

# CONSTITUTING IMMIGRANT CARE WORKERS THROUGH GENDERING AND RACIALISING PRACTICES IN EDUCATION

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Received 20 June 2017, Accepted: 18 January 2019

## Abstract

The focus of this paper is to examine how immigrants become constituted as ideal care workers in educational settings. By analysing the everyday practices in two educational contexts in the Helsinki metropolitan area, Finland, the authors explore how these practices that are influenced by the national and transnational immigration and integration policy, regardless of their well-meant actions, can gender and racialise students with immigrant status.

## Keywords

Immigration • care work • subjectification • resistance • Finland

## Introduction

We could not do without them: immigrants clean up our mess and help us go to the toilet. (YLE News 2015)

Immigrants are desperately needed in the social and health care sector to help trained nurses to feed, bathe and dress up patients. (Ministerial report)

I'm not trying to guide them wilfully to care work but quite many just end up there. I think it's because... Well, it is true that they [immigrants] get employed quite well in the social and health care sector, and also because immigrants they want to work there. They may want to study in the care sector because there is the possibility to get

employed. To get employed that is the most important thing. (Teacher of pre-vocational training for immigrants)

I was wondering that if I study three years to become a practical nurse, I can then continue studies for another profession. I'd like to study to become a medical doctor, but when I asked, they said that after pre-vocational training you cannot go to medical training. I asked if after practical nurse training you can go to medical training and they said no. So then I took that plan out of my mind. (Student of pre-vocational training for immigrants)

The focus of this paper is to examine how immigrants become constituted as ideal care workers in educational settings. By analysing the everyday practices in two educational contexts, those of lower secondary school and pre-vocational training for immigrants, we explore how these practices that are influenced by the national and transnational immigration and integration policy, regardless of their well-meant actions, can gender and racialise students with immigrant status. We ask, how care work becomes normalised and is taken for granted as an ideal and suitable profession for immigrants.

The abovementioned four extracts that present media, governmental, teachers' and students' perspectives on this matter act as the starting points for our paper. Our focus is not on the much discussed international recruitment of care workers from the Global South and East to the Global North (e.g. Parreñas 2001), but looking at how immigrants resident in Finland are guided, even induced to the care sector. Although much attention has been paid in research on migration and care in general, and immigrant women working as domestic servants in particular, there has been less discussion on the role of education and training in constituting immigrant care workers and on immigrants' views and responds on becoming care workers or on their subtle acts of resistance not to become one.

The data we utilise have been produced by Kurki for her ethnographic study in the Helsinki metropolitan area, Finland.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, we are not interested in assessing or evaluating whether or not immigration policy and educational integration practices are "right" or "successful" according to their own criteria. Rather, we examine what their effects seem to be from the participants' point of view and how immigrant care worker subjectivities become constituted through immigration policy and educational integration practices. We are interested in the ways in which immigrants and professionals working with them describe their thoughts of immigration, integration and care work and how these thoughts can be understood as a result of how the discourses of immigration have shaped them (cf. Davies 2004, pp. 4-5). We have, for example, looked at the instances where care work is mentioned in the observation notes, interviews and in policy documents and reports and tracked the instances where gendered and racialised reasoning and rationalities to become care workers are mentioned.

Before looking at the empirical data, we discuss the contemporary national and transnational care agenda, which is shown to be gendered and racialised. The analysis laid out in the sections that follow focus, respectively, on guiding immigrants to care work, the

gendered and racialised nature of career guidance and lastly on positioning the immigrant self to care work.

## Background: gendered and racialised care agenda

The ageing of the population combined with the simultaneous decline in births and the downswing of the welfare state has given rise to a general uncertainty and the “crisis of care” in the majority of the European Union (EU) countries. Without immigrants, who are seen as an easy yet profitable solution for care deficit, the public and private healthcare would be ineffective in many European countries (e.g. Fraser 2016; Näre 2013; Himanen & Könönen 2010; Precarias a la deriva 2009). Immigrants act as the “servants of global capitalism” (Parrenas 2001, pp. 25-26) maintaining the care services for the children, disabled and the elderly of the EU. This has led to the continuation and acceleration of social and racialised inequalities in working life, where the distribution of work is based on people’s gender, race and ethnicity (e.g. Wrede & Nordberg 2010).

In Finland, the average age of population rises faster than elsewhere in Europe. This means not only a growing labour shortage due to retirement but also a growing need for care workers. Historically, care work has been gendered and classed work, maintained by the working-class women (e.g. Hoppania *et al.* 2016, p. 119-120; Lappalainen 2014; Lappalainen, Mietola & Lahelma 2013). Influenced by the examples from other EU countries, the Finnish political and economic eye has been however turned into the Far East to recruit care workers instead of improving working conditions in the care sector, including the limited financial support and budget cuttings (Hoppania *et al.* 2016; Himanen & Könönen 2010). In addition, long working hours, shift work that pays poorly stressful and physically demanding working conditions and precarious contracts have remained the norm in the sector, which makes care work unattractive for many. In addition to the international recruitment of care workers, the current trend in Finland seems to be guiding unemployed immigrants resident in the country to work in the care sector regardless of their previous education and personal interests (e.g. Kurki 2008; Nieminen 2011). At the policy level, an example of inducing immigrants to care sector is a nursing assistant initiative, launched in 2013, to open up a “flexible training and employment path” to the assisting tasks of the social and healthcare services (e.g. Sinervo *et al.* 2013; Koponen 2014). The primary purpose of the nursing assistant initiative is to train care workers fast who can help practical and trained nurses, who are referred to as “proper nurses”, to feed, bathe and dress up patients. Although the initiative may seemingly promote immigrants’ employment, it can also reinforce immigrants’ position in the care sector as secondary and marginal workforce when they are pushed to the bottom-end tasks at the lowest stages in professional hierarchy. In the media and political contexts, this kind of “immigrantisation” (Kurki *et al.* 2018; Kurki 2019) of care work is however often presented as a win-win story where the social and healthcare sectors get more employees and immigrants get employed (Olakivi 2018).

## Theoretical concepts: gendering and racialising subjectification

In the Finnish public discourse, the term “immigrant” refers to “all foreign figures” (Ahmed 2000) as it is used as a generalising term referring to a specific group of people or to assumed shared identity, such as the term “ethnic minority” in the UK context (see Kurki 2008). If attempts to define “who” the immigrant is, the distinction is often made between legal and illegal immigrants, between EU- and non-EU nationalities, or utilising other migration-related concepts, such as foreigner, refugee, asylum seeker or alien (e.g. Lepola 2000). Consequently, the official integration policy and its practices presuppose that there is some sort of universal “immigrant experience” that overrides all other differences. Thinking immigrants as one group is obviously erroneous as this “group” is composed of individuals with a wide range of differences, including gender, nationality, cultural background, religion, age, language, educational background and the reasons for migration, to mention a few. Failure to recognise the differences of immigrants subscribes to a fixed definition and reinforces cultural racism and dissolves individuality (Bhavnani, Mirza & Meeto 2005) resulting in the conception and treatment of immigrants as “faceless others” (Huttunen 2004). Thinking with post-structural and postcolonial terms, we understand immigrant-ness as “becoming” and “doing” rather than as “being”, which opens up possibilities to challenge the terminology related to immigration (cf. Bacchi 2017). In other words, we think that certain subjects are not immigrants but are made immigrants through policies and practices.

In our analysis, we utilise the concept of subjectification (e.g. Fanon 1967; Foucault, 1982/2002; Butler 1990; Youdell 2006) to examine this making of, or “constitution”, immigrant subjectivity and how then immigrant subjects are constituted as ideal subjects for care work. Subjectification happens intersectionally, which means that differences and categories, such as gender and race in which subjects are positioned, are inseparable, interdependent, mutually constituted and internally heterogeneous, they intersect and interact simultaneously (e.g. Crenshaw 1991; de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005). In this paper, we focus on the intersections of gender and race, and following the idea of making rather than being, we have adopted a verb form of the nouns “gender” and “race”, as “gendering” and “racialising”, to capture the active, ongoing and always incomplete processes of subjectification that constitute gendered and racialised immigrant subjects (cf. Jones 1997; Bacchi 2017). Importantly, as the idea of subjectification always includes the possibility for resistance, we also examine how immigrants actively take part in their own subjectification and how the making of gendered and racialised immigrant care workers can be unmade, remade and recuperated (cf. Mirza 1992; Phoenix 2012).

## Methodology, data and analysis

Methodologically, we intertwine ethnographic and nomadic discursive approaches. This means that we relate to the tradition of ethnographies conducted in educational settings

with feminist approach (e.g. Mirza 1992; Youdell 2006; Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma 2000; Paju *et al.* 2014; Mietola *et al.* 2016) and share their interest in studying differences and (in)equalities within educational institutions and the intersections of gender, ethnicity and race. We combine ethnographic approach with the idea of nomadic thinking that has emerged among feminist, postcolonial and anti-racist research (e.g. Braidotti 2011a, b; Tamboukou & Ball 2001; Kurki, Ikävalko & Brunila 2016). Nomadic thinking highlights paying attention on identities reserved/offered to subjects, in our case to immigrants, in the hegemonic discourses, and rethinking how to resist the idea of unchanging, uniform subject (e.g. Termonen, Pyykkönen & Kettunen 2003).

Analytically, our reading of the data can be described as discursive (e.g. Butler 1993; Ikävalko & Brunila 2017), which means that subjects, in our case immigrants and immigrant-ness, are made, which creates “the reality” on immigrants. Discursive reading enables us to analyse also what kinds of possibilities for resistance this constitution includes. The analysis draws on Kurki’s ethnographic study conducted in two educational contexts in the Helsinki metropolitan area, Finland: in a lower secondary school (2006) where she spent 16 school days and in two groups of pre-vocational training for immigrants (MAVA: Maahanmuuttajien ammatilliseen koulutukseen valmistava koulutus) (2009-2011) that she visited on average 1–2 days a week, sometimes with longer breaks between the visits, during the 2-year ethnographic period.

In the lower secondary school, Kurki interviewed seven students from the ninth grade with immigrant status whose parents had immigrated to Finland from Somalia (2), Kosovo (2), Estonia (1) and Vietnam (1), and one with Kurdish background. In two groups of MAVA, she interviewed 15 students whose countries of origin varied from Afghanistan (2), Bangladesh (1), Bela-Russia (1), Brazil (1), Congo (1), Ecuador (1), Estonia (3), Finland (1), Iraq (1), Latvia (1), Nigeria (1), the Philippines (1), Russia (5), Somalia (4) and Thailand (2) to Turkey (1). Four of them had a double nationality. Some of the MAVA students had finished compulsory school, while others had higher education degree and/or had worked for years as professionals in their respective fields of expertise either in their country of origin or also in Finland. Before attending MAVA programme, they had participated in a number of other forms of integration training, mostly language training. At the time of the study, all of them had registered as unemployed jobseekers in the employment office through which they had been guided to MAVA programme.

For this paper, we utilise data that include interviews with 22 immigrant students (five young women and two young men aged 15–17 years from lower secondary school and seven women and eight men aged 19–46 years from MAVA programme) and 14 teachers and other education professionals (four teachers from lower secondary school and six from MAVA programme, three project workers and one policymaker of which 13 women and one man, aged 40–50 years), observation notes from both educational contexts and 32 national and transnational policy documents, reports and guidelines from different levels of government related to immigration, integration and care work. Advertisement and media texts and curriculum and learning materials gathered during the ethnographic period as well as 153

application forms for MAVA programme work as a background information to understand the picture that is painted of immigrants as care workers in the public eye.

## Immigrants as ideal gendered and racialised care workers

In 1983, a report on refugee education of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health stated that “guiding immigrants only to certain labour market sectors should be avoided” (FMSAH 1983). In the beginning of 2000s, the direction had switched 180 degrees as the immigrant education guidelines of the Ministry of Education from 2003 indicate stating that in order to empower immigrants, and immigrant women and girls in particular, immigrants should be guided to the labour market sectors with growing demand for workforce, such as social care and healthcare (FME 2003, p. 16). In 2010s, integration of immigrants increasingly took place directly at workplaces and immigrants were openly used for business purposes (e.g. SITRA 2015; Kurki *et al.* 2018).

It is within this political (and business) agenda that teachers and other professionals work with immigrants. We have discussed elsewhere about the challenges teachers face when trying to get their students to complete studies and find jobs, but at the same time trying to respect students’ educational wishes and choices (e.g. Lahelma *et al.* 2014; Niemi & Kurki 2013, 2014). We have also discussed how teachers feel responsible for how and into what immigrants are integrated, and if they do not succeed in guiding their students to further studies and employment, they feel failing to do their job (Kurki *et al.* 2018). However, when talking about inequalities in education and labour market, teachers mainly talked about the importance of individual responsibility and making realistic choices for future education and profession. Guiding immigrant students to care sector was justified among teachers by stating that care work was a realistic and practical choice, which could save immigrants from unemployment.

If nurses are brought from the Philippines to Finland [to work in the care sector], of course people read about it and follow the news. So it’s logical to them to think, “Hey, if they bring nurses from abroad to Finland so there must be jobs in the care sector and because I cannot find any other job, maybe I should become a care worker”. (Teacher at MAVA)

We argue, however, that talking about care work as a practical choice “because I cannot find any other job” can actually be infantilisation of immigrants and their skills, which refers to racist practices whereby black (and other racialised) people are imagined to be capable of performing only certain competencies (Fanon 1967). Puwar’s (2004, p. 73) analysis went well with the discussion on immigrants’ position at the care sector when she stated that infantilisation occurs along the lines of gender, especially when young women are assumed to be simply assistants and helpers rather than central figures of authority and command. We are not to suggest that teachers and other professionals were intentionally racialising but while teachers’ efforts to get immigrants employed appear to develop and implement

equal opportunities, they can still have significantly discriminating and marginalising consequences. By encouraging immigrants to care work regardless of their own interests, teachers focused on changing the individual rather than addressing the barriers to employment and contributed to the reproduction of immigrant care labour. The aim to get immigrants to continue their studies “at least somewhere”, as one teacher described the career guidance, was stronger than challenging the discriminatory practices of the Finnish labour market (see also Niemi & Kurki 2014; Lappalainen, Mietola & Lahelma 2013).

In addition to highlighting the importance of getting employed, for quite some time now, a common objective in the EU integration policy has been to increase the participation of immigrant women and girls in education and working life. Behind this policy can be interpreted an assumption that without guidance, empowerment and activation, immigrant women and girls become socially excluded from the society. The following example from a report on integration training indicates how “immigrant culture” is considered as the reason for the exclusion of immigrant women and girls and how education and employment can save them.

The living environment of immigrant girls is often narrow and restricted: only home and school. Immigrant girls and women are in particular risk of exclusion from the Finnish society, where education, employment and participation are important parts of everyday life. (Integration training report)

In the context of lower secondary school, it was young Somali Muslim women who became assumed to struggle and suffer between the authoritarian and restrictive Somali culture and Islam and the liberal Finnish “culture of freedom” (cf. Archer 2002, p. 361). The interviewed teachers depicted young Somali Muslim women as in need of empowerment in order to resist the restrictions of their culture and religion that were understood as oppressing. Teachers described these young women as vulnerable and at risk of exclusion and thus as an opposite of themselves and other Finnish women who were positioned in the discourse as powerful and invulnerable without any needs of protection.

I am not worried that she would not be able to find a profession, she certainly can, but I am worried if her mother gives her the opportunity to study because, I think that she had to take care way too much of her siblings, who were quite lively. (Teacher at lower secondary school)

In the abovementioned extract, young Somali Muslim woman helping her mother at home by taking care of her brothers and sister became depicted as vulnerable and powerless victim, oppressed and devoted to family from young age (see also Huttunen 2004; Hirsiaho 2007; Mirza 2006). Consequently, teacher saw as her duty to rescue young Somali Muslim women by promoting the importance of education and work. Although the teacher regarded household work as a negative and restricting aspect, effecting the future of her student, teacher herself employed the idea of “caring immigrant cultures” when explaining why young Somali Muslim women should apply for practical nurse training and become care workers.

I think they [young Somali Muslim women] suit well for care work as they have this certain skill because they have had to take care of their brothers and sisters at home. (Teacher at lower secondary school)

Studies have shown that while the educational and professional choices of the majority population are considered rational and individual, immigrants' choices are seen as cultural, relying on tradition (Himanen & Könönen 2010, p. 65). A number of postcolonial researchers have argued that behind the need to empower racialised subjects lays an assumption of powerless and passive vulnerable victims (e.g. Spivak 1988; Mama 1995). They have criticised the colonial desire to save racialised women from the assumed cultural restrictions and depicting them as an opposite to the white, modern, secular and individual Western women (e.g. Mulinari *et al.* 2009, p. 5).

In the context of pre-vocational training for immigrants, suitable care workers were no longer just vulnerable young Somali Muslim women, but all immigrants regardless of their backgrounds and interests. The following extracts are examples of how the homogenisation of highly diverse group of immigrants into a particular kind of immigrant subject works in the context of integration (cf. Mulinari *et al.* 2009, p. 5).

It is natural for them [immigrants], they like it and are used to taking care of other people. (Teacher at MAVA)

In addition to the basic level of language skills, care work requires understanding of culture as well. We have a lot of potential labour for whom it is very natural to help and assist. (Project worker at immigrant integration)

Guiding immigrants to care work by pleading that they are “naturally skilled” becomes reconciled in the subjectification of “benefactor teachers” who may not intentionally racialise their students but still end up doing so through their mundane little actions, and as such, actively support institutional racism. We argue that the assumed natural skill for care work can be read also as “romanticised racism”, as Kuronen (2015, p. 86) described it. In the media and public discussions, a similar discourse can be found, where immigrant care workers are depicted as active and motivated workers interested in elderly care because of their cultural background, driven by entrepreneurial self-development, responsibility, activity and ability to overcome any obstacles (even discrimination and racism) (see Nordberg 2016; Näre & Nordberg 2016; Näre 2013).

In the context of pre-vocational training, the idea of caring cultures was used as a resource when marketing care work for immigrant students. Immigrants' caring cultures were told to enrich the Finnish society providing care services that was not natural for the Finns. The following extract is an example of student's attempt to question the idea that all immigrants are suitable for care work.

Student: Why do we all apply for practical nurse training?

Teacher: Well, maybe it is because people who come from other cultures have a need for caring.

Olakivi (2018) showed in his study how the stereotypical thinking of caring cultures is used also by immigrants themselves. At the moment, the problems of elderly care are at the centre of public debate, and the criticism affects also nurses who have to constantly persuade care managers, patients and their relatives of their skills, commitment and ethics. Images of committed, motivated and caring immigrants circulating in the public mind provide a potential resource to be used. Immigrants understand the market value of “their” immigrant-ness in order to get employed (see also Hoppania *et al.* 2016). The following extract is from an interview with young man from the Philippines, with whom Kurki discussed about his country’s open emigration policy to educate nursing personnel well beyond its own need with the hope of international recruitment. In the extract, however, the student depicts himself not only as motivated but importantly as educated and experienced for the care work, still ending up working as care assistant instead of practical nurse.

Student: I am interested in practical nurse training because in my home country I graduated from this course. I also have professional experience, I worked in the hospital for the first aid, first in Saudi Arabia, maybe five years there, and then I was in Abu Dhabi.

Researcher: You worked in a hospital also in Saudi Arabia?

Student: Yes.

Researcher: Okay, and what kind of training was there in the Philippines?

Student: I am a graduate nurse, which is a practical nurse here. It was a one-year course and then I left for work.

Researcher: Okay, so you are a graduate nurse already from the Philippines, but you have to re-do the training in Finland again?

Student: Yes, last year I did an on-the-job training in the hospital (...) and then I got a study place at MAVA. I will have a summer job in the same hospital because they said I am so diligent and work so carefully.

Researcher: Is it the practical nurse’s work that you do?

Student: Yeah or no, maybe nursing assistant.

Nieminen (2011) highlighted in her study how difficult it is for trained immigrant nurses to get their professional skills acquired abroad recognised in Finland. In practice, trained immigrant nurses often have to act as nursing assistants and/or start practical nurse

training from the beginning. Many immigrants have excellent possibilities to represent themselves as hardworking entrepreneurs who have creatively and courageously crossed the obstacles of integration including learning the language, getting employed and tolerating discriminatory practices (Olakivi 2018). Emphasising differences between immigrants and the Finns and replacing the concept of race with that of culture serve as the basis for hierarchies and categorisation. Racism in the politically correct disguise of multiculturalism guides the debated to cultural differences and naturalness instead of the social status of immigrants and their experiences of exploitation and struggle (Himanen & Könönen 2010, p. 65).

## Positioning the immigrant self to care work

When adapting to the needs of the labour market and trying to fulfil the expectations of teachers, career counsellors, employment officers, social services, integration policy and also their families, it seems that immigrants often have to “start from zero”, that is, to take up the educational routes that do not relate to their past education, skills and experiences and/or present interests (see also Könönen 2011; Hirsiaho 2007), as the following example illustrates:

Researcher: So, how come did you choose care work? You told me your background was in engineering.

Participant: Well, there isn't care work in vocational training in my country. Everybody takes care of their children and family on their own. There are no old people's homes, no bed patients. Then when I came to Finland and started MAVA programme, my teacher asked me which profession you want. She always talked about care work. Then I asked, what this care work is, and she explained and said that it is easy to get a job in care work, that it's easy to get a job in care work anywhere in Europe! And so I got interested in it because I like to work with people and with old people. So, then I went to the interview in an old people's home for my on-the-job training and saw old people lay in beds and their children don't come to visit them. Nobody comes. So then I just felt that this is the job I want to do, even though it's difficult.

The idea of starting from zero has been analysed and widely discussed in social research, indicating the global inequalities where immigrants are forced to take the shitty jobs at wages and working conditions that the majority population no longer accepts (e.g. Himanen & Könönen 2010; Anderson 2010). It is, however, in this atmosphere where resistance to politics and practices that facilitate a larger immigrant presence in care work can emerge. The dominant conception of vulnerability presupposes and supports the idea that vulnerability can be understood only as victimisation and passivity, invariably as the site of inaction (Butler, Gambetti & Sabsay 2016) and as a form of individual deficiency and pathology (see Brunila *et al.* 2017; Ecclestone & Goodley 2016). However, following Butler,

Gambetti & Sabsay (2016), we state that vulnerability can also be considered as a condition of resistance. We suggest that instead of understanding accepting and choosing care work simply as submission and obedience, it should be analysed also as an act of resistance.

Interviewed students deployed their immigrant-ness strategically at the same time as they became naturalised by professionals as a fixed group of immigrants which was used as a basis of racialisation (see also Näre 2010). The strategy that was used was to occupy care work in order to aim for another profession. Students, for example, took a detour via care in order to have better chances of getting into another profession, such as police officer or medical doctor, a profession of their dreams (see also Niemi & Kurki 2014), as these students (both of them young Somali Muslim women) who applied for practical nurse training explain in the following excerpts.

I applied for practical nurse training. I'm sure it will be great there as there are lots of people I know, friends and relatives. So, after five years I will be a nurse and then I'll become a medical doctor. (Student of lower secondary school)

You know, I haven't seen any police officers here in Finland who come from my country (Somalia), who would have studied here and then become a police officer. In Sweden, I saw a black boy who was a police officer but in Finland I haven't seen any. So, that's what I want: to become the first black policewoman in Finland! (Student of MAVA)

We argue that becoming an immigrant care worker can easily be read as an “entrapment” of gendered and racialised stereotypes. However, it can also be read as an “escape attempt” (Tamboukou & Ball 2002) as it may contain “ways out” to other subject positions in which to be, ways of being something else than what is expected. Thus, constituting immigrant care workers and becoming immigrant care workers are richly contradictory and paradoxical. Interviewed students did not resist their subjectification as care workers, instead, they were actively took part in their own subjectification by finding creative ways to discursively present care work as a justified and rational choice that also served their own interests. They resisted the expectation that they should spend their whole lives at the bottom-end tasks of the care sector.

These examples can be then read also as “resistance within accommodation” (Mac an Ghaill 1988, p. 9), as positioning the immigrant self perhaps silently to care work but refusing to stay at “immigrants’ place”. Putting “their immigrant bodies” into care work but insistently taking their own place in the sector can be read as resistance against contemporary anti-immigration and racialisation of working life in general, and care sector in particular. As such, becoming “immigrant care workers” simultaneously operates as a repertoire of collective action and as a form of “re-attunement to vulnerability” (Butler, Gambetti, & Sabsay 2016). Gendered and racialised embodiment of immigrants in the public care spaces can then become platforms for politics of resistance by making immigrants and their work visible and political. We suggest that the idea of immigrants as care workers can be read as “embodied performative speech act” (Butler 1997), where the space of appearance for the political, in this case care work, comes into being. Their positionality

in care work illustrates how their very presence is a disruption as well as a continual negotiation (cf. Puwar 2004). This is related to our understanding of immigrant-ness, which we conceptualise as “doing” or “becoming” rather than “being”, meaning that immigrant-ness is reproduced in power relations and in discursive practices.

## Conclusion

As a number of feminist postcolonial researchers before us have stated, if we look at the positions of racialised subjects only with the protective or empowering approach, researchers themselves may in fact unconsciously/consciously perpetuate the colonial gaze and perceive and infantilise racialised subjects as helpless victims and deprive them of a sense of autonomy and self-determination (e.g. Mulinari *et al.* 2009; Doezema 2001). In this paper, we have suggested that immigrants in general, and some immigrant groupings in particular, become considered ideal care workers as a result of labour market policy and economic needs, and also through gendering and racialising practices of education. In our data, the reasons given for guiding immigrants to care sector vary from care deficit (working in the sector serves both Finland and immigrants as they get employed) to gendered and racialised stereotypes of caring cultures (see also Kurki 2008; Jokinen & Jakonen 2011; Nieminen 2011). We have shown how immigrants are depicted as a motivated and committed group, ready to care and nurse the children, disabled and the elderly with their natural caring skills. We agree with Näre (2013) that immigrants are attractive to care providers precisely because they are immigrants, it is their immigrant-ness that makes them potentially attractive care workers. We have also shown how that it is through the most apparently trivial moments in educational settings that immigrants come to be constituted as ideal for care work within the terms of discursive practices of integration. Therefore, it is important to understand that immigrants do not “just end up” to the care sector but are deliberately guided there through integration policy and practices of education.

It goes without saying that the interviewed students had various kinds of dreams and plans about their future and ideal professions. During the course of education, in both lower secondary school and pre-vocational training, they slowly started to realise that certain professions were not considered realistic or ideal for them as immigrants. They had been told, for instance, that “you cannot become a medical doctor” while another student had given up on her dream to become a psychologist or social worker as she was told that “university is not for immigrants”. Through these kinds of everyday practices in the education sector, immigrants become seen as not qualified for something they aim for, instead, they are expected to learn willingness to start from zero. Consequently, the subject position of “immigrant care workers” becomes part of one’s subjectivity, of the understanding of the self, regardless of the multiple subject positions available (cf. Davies 2000; see also Kurki *et al.* 2018; Kurki & Brunila 2014).

Although care work is undoubtedly a valuable work, pushing all immigrants to care work can be interpreted as racist and sexist integration policy if the “popularity” of care

work among immigrants is explained with cultural reasons and natural suitability (Jokinen & Jakonen 2011). At the same time, gendered and racialised reasons given in official policies and everyday practices for guiding immigrants to care sector are hushed and not easily spoken, particularly the assumptions related to gender, race, ethnicity and culture; disparity of immigrants in the care sector; segregation of care tasks based on ethnicity in the care sector, and above all, the possibilities to refuse care work.

There is always something both risky and true in claiming that immigrants (or other socially disadvantaged groups) are especially vulnerable. We do not want to blame teachers for over-promoting or immigrants for approving care work nor do we want to look at it as vulnerable and ignorant submission. The actions of teachers and other education professionals can actively support this institutional form of racism, whether they are aware of it or not. We argue that guiding immigrants to care sector is not accidental, and that education, which is designed to eliminate inequalities, can sustain segregation and marginalisation of immigrants in working life. In this paper, we have discussed about the possibilities of resistance and attempted to go beyond the victim or exploitation perspective of migration and care by problematising the representation of immigrants merely as victims of labour market needs. This does not mean that we would deny the discriminatory and racist practices related to immigration and employment as it is important to understand the challenges racialised subjects face in education and labour market, but we want to highlight that racialised subjects are not simply steered by them.

## Notes

1. This paper is part of Tuuli Kurki's doctoral dissertation (Kurki 2019). The study is located in two research projects funded by the Academy of Finland: "Citizenship, agency and difference in upper secondary education – with special focus on educational institutions" (2010-2013) led by Professor Elina Lahelma and "Interrupting youth support systems in the ethos of vulnerability" (2017-2021) led by Associate Professor (tenure track) Kristiina Brunila.

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