that keep affecting the lives of the people positioned as asylum seekers. The critique here is pointed towards the nonneutral process through which categories are constructed and the political purposes that they serve (Becker, 2014; Long, 2013; Scherschel, 2011; Zetter, 2007). Categories have consequences, as they entitle some to protection, rights, and resources whilst simultaneously disempowering others; they are used to justify policies of exclusion and containment (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). People become asylum seekers in relation to these politically constructed categories that keep changing to better serve political purposes, which means that the people seeking asylum need to reflect on these categories in order to fit. The participants of this research experienced how, throughout their years of waiting, the legal category of their position limited their space as humans. Their experience of confinement amplified, as any progress with the asylum process was made extremely difficult. The research participants moved into, out of, and between these politically constructed categories that defined their migration situations across time and space. People navigated this layer of asylum-seekingness by adding supporting documents to their asylum applications or by completely changing the category, by applying for a residence permit for an employed person for instance. In addition, the exclusion, containment, and deportations were resisted in demonstrations.

The *societal expectations*, that is, the discursive requirements that asylum seekers had to meet, constitutes the subject position as a paradox. This research showcases the sheer impossibility of successfully occupying the position, as there seems to be no good or safe way of being an asylum seeker. Even if one manages to respond to all the contradictory requirements (being simultaneously patient, active, positive, and grateful as well as being ready to accept prejudices, racism, and being viewed as a less worthy human being), the last unfulfilled requirement would be to eventually “go away” and stop being an asylum seeker.

Moreover, the legal category of an asylum seeker hinders the fulfilment of the societal expectations pertaining to asylum-seekingness. For instance, one basic rationale for keeping people waiting for a prolonged period, constantly delaying them and repeatedly sending them “back to square one,” is the belief that the time of these people is less worthy than the time of citizens (Khosravi, 2020). This act creates distress and anxiety, which impedes asylum seekers’ ability to fulfil societal expectations. “Being active” is an individual responsibility, while the structurally produced barriers require asylum seekers to invest even more efforts in their pursuit of a “normal life,” as indicated by the research participants. For instance, resiliently finding a way to work despite the structural challenges of employment is crucial.

Showing one's worth as a worker (submitting to the activity discourse) is a means of disrupting the market economy discourses portraying asylum seekers as expenses rather than humans (resisting the dehumanizing discourse).

Asylum seekers must adapt to the conditions they live in. They must endure and "wait out" the waiting period, even though it is precisely the conditions that are in need of altering. In line with the neoliberal order, asylum seekers must become resilient, entrepreneurial, active, and integratable subjects to fulfil the societal expectations targeted at them. And yet, becoming all these does not aim for structural change. Instead, institutionalized and public forms of racism such as restrictive immigration policies remain normalized, while structural inequalities are attributed to individual failure (De Lissovoy, 2012; Green, 2019).

The *fundamental basis* of becoming an asylum seeker stems from the reality that people cannot continue their lives in their countries of origin. Sooner or later, this fact becomes entangled with other layers of asylum-seekingness. Dichotomous categories produced in both legal and societal discourses, such as "migrant"/"asylum seeker" and "welcomed"/"unwelcomed" require from asylum seekers continuous positioning in relation to these categories. People seeking asylum become tired of proving which one is the "right answer," as it seems to vary. In Migri, one needs to prove severe vulnerabilities, persecution, and fear to be considered a "real asylum seeker." On the other hand, to prove one's worth to racist groups, one needs to be a resilient, active, tax-paying member of a society, not an asylum seeker. The subject position of an asylum seeker is so strongly intertwined in the net of racist and xenophobic discourses, politics, and power relations that sometimes, it is forgotten that these people are, in fact, in search of a safe place.

This research suggests that the produced, yet actively encountered waiting forms a large, existential context for asylum seekers' **subjectification**. People become asylum seekers through the intersecting discourses and the ambivalent official and nonofficial meanings that constitute asylum seekers' subject position during the time of waiting. Waiting, as an act, is not empty or static, as it is often portrayed, but is full of life, fluid, and relational. Subjectification of people positioned as asylum seekers is shifting, paradoxical, and contradictory; it is often recognized and resisted. This research suggests that within the search of a safe place, subjectification happens structurally in relation to the requirements of different institutions and their official processes as well as interpersonally in course of mundane encounters with other people while waiting for the asylum decision. The latter can be based on natural, reciprocal interactions with, for example, friends and family, or violent and forced encounters with anti-immigrant, white-supremacist

groups, such as Soldiers of Odin. Overall, becoming an asylum seeker means subjectification within a narrow position with limited space to move.

Becoming can never “be adequately described. If it could, it would already be what it is becoming, in which case it wouldn’t be becoming at all” (Massumi, 1992, p. 103). However, based on this research, I suggest that becoming an asylum seeker is in a particular way entangled with time. Asylum seekers must constantly justify their rightful places in the present by referring to past but not counting on the future. If “becoming” is continuously taking place on the threshold of the present and the future time, that is, the immediate and the imagined, then the process of subjectification becomes even more obscure for asylum seekers. There is no drafted pathway to future to imaginarily lean towards, in relation to which become. Instead, asylum seekers’ becoming stagnates at the intersection of the present and the past, which disallows them to move forward with their lives. It is paradoxical, because “moving forward” is precisely what is expected from asylum seekers, and what they expect for themselves. The idea of temporariness is built up in the asylum system, although in practice it rarely materializes. In the context of waiting for an asylum decision, moving forward would mean forward to other subject positions.

This research suggests that in the process of becoming an asylum seeker, the definitive purpose is to **unbecome** an asylum seeker. All the three layers that constitute and reconstitute the subject position aim to de-constitute the position. The legal category heads to make decisions that lead either to deportations or residence permits, nonetheless losing the status of an asylum seeker. Within the societal expectations, the ultimate requirement of racist groups is for asylum seekers to “go away,” “go back home,” that is, stop being an asylum seeker. Curiously, asylum seekers and their critics share the same goal; asylum seekers would also like to discontinue being the seekers of a safe place and start building their lives as the holders of their safe places. Paradoxically, it could be said that the best way of being an asylum seeker is to no longer be an asylum seeker. Yet, at worst, due to the excruciatingly long asylum-seeking process, people may be confined to the particular subject position for years.

8 Concluding thoughts

In this chapter, I will express some of the things that have, until this point, been unsaid. In a conclusive manner, I discuss what I aimed to do with this research and consider its limitations. I also ponder upon the scope for future research, which will, in turn, make visible the boundaries of this research. I once more return to the idea of nomadic thought, after which I discuss the implications of this study and offer my final words.

The aim of this research was to produce knowledge on the particular phase of life when people are positioned as asylum seekers and examine the process of their subjectification. I have approached this issue by focusing on the concepts of subjectification, subject position, and becoming. I have elaborated these concepts in the context of waiting for an asylum decision in Finland after 2015. I did not aim to offer a fixed answer about the process of subjectification. Rather, with this research, I seek to make visible the mechanisms working in the background, influencing what the asylum-seeking men can or cannot be and become and how they see or unsee themselves.

The findings address life as it was described to me, a young white Finnish female. Different discourses could have been drawn from if I was, for instance, a man of color or someone with an asylum-seeking background. Also, the findings would have been very different, had the participants been of any other gender, ethnicity, or age. The voices or narratives, even when treated as data, were not assumed to be unitary or authentic (Hohti & Karlsson, 2014); they were filtered and shaped by our encounter, the available discourses, and the social and political contexts in which they were told (Wernesjö, 2019).

A limitation of this study is that the findings are not representative of all asylum seekers, or even all asylum-seeking men, nor could they ever be. The findings rather theorize how the participants of this study continuously subjectificated within their positions as asylum seekers in particular times and places. Another limitation of this research is that it focuses only on the subject position of an asylum seeker, despite the other intersecting, inextricable positions the men occupied. The aim was not to exclude these other positions from the men's becoming but to focus specifically on the becoming of an asylum seeker. The findings are partial and situational, as always. Overall, this research is only able to portray flashes, incomplete pictures of particular moments of the participants lives, as the lives kept moving on and changing.

Some of the research participants have now been waiting for the decision to permanently stay in this country for six years. I remember my first bike ride to the temporary shelter. It was September, as it is now, when I am sitting in my study and writing this chapter. The leaves on the trees outside are turning orange again, similar to how they were on that bike ride. I keep thinking how the leaves have grown, turned orange, and fallen six times, while some of the men still do not have a permit to stay in this country.

In my future research, I might treat time and waiting differently. Instead of considering time as passing hand in hand with the autumn leaves, I could try to think diffractively with temporalities. I would focus on the affects travelling in time. I would focus on the materiality of the phenomenon of asylum-seeking in a way that the materiality is not an add-on to the discursive. Rather, the phenomenon in itself would be the leading act. In this research, I have touched upon the thing-power of a paper—the letter carrying a negative asylum decision. I have discussed how it produces effects and alters situations. It embodies such a strong material–discursive power, that people do not even want to open the letter. It holds the power to deport them. Broadening this idea, in future research I could focus on the material–discursive entanglements within an asylum interview: How does the interview room look like? Through what kind of corridors are people taken into the room? In what kind of seat do they sit? What kind of clothes is the official wearing? What is the tone of their voice? What are the 220 questions the people are asked?

In this research, I have approached the nomadic through theoretical, methodological, and relational streams. I still consider this chosen approach fitting for my research. However, the fact that so many dimensions of the research were nomadic, in constant motion, changing, and open inevitably meant that they were not stable and easy to deal with. Nothing was particularly certain. As a researcher, I needed to learn how to tolerate the poignant pieces. During moments of doubt, it would have been easier to explain to everybody how I have, in fact, ruled and controlled the research. I believe that, allowing for the uncertain to flow, or allowing movement within the streams, has made the research more tangled, yet richer. It made it possible for the research to take turns beyond planning and controlling, that ended up being worth studying for. In moments of doubt, relationality has been my ethical compass. A part of my research ethics has been not trying to artificially separate “me as a person” from “me as a researcher”. When researching the lives of the asylum seekers, their everyday being and becoming, and the life-changing and shattering events, it was impossible for me to relationally exist without being emotionally invested.

At this point, it is typical to suggest practical implications based on the research. Providing implications often gives a feeling that the matter, whatever it may be, is under control and governable. I hesitate to do this, since here the problem in question is massive, global inequality: The neo-liberal, capitalist order and the bordered nation-states excluding certain people as racialized, burdening others and shaping the rest to prioritize their own interest and wealth. A change requires educating white people in a matter in which some people do not want to be educated, as the purpose of such education would be to intervene with the privileges we hold, which we often do not even recognize as our privilege. Evident practical implications, however, would be policy changes aiming to improve the lives of the people seeking asylum. This has been noted, for instance in the “Permit to live” - citizens’ initiative (1 November 2021 – 1 May 2022) demanding four-year residence permits for the asylum seekers who arrived in Finland before 2017 and are still in the limbo of waiting. It would effectively solve the acute human rights problem in Finland that was created by adopting more restrictive asylum policy after 2015. If materialized, the citizens’ initiative would work in granting permits also for those participants of this study, who still did not receive them.

People are not “flows,” “floods,” or “waves.” They are not “illegal” or “undeserving.” Europe is not, nor has it ever been in a “refugee crisis.” The crisis concerns the people who need to flee their countries of origin. The crisis in Europe is mostly a question of organizing. The people who arrive do not need to be “fast integrators,” active learners of the Finnish language, or skilled in whatever is beneficial for the Finnish society. Living a safe life is not a trade. It is a human right. Based on this research, for these men, a safe place is not offered by the society that keeps portraying these people as a disturbance, a problem. A safe place cannot be provided by a society that keeps speaking and enacting asylum seekers into existence through othering discourses.

This research has made visible some of the unjust dimensions of occupying the subject position of an asylum seeker. I hope to attach my research to the existing body of scholarship in the ultimate pursuit of a more just world. Karen Barad (in a dialogue with Juelskjær, Plauborg & Adrian, 2020) borrows Jacques Derrida’s term “justice-to-come” and discusses how knowledge production and political processes are never settled once and for all but represent an ongoing endeavor in ways that may help to create more just worlds. They continue, that these just worlds are always in the making, because justice can never be finally achieved but has to be continually strived for. The world does not sit still—it is always already being reconstituted, in a process of becoming.

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Original publications

- I Petäjämäniemi, M., Lanas, M., & Kaukko, M. (2018). Osallisuus turvaa hakevan reunaehdoissa: Hätamajoitusyksikössä asuvien nuorten turvapaikanhakijamiesten kertomuksia arjesta. [Participation as part of the boundary conditions of an asylum seeker: Stories of participation, inclusion and exclusion of young male asylum seekers living in a temporary shelter]. *Aikuiskasvatus*, 38(1), 4–17.
- II Petäjämäniemi, M., Kaukko, M., & Lanas, M. (2021). Confined in waiting: Young asylum seekers narrating in and out of temporary shelter. *Young*, 29(1), 62–80.
- III Petäjämäniemi, M., Lanas, M., & Kaukko, M. (2021). How to be a “Good Asylum Seeker”? The Subjectification of Young Men Seeking Asylum. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 11(3), 284–300.

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ISBN 978-952-62-3300-0 (Paperback)
ISBN 978-952-62-3301-7 (PDF)
ISSN 0355-323X (Print)
ISSN 1796-2242 (Online)