

## STREET-LEVEL ENGAGEMENTS: *Migrated Families Encountering the Local Welfare State*

Camilla Nordberg\*, Sirpa Wrede

University of Helsinki, Finland

Received 23 February 2015; Accepted 25 March 2015

### Introduction

During the last decade, new research approaches to global migration have highlighted the multifaceted ways in which structural inequalities and subordination impinge upon the possibilities to substantive citizenship (Fraser 2009; Nordberg 2006; Olwig 2011; Tully 2000). By shifting the focus from migrants themselves to reciprocal processes of interaction, the complex macro–micro relationship between recognition, redistribution, representation and a sense of belonging becomes visible. Scholars, particularly drawing on governance perspectives, have effectively shown how the political-cultural framework morally constructs and disciplines migrants (Lippert & Pyykkönen 2012; Geiger & Pécout 2013). The categories produced for the purposes of governance are ordered along intersectional social divisions such as gender, race, class and sexuality (Anthias 2013).

Recognising the insights of such previous research, the specific aim of this special issue of the Nordic Journal of Migration Research is to bring to the forefront new, empirically grounded understandings of policies and practices of migrant citizenisation in the restructuring welfare state. The individual contributions have been produced in different scholarly contexts: social work, social policy, sociology, education and ethnic and migration studies. A multidisciplinary approach to citizenship proved particularly fruitful for grasping the complex and multifaceted nature of contemporary citizenship. Accordingly, introducing the notion of *citizenisation*, we develop it from a top-down understanding (cf Tully 2005) to the interplay between migrants' negotiations and acts of citizenship (Isin & Nielsen 2008) and the normative practices of (welfare) state incorporation played out in street-level encounters. We understand acts of citizenship as a broad category of engagements. The notion of the street-level was introduced by Michael Lipsky (1980) to identify the specific character of this type of institutional encounters between bureaucrats and

service users. In this issue, we find that street-level encounters constitute sites of fundamental importance for citizenisation, referring simultaneously to formal institutional encounters in the Lipskyan sense, to semi-formal institutional encounters and to the myriad forms of everyday encounters with fellow members of society.

In the Nordic welfare state contexts at the street-level, migrant citizenisation practices are typically featured by extensive interaction with the local welfare state: mainstream social and welfare services as well as specific integration plans, language training and citizenship training (Fernandes 2013; Hagelund 2010; Keskinen *et al* 2012). The neoliberalisation of what once were perceived as mature welfare states has not only implied a move towards a fragmented and increasingly marketised model of service provision, but also a redefinition of the social contract with a stronger emphasis on the duties and responsibilities of individual citizens (see also Carmel *et al* 2011; Schierup & Ålund 2011). Accordingly, there is a call for research that empirically examines the implications of the reconfigurations occurring at the nexus of state policies, street-level encounters and the individual.

The special issue takes as its starting point the way migrants socially engage/disengage with the street-level welfare state. This analytic lens that has not previously been discussed in the literature vis-à-vis migrant citizenisation draws on the understanding that migrants lose the social status they had in the country of origin. In the country of destination, the category of being a migrant is often a stigmatised category, regardless of the individual background and reasons for migration. Hence, the common denominator for people who have migrated is the experience of renegotiating subjectivities and social status positions (Wrede & Nordberg, 2010). Thinking about *migrancy* as a social category (Wrede 2010, 12–14, Näre 2014) in this way, we follow the lead of Bryan S. Turner (1989) who developed

\* E-mail: camilla.nordberg@helsinki.fi.

an analysis of engagement/disengagement for his discussion of ageing as an issue of status politics. Accordingly, the process of migration often constitutes a loss of social status that is akin to that occurring for age groups outside the 'productive ages'. Turner (1995: 123) argues that young people as well as the aged are held irresponsible and disengaged, because of their lack of involvement in the community and/or their 'dependency on the community', whether real or perceived. With the notion of street-level engagements, we want to call attention to the implications of status politics for the ways in which migrant citizenisation is played out in street-level encounters. In many ways, the studies resemble the complex conception of recognition centred on subordination and participatory parity, as introduced by Nancy Fraser (2013). She maintains that participatory parity is conditioned by institutionalised value patterns that ensure equal respect and opportunity for achieving social esteem.

In the following, we further identify the specific analytical and empirical foci the theme issue in its part will address.

First, welfare state citizenship has been marked by a formalistic approach to the citizen, neutralising the human individual and subsequently, neglecting the social contexts of human life. Employing the idea of *social engagement through ties*, we argue that integration policies have tended to narrowly focus on institutional dimensions of citizenisation in that policies invest in the building of the social capital of migrants with the interest of enhancing the creation of weak ties, of interpersonal ties featured by little time spent, by a low degree of intimacy and emotional intensity (Granovetter 1974). What policies and institutional practices tend to overlook or treat as problematic in the contemporary welfare state are the strong ties, most importantly, those to the family (see also Erel 2011; Olwig *et al* 2012; Schmidt 2011). We bring to the forefront, the nexus of strong and weak ties in relation to processes of social engagement/disengagement and ultimately, for citizenship. While the empirical case studies draw on migrant background individuals' street-level experiences and negotiations from different civic and life-course perspectives, the special issue specifically highlights the social category of motherhood. Mothers are increasingly singled out as a 'special needs' group in integration policy and practice. Drawing on empirical case studies from different street-level settings, the articles illustrate how status politics are related to notions of social engagement, infused by the dynamics of strong as well as weak ties.

Secondly, previous research has often overlooked the particular *places and spaces* within which citizenisation takes shape and is contested. In welfare state settings, the conceptualisation of the 'state' as a dominant institutional structure has contributed to the analytical bias whereby local practices and encounters have been overlooked. Everyday life has materiality in that it revolves around particular institutions, streets, buildings and people, creating a web of street-level encounters through which social engagement is negotiated and established. According to Kevin Cox (1998: 2), spaces of dependence and spaces of engagement can be distinguished, referring to the former as place-bound 'localised social relations upon which we depend for the realisation of essential interests and for which there are no substitutes elsewhere' and to the latter as broader sets of relationships, as 'the space in which the politics of securing a space of dependence unfolds'. Everyday life is an organic feature of concrete local ties and encounters as well as more abstract spaces of claims-making and engagement. Following John Clarke (2008: 15–16), a careful analysis of 'the local' is a fundamental obligation of social analysis, looking into the local as the object of analysis and as the possibly changing scales and forms of governing whereby the local has become a particular site of governing practices.

While the notion of social engagement may involve more abstract senses of belonging and commitment, these special issue articles understand it as rooted in the web of localised, formal, semi-informal and informal encounters. Ultimately, we argue that the ways in which such encounters are played out shape migrants' capability to agency - to negotiate and challenge the hegemonic discourses and practices surrounding citizenisation. Indeed, rather than discussing it vis-à-vis abstract notions of social equality, it is fruitful to examine citizenisation as a spatially and temporarily located process that is structured by the specific histories and dynamics of the welfare state settings in question. Accordingly, the particular institutional dynamics of the practices and mechanisms of social protection that migrants encounter need to be accounted for to achieve an understanding of how their potential exclusion from equal social protection may underpin inequality related to the specific welfare institutions in both the short and long run.

Thirdly, the articles are devoted to unfold the *research processes* in detail, including those confusions and mistakes that have emerged on the path to analysing and reporting our findings (see e.g. Whyte 1993). We will discuss specific ethical and methodological challenges posed by researching potentially vulnerable individuals. While the migrant background population constitutes as diverse a group of individuals as the native born, particularly recently arrived migrants risk facing a subordinated position due to their very position as newly arrived and 'resettling' (Wrede & Nordberg 2010). Thus, recognising the self as relational has implications also for the ways in which we, as researchers, encounter our research participants and reflect upon these encounters in our writings.

Thus, from different scholarly perspectives, the articles in this issue approach the place and space of citizenisation as embodied engagement that is located in material surroundings that involve both semi-institutionalised and institutionalised settings infused by the larger socio-political context. All articles highlight the importance of a sound empirical basis for conducting social research.

Anna Bredström's and Sabine Gruber's (2015) article problematises the implementation of language interpretation in the context of maternity healthcare. Taking a critical stance to the neoliberal dismantling of public welfare institutions, they explore the ways in which healthcare professionals reflect upon experiences of cross-language interpretation. The analysis discursively illustrates the contradictions between language interpretation articulated as a migrant's right for achieving equality, and a racialised discourse where language becomes intertwined with otherness.

Camilla Nordberg's contribution (2015) focusses on newly migrated 'stay-at-home' mothers in capital region Finland. Empirically drawing on two case stories, she explores the contradictions between neoliberal policy rationales of the self-sufficient, productive individual and everyday institutional practice that paradoxically seems to reinforce the position of migrant mothers as long time assigned to the private sphere. Such external 'cementation' of the site of 'stay-at-home' parenthood is opposed to the active, transitory citizenship articulated in policy documents and by the mothers themselves.

Also, the article by Minna Intke-Hernandez and Gunilla Holm (2015) elucidates the interplay between migrant stay-at-home mothers and the local welfare state, from the perspective of education. Having conducted ethnographic work at an integration and language course for stay-at-home migrant mothers and their young children, they find that course instructors typically employ an 'ethnocentric' perspective in their teaching, thereby maintaining cultural silence. However, the results also show how the women negotiate and resist this approach,

highlighting their own perspectives and forcing the instructors to take a learner position.

Annika Lillrank (2015) explores refugee background women's experiences of pregnancy and birth giving in interaction with Finnish maternity care professionals. She departs from salutogenic theory in her analysis of interviews with twelve women, maintaining that cultural-sensitive practice as such does not establish trust between refugee-background women and maternity care professionals. Rather, she concludes that the salutogenic theory moves us away from stereotypical ethnic-centred models to better understand the importance of strengthening individual resources.

Finally, Eveliina Heino and Minna Veistilä (2015) analyse discourses on social support received through social relationships among Russian background families in Finland. Drawing on 25 family interviews, they explore social support provided through informal and formal relationships from different angles, highlighting the complexity and tension of social relations, also of supportive relationships. Recognising these tensions is significant for the development of social services, understanding multicultural marriages and preventing racism.

To conclude, these contributions in their own specific way all highlight challenges to migrant background families' social engagement in - and with - the local welfare state. When we conceptualise citizenisation as the ways in which 'citizens to be' are enacting and negotiating their paths to citizenship through myriad street-level encounters, the studies show how the potential to social engagement necessarily is defined by the recognition dimension of these encounters.

The intersubjective condition of 'participatory parity' introduced by Nancy Fraser precludes value patterns that 'deny people the status of full partners in interaction - whether by burdening them with excessive ascribed difference', as was the case in the study on migrant stay-at-home-mothers who were closed out from mainstream social services (Nordberg 2015) 'or by failing to acknowledge their distinctiveness' (Fraser 2013: 164), as was the case in Heino's and Veistilä's research on Russian background families in child protection (2015). By exploring contemporary welfare and integration policy through the lens of street-level engagement, we found that social ties often are at the core of citizenisation. The local welfare state that the migrant encounters neglects or misinterprets the meaning of strong ties, such as the family and kin (Bredström & Gruber 2015; Heino & Veistilä 2015). This is problematic as the weak ties in the form of street-level worker interaction do not constitute a basis for migrants to interact with street-level bureaucrats as equals. Fraser (2013) emphasises that equal participation always requires material resource distribution to ensure participants' independence and voice. Only then can members of society 'interact with each other as

peers' (Fraser 2013: 164). A joint conclusion of the studies, having looked at refugees as well as other categories of migrants, is that the welfare state to some extent caters for income redistribution while the redistribution of power and knowledge remains weak (Bredström & Gruber 2015; Heino & Veistilä 2015; Intke-Hernandes & Holm 2015, Lillrank 2015; Nordberg 2015).

Hence, from the point of view of street-level engagements, at the essence lies the call for counteracting the experienced stigma and lacking autonomy stemming from migration, either from being made invisible or unheard, or, from being institutionally unequal on the basis of race, class and gender. Furthermore, we argue for the need to further research on the workings of the state at the street-level, where citizenisation occurs in face-to-face interaction. Moreover, we call explicitly for research that seeks to make visible the agency also of vulnerable groups.

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful for valuable comments on this special issue of NJMR by an anonymous referee and by the editors-in-chief, at different stages of the writing process. We also want to thank the participants in the kick-off seminar in Helsinki in February 2014 for inspiring and thought-provoking discussions on street-level engagements in different contexts. Last but not least, we want to thank the managing editor for her professional and patient guidance of this contribution.

**Dr. Camilla Nordberg** is a Senior Lecturer in social work at the Swedish School of Social Science at the University of Helsinki. She currently holds a five-year Academy of Finland Research Fellowship conducting an ethnographic longitudinal study on migrant background mothers' citizenisation practices in restructuring urban settings. Her research interests and publications have broadly related to the migration-welfare state nexus, with a particular focus on micro-level analyses of citizenship and power, media and public discourse.

**Dr. Sirpa Wrede** is a Senior Lecturer and a Docent of Sociology at the Department of Social Research at the University of Helsinki. In addition to research on the impact of globalisation on professions and professional work as well as on ethnic relations in working life, her research areas include the welfare state and welfare-state restructuring. Furthermore, she has written on the use of qualitative methods in international comparative research. She is principal investigator and leader of the Academy of Finland project 'The Shaping of Occupational Subjectivities of Migrant Care Workers: A Multi-Sited Analysis of Globalising Elderly Care' (2011–2015).

## References

- Anthias, F 2012, 'Transnational mobilities, migration research and intersectionality: towards a translocational frame', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 102–110, DOI: 10.2478/v10202-011-0032-y.
- Bredström, A & Gruber, S 2015, 'Language, culture and maternity care: 'troubling' interpretation in an institutional context', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 5, no. 2, DOI: 10.1515/njmr-2015-0010.
- Carmel, E, Cerami, A & Papadopoulos T (eds.) 2011, *Migration and welfare in the 'new' Europe: social protection and the challenges of integration*, Policy Press, Bristol.
- Clarke, J 2008, 'Governing the Local? A response to Kevin Stenson', *Social Work & Society*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 15–20.
- Cox, KR 1998, 'Spaces of dependence, spaces of engagement, and the politics of scale', *Political Geography*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 1–23, DOI:10.1016/S0962-6298(97)00048-6.
- Erel, U 2011, 'Reframing migrant mothers as citizens', *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 15, no. 6-7, pp. 695-709, DOI: 10.1080/13621025.2011.600076
- Fernandes, A 2013, 'Ethnification of new social risks: programmes for preparing newly arrived immigrants for (working) life in Sweden, Denmark and Norway' in *Changing social risks and social policy*

- responses in the Nordic welfare states, eds. I Harsløf & R Ulmestig, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 189-219.
- Fraser, N 2009, *Scales of justice: reimagining political space in a globalizing world*, Columbia University Press, New York.
- Fraser, N 2013, *Fortunes of feminism: from state-managed capitalism to neoliberal crisis*, Verso, London and New York.
- Geiger, M & Pécoud, A (eds.) 2013, *Disciplining the transnational mobility of people*, Palgrave Macmillan, UK.
- Granovetter, MS 1973, 'The strength of weak ties', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 78, no. 6, pp. 1360-1380.
- Hagelund, A 2010, 'Dealing with the dilemmas: integration at the street-level in Norway', *International Migration*, vol. 48, No. 2, pp. 79-102, DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2435.2008.00497.x
- Heino, E & Veistilä, M 2015, 'Integration, recognition and security: discourses on social support by families of Russian background living in Finland', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 5. no. 2, DOI: 10.1515/njmr-2015-0013.
- Intke-Hernandez, M & Holm, G 2015, 'Migrant stay-at-home mothers learning to eat and live the Finnish way', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 5, no. 2, DOI: 10.1515/njmr-2015-0012.
- Isin, E & Nielsen, G (eds.) 2008, *Acts of citizenship*, Zed Books, London and New York.
- Keskinen S, Vuori J & Hirsiaho, A (eds.) 2012, *Monikulttuurisuuden sukupuoli. Kansalaisuus ja erot hyvinvointiyhteiskunnassa*, Tampere University Press, Tampere.
- Lillrank, A 2015, 'Trust, vacillation and neglect: refugee women's experiences regarding pregnancy and birth giving in Finland', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 5. no. 2, DOI: 10.1515/njmr-2015-0009.
- Lippert, R & Pyykkönen, M 2012, 'Contesting family in Finnish and Canadian immigration and refugee policy', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 45-56, DOI: 10.2478/v10202-011-0026-9.
- Lipsky, M 1980, *Street-level bureaucracy: dilemmas of the individual in public services*, Sage, New York.
- Näre, L 2014, 'Moral encounters: drawing boundaries of class, sexuality and migrancy in paid domestic work', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 363-380, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2012.729669
- Nordberg, C 2006, 'Claiming citizenship: marginalized voices on identity and belonging', *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 10, no. 5, pp. 523-539, DOI: 10.1080/13621020600954952
- Nordberg, C 2015, 'Invisibilised visions: migrant mothers and the reordering of citizenship in a Nordic welfare state context', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 5. no. 2, DOI: 10.1515/njmr-2015-0011.
- Olwig, KF 2011, 'Integration: migrants and refugees between Scandinavian welfare societies and family relations', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 179-196, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2010.521327.
- Olwig, KF, Larsen BR & Rytter, M (eds.) 2012, *Migration, family and the welfare state: integrating migrants and refugees in Scandinavia*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Schierup, CU & Ålund, A 2011, 'The end of Swedish exceptionalism? Citizenship, neo-liberalism and politics of exclusion', *Race and Class*, vol. 53, no. 1, pp. 45-64, DOI: 10.1177/0306396811406780.
- Schmidt, G 2011, 'Migration and marriage: examples of border artistry and cultures of migration?', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 55-59, DOI: 10.2478/v10202-011-0007-z.
- Tully, J 2005, 'Exclusion and assimilation: two forms of domination', in *Domination and exclusion*, eds. M Williams & S Macedo, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Turner, BS 1989, 'Ageing, status politics and sociological theory', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 588-606.
- Turner, BS 1995, *Medical power and social knowledge*, 2nd edition, Sage, London.
- Whyte, WF 1993, 'Revisiting street corner society', *Sociological Forum*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 285-297.
- Wrede, S & Nordberg, C. (eds.) 2010, *Vieraita työssä. Työelämän etnistyvä eriarvoisuus*, Gaudeamus, Helsinki.
- Wrede, S 2010, 'Suomalainen työelämä, globalisaatio ja vieraat työssä', in *Vieraita työssä. Työelämän etnistyvä eriarvoisuus*, eds. S Wrede & C Nordberg, Gaudeamus, Helsinki, pp. 7-31.