Constructing narratives through story telling: A study of refugees in Estonia

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Abstract

Very little investigation has been done on refugees in Estonia and their construction of narratives in a new society. It is believed that refugees portray their memories of their own country while in exile to be able to create their present individuality in a new land and to adapt to a new culture. This paper has attempted to investigate refugees who were placed at refugee accommodation centre in Estonia and to analyse their present and past memories and stories to associate with their coping mechanisms, while they relate their stories in adapting to a new land. Based on qualitative study and from in-depth interviews, this paper brings out the argument that despite being displaced from their homeland, refugees portray their homeland as idyllic stories; family and community life are emphasized with the contrast of individualism. This paper argues that specific narratives can produce double marginalized people while at the same time stories told and memories are significant in forming agency to establish counter-narratives.

KEYWORDS: refugees, Estonia, narrative, storytelling, identity

Introduction

We are living in an era in which changes are constant, and societies that remained unchanged are quickly becoming diverse. Socio-economic and political aspects and the consequence of global communication and conflicts testify that we are going through an era of diversification. Cooperation between countries, business organizations, intercultural communication, and human migration are the features of today's world that signify the fact that countries and societies are changing and diversity is a part of it (Islam 2016).

From within these diverse societies, there are people who are forced to take part of this diversity. We are however living in an era which is 'age of the refugee, people who are displaced and mass migration' (Said 2000:174). The global number of refugees has been increasing over the past decades. (Islam 2016). European Union countries (EU) have been receiving large numbers of refugees in recent years. More than six hundred thousand asylum seekers were received by the EU countries in 2014; there were four hundred thousand in the previous year (Bourgeais 2015). Therefore, the rate of increase is quite high.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL NOTEBOOKS 23 (2): 67–81.
ISSN 1408-032X

Traditionally Estonia has been viewed as less attractive country for the Asylum seekers and refugees (Islam 2016). In 2004, Estonia joined the EU, and in 2007 they signed the Schengen treaty. The 1951 UN convention relating to the status of refugees was signed by the Estonian state in 1997. According to the Estonian State portal on Refugees 'Estonia has received a relatively small number of applications for international protection compared to other EU member states, but the number of applications has increased every year' (Valitsus 2016).

The number of application that Estonia received from 1997 to May 2015 was 709, out of which 114 were granted protection. However, this number is on the increasing side; in five months of 2015, Estonia received 90 applications for international protection and it was expected that this number would be even higher for the next period of time (Islam 2016). However, all these statistics are before the crisis that was evident in summer 2015 in Europe, when influxes of migrants and refuges made it a crisis; to be able to handle it European commission president announced the proposal that 120,000 additional asylum seekers will be distributed among EU nations with binding quotas. According to the state portal of Estonia, Estonia's positions on the refugee quota 'Estonia does not intend to remain a bystander in the Mediterranean crisis, Estonia does not dispute the refugee distribution formula' (Valitsus 2016). Estonian received the first war refugees on March 29, 2016 as a relocation quota.

Drawing on the existing literature on migration and ethnic minorities in Estonia, Islam (2016: 293), in his studies on 'Refugee Quota: is Estonia ready to receive refugees,' stated that 'migration research in Estonia mostly been built on four major categories and none of them particularly focused on refugees or immigrants having ethnic background outside Europe.' In the 2009, there was research on readiness to accept immigrants in Europe, Masso (2009) asked the question of how would they like to have people from outside Europe, and from different races and ethnicities; Estonia ranked at the bottom of the table, scoring 22, just above Hungary, scoring 23, while Iceland and Sweden were at the top respectively. This research was done in a scale of 23, rank 1 being highest and 23 being lowest. In this study, Islam (2016) also pointed out that Estonia has very little experience in handling migrants win non-European background, as existing studies are mostly on Russian minorities in Estonia and their integration aspect in different sectors. The Estonian state portal also suggests that the number of asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Sudan have been increasing in Estonia, while before it was mostly from Russia, Georgia and Ukraine (Valitsus 2016). Islam (2016: 294) pointed out that 'policy makers, academician [sic] and researchers will have to address this aspect to tackle the challenges which are emerging from migration crisis to build up a cohesive society.'

With this background of asylum seekers and refugees in Estonia, this study aims to provide contributions to the literature by exploring Asylum seekers and refugees in Estonia and their cooperative memories about their experience at the refugee centre and their own country while they are dislocated to a European country and to utilise their stories of present and past to construct their current and future self or identity (Chamberlain & Leydesdroff 2004; Cohen 1996; Brubaker 2005). To be precise, this study attempted to explore the role of memory and narrative of the continuing process that the refugees

and asylum seekers in Estonia are undergoing. The aim is to contribute to the literature that investigates the importance of storytelling, as well as past and present memory from asylum seekers and refugees.

Asylum seekers and refugees in Estonia and their placement

Over the last 18 years, from 1997 to May 2015, Estonia received a total of 709 applications; among them, permission was granted to 114 people, which includes 74 refugees and 40 who received complementary protection.

In 2012, the number of applications was 77, in 2013 it went up to 97, and in 2014 it was 147. By mid-2015, Estonia received 90 applications, and it was expected that the number in total for that year would go past 250. Therefore, the number of asylum seekers and refugees are on the increase.

The Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for helping and finding residence for refugees. For family or individuals who seek asylum for protection, state provides housing centre, which in a village called Vao, in Laane-Viru County. It takes around one-and-half hours by train to get to that village from the capital city of Tallinn, and this is the only convenient way to travel to the capital city.

At the end of December 2016, the Vao accommodation centre housed 73 persons. Of those, 54 are asylum seekers and 19 are refugees with a residence permit. The centre housed 24 children and 15 females, comprising 11 families.

Once a person receives international protection (i.e. refugee status), he or she is not supposed to stay at the accommodation centre but should be living in a home rented from any social housing or on the free market; the Ministry of Social Affairs helps them find it.

At the end of 2016, the asylum seekers and refugees were from 16 different countries. The largest numbers of residents are from Ukraine, Armenia, Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Georgia. The number of applicants from outside Europe is rising (Valitsus 2016).

The village has a small shop, which has mostly very basic grocery items, but residents from Vao centre usually go to the nearby town, which is 15 minutes far by bus: there are usually two buses a day that go back and forth from the town to the village.

After refugees are granted the residence permit house rent, essential translation services and Estonian language instruction costs are covered by the state for up to two years (Valitsus 2016). It is expected that refugees should learn the language and other social aspects so that they could adapt swiftly and find a job to become self-dependent. However, refugees (not asylum seekers) are allowed to access state pensions, family benefits, employment services, and other benefits like any permanent resident of Estonia. Asylum seekers, who are waiting to get their decision, are not entitled to work at that time; however, from 2017 it is expected that once they have waited six months after their application, they might be allowed to work.

There is a firm distinction between asylum seekers and refugees. Asylum seekers are those who have asked for protection, and their application is in process; refugees are

those who applied and received protection, therefore they have residence permit and can enjoy all other benefits like any other permanent residents in Estonia. Asylum seekers also have permit to stay but on different ground; this does not allow having many benefits but to stay and wait for their decision. In this waiting time, they are placed in an accommodation centre and are given 130 euros per month for their living expenses. They also have some medical services and language lessons.

Storyline

For the migrants, narrative is quite significant for making sense of their lives (Portelli 1998). In a study of migrants, Farah (2000: 37) stated that 'stories poured out, their memory flowing out of their mouth with a broken string.' By using narrative, people exchange their memories of incidence and produce each other's accounts to build certain memories of a group (Assmann 1995). Told stories have their plots, themes that come through them, and the way they tell the stories are certainly driven by their cultural narratives. (Passerini 1987). We can find symbols from told language and narrative; as Bruner (1987: 10) pointed out 'Our mind needs cultural symbols to express.' Therefore, whatever we try to make relations and whichever way to relate has its tools at our disposals. Hence, a society or a particular group tells its story by using narratives and by its cultural framework (Ramsden & Ridge 2012)

Stories can be a strategy that solves problems and leads the present situation to validate the experiences (Connerton 1989; Manderson & Allotey 2003). Therefore, it has inspired many researchers to investigate on narratives and how we talk about current events and not just to focus on what is being said, to construct 'an unmatched opening into opinions or subjective experience' (Ochberg 1988: 173).

By recalling experiences and making choices on narratives, individuals or groups of people could retake their control over life after any major events like displacement or any kind of disaster in life; Frank (2003) used the term "survivorship" to interpret how people could take control over their lives. Riessman (2002), in a study on narratives, developed a proposition that what we exclude or include in narrativization and how we plot things and how they are being meant depends on human agency and our imagination. Storytelling at times highlights immigrants' resettlement and aids in constructing or reconstructing identity (Chavez 1994), which creates an opportunity to make a vision for future. Therefore, the focus of this study is to gather narratives to create comprehension of experiences from the refugee centre and life in a new country and memories of their own country and to have some resonance with the asylum seekers and refugees in Estonia.

Narrativization and memory telling

Existing literature regarding memory tends to indicate that individuals attempt to reconstruct and restore their order by using memory, which helps them to term their past in a recent context. (Agnew 2005; Malkki 1992; Jedlowski 2001). Agnew (2005: 20) stated that 'our memories can generate new definition and sense of our understanding for our past and also for our present.' Refugees have complicated ways of explaining their experiences

and asserting a specific place as their homeland. Malkki (1992), in a study on refugees, pointed out that 'because of mobile nature of people and being displaced, they continuously invent homes and homeland, while it is impossible to stay at their past land or territories.' Transnational families reconstruct their identity at times building a vessel for immigrant's belongings and non-belongings when in search for a place which can be called as home (Christou 2003; Sutton 2004). Peggy Levitt (2004) wrote a report where she stated that home can mean more than one country.

The argument that Halbwachs (1980) made about memories is quite significant. Individuals tend to remember and locate their memories through their group memberships, religious identity, or the class with which they are affiliated. Kingship is also another aspect through which an individual can gain and remember memories. Schwartz (1998) argued that memory is not something static, rather he argued that it comes from dynamic influence or interaction between and among members of a community. As an individual or group, people tend to forget and reinterpret their past and invent new features of their life through shared common experiences (Middleton & Edwards 1990). It is quite evident that whatever we remember or comes out as memory, much of it actually influenced by our membership or families, different social groups or societies what Zerubavel (1996) termed "mnemonic socialization". When we remember something of our past, we try to recall it through what our parents and elders told or tell us about it; through enduring memories, we attempt to identify ourselves (ibid.).

In this study, I started with the standpoint that memory is a complicated matrix of narrative in terms of current or present requisites, both at the collective and individual levels (Ramsden & Ridge 2012). This study particularly focused on the narratives of asylum seekers and refugees, considering them as a group of refugees and about their resettlement in Estonia. The focus is on the reconstruction of memories and narratives to see them as a vehicle for combining management issues in the present. Therefore, this study investigated how refugees in Estonian form their connection with each other, experience and sense of belongings in a new country through storytelling and memories of the past and present.

Methods

Participants selection

Fieldwork was carried in two different times; the first field work was from March 2015 to May 2015; the second was in December 2016. The selected fieldwork site was the village of Vao – the centre for asylum seekers and refugees in Estonia. The police and boarder guard service gave permission to carry out the fieldwork; afterwards, good communication was established also with the manager of the centre.

Vao currently houses 72 persons, of which 54 are asylum seekers and 19 are refugees with a residence permit. Members are from different ethnic groups. At present, the centre accommodates persons from 16 different countries: Iraq, Ukraine, Palestine, Georgia, Armenia, Sri Lanka, India, Afghanistan, Albania, Sudan, Iran, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Somalia, Bangladesh, and Syria. The centre houses 15 women; there are 24 children and 11 families (Valitsus 2016).

According to the UNHCR definition, 'An Asylum Seeker is someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed' (UNHCR 2016) and refugees are people fleeing conflict or persecution. They are defined and protected in international law and must not be expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom are at risk' (UNHCR 2016). However, according to Estonian law, an asylum seeker is the one who has applied for protection, and a refugee is the one who has received protection and has been given a residence permit card with all other facilities that a permanent residence in Estonia receives. In this study, both asylum seekers and refugees are considered to be refugees (Gerritsenetcl 2006) and that they have common feelings of being displaced from their homeland and shared the experience of living in an accommodation centre while in exile.

The findings of this study are based on group interviews with 24 refugees; 19 were men, and five were women. They are from Sri Lanka (3), India (2), Iraq (3), Syria (4), Sudan (4), Afghanistan (2), Albania (4), Cameroon (1), Bangladesh (2), Ivory Coast (1), and Palestine (2); 18 of the 24 participants among the group interview agreed to be interviewed individually (16 men and 2 women from Sri Lanka, India, Iraq, Sudan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, and Syria). Interviews that were carried out individually conducted with eight key informants who were selected by observing and also suggested by other fellow refugees (Yin 2003) These eight key informants are from Bangladesh, India, Iraq, Sudan and Syria.

Collection of data

It is difficult to access refugees, and often they are termed "invisible actors" (Bond & Voutria 2007). In a country like Estonia, immigrants from third countries can be identified easily, as there are very few immigrants from outside Europe. (Islam 2016). It is at the same time very hard to access as Bond and Voutria (2007: 283) figured 'perhaps they are visible and can be identified but largely inaccessible for researcher[s] for different reasons.' Refugees are given a support person in Estonia to receive their primary information and supports and to become settled. A network was established with a support person. Through that support person, access to the Vao Centre was possible, and I gained access to the participants.

Staying two months at the Vao Centre and living like them helped build a relationship with them. 'This assisted in creating bonds of trust and facilitated openness and engagement in the research process' (Ramsden & Ridge 2012: 230) Throughout the study, notes were taken constantly, and all the events that took place during the fieldwork, and all the interactions among them were observed and have been included in the analysis. A semi-structured approach was taken to conduct both group and individual interviews (Denzin & Lincol 1994). To be able to switch to a storyline mood of communication, open-ended questions were utilized which helps participants to make attention to certain aspects of their story of migration process and the process they undergone their settlement experiences and the set up through which they have been through. To elicit narratives, their past and presents situations were investigated to determine their aspirations for the future.

Participants had enough time to express their lives in their own way of speaking so that whatever aspect is significant for the study comes out. This also provides the possibility to obtain narratives on the aspects about which they are concerned. The participants

were placed at a detention centre before they were placed at the Vao Centre, where this study was carried out; therefore, stories had a starting point and those are relevant to this study. Phenomena included communication, treatment, migration. and settlement issues in a new country as well as views about detention and current centre and the country where they currently belong.

Group interviews lasted around two hours, and they were audio-recorded; the permission was granted from both the centre manager and from the participants. All the interviews were conducted in English, except two individual interviews that were conducted in Bangla, the language this researcher also speaks. All participants were fluent in English, which helped them to express their narratives and to give voice to their concerns. All notes were taken in Bangla and then translated and transcribed into English. Most of the individual interviews were around 40 minutes long and some of lasted even for more than two hours while lunch or dinner were taken together with the participants. To obtain the narratives, individual interviews were very significant. These individual interviews not only helped to discern insights but also created a path to validate the data that were obtained from the group interviews.

Analysis

After the interviews were transcribed, they were checked by the participants for any kind of misconceptions and to make them more accurate. All the names in the analysis are pseudonyms. Transcripts were checked and rechecked to inspect any common themes to create narratives. (Morse & Field 1995). It also aids in spotlighting contents and its differences. Transcripts were continuously reviewed to construct and categorise and to find links between categories. (Browne & Sullivan 1999). The main comprehension of narratives of their present and past experiences was identified from the final categorisation.

Limitations

Most of the participants were men, and the findings of this analysis reflect their views. While a diverse sample of participants were interviewed from different countries and different ethnic groups, this study did not set out to see the difference between these participants; it considered them as a set group of refugees. Furthermore, this study did not intend to generalize the findings to all refugees in Estonia but to explore the situations of the refugees living in the Vao Centre and to give priority to their own narratives that they construct.

Findings

Collective narratives became evident despite the fact the participants come from different backgrounds; they mentioned idyllic interactions both in the cultural and social dimensions with their own community before being displaced, and that includes strong ties with family and support. The image of their country remained a place for joy and peace despite being displaced from their country. Observation supports the fact that memories, as such, conveys the story of leaving the life being ‘attractive’ and a feeling of the fact that they belong there and a sense of safety:

> When my country was stable, and everything was running smoothly, it was very nice and lovely. The environment is nice, and weather is so good that you could go anywhere by foot and can spend time on the street, talking with other people even with stranger. You will find nice foods on the street and they are fresh (Sohan, 31, Iraq).

Despite their cultural and social diversity, all participants spoke of strong family bonding and family support involving unity and being part of an extended family. Family takes an important part of their everyday life storytelling and whenever they got the chance to express it, they mentioned it with joy. Family also takes the role of supporting each other as an obligation.

> If you get married, you don't leave home; you rather stay at home. It's our tradition. Sometimes only one member is working, and the rest are enjoying their lives being part of the family. We take care of each other. As a part of extended family, you contribute to your family in many ways. If you have a job, you contribute financially; if you stay at home you cook, you clean the house and sometimes we just keep company with others. There is no depression because we always discuss things with each other and problems can be solved this way (Sahed, 28, Sri Lanka).

Not only family but also activities outside the home are considered as mingling points or socializing by the participants. The concept of "community" is regarded as the sense of interactions with neighbours and relatives. Peaceful and happy interactions with the neighbours have also been central to their memories.

> You actually know everyone who your neighbour is. Children used to play with them outside. Elders gossip at home with other neighbours. It is beautiful culture. If a new neighbour comes into the locality, we try to get to know them by inviting them and sometimes they also invite others. As the weather is good and warm, you do not need to stay at home all the time, so you know all other homes and their members while you are out in the street and spend time outside home. You can even sit under a lamppost together and talk (Rahim, 35, Sudan).

Relationship with neighbours was explained as being a part of the social interaction that is the central part of their everyday life as they extend their stories:

> While cooking something, if discovered you don't have salt at home, you do not go to shop. You turn to your neighbour. We at times go to market together and even exchange things with each other (Rahela, 28, Afghanistan).

The reason for migration and their trajectories differs considerably; their narratives were linked to the memories of being displaced and affirmative relationships of family and community in their homeland. When pushed and asked about their displacement period and difficulties that they have been through, five participants elaborated how their situations changed during the difficult period and in which way in relations to safety. At

the same time, they bring out their focus on the pre-difficulty period and their memories of a beautiful country. Their way of describing home then become a viewing a past that they could live and the reference points out the strain of the current situation (Field 1998; Refslund Sørensen 1997)

Their periods of difficulties of their homeland highlights their longing of the past and all the memories of their homeland are before that:

> I have two kinds of stories or memories one before I was displaced and the other is when everything was running good in my country. My country was the most amazing country that I could ever find. I do not say that I am not liking Estonia, but your homeland is your homeland, and you know every bit of it (Saher, Albania).

Participants in this study focused on positive narratives on their country in contrast to some studies on migration (Ryan 2001). Participants did recognize their countries situations and how unsafe it is for them, but then turn to memories of their happiness.

> There is no proper government because of war but still when I remember my country I could feel happiness. I was always laughing back home. I cannot remember the last time that I laughed here in Estonia (Asfaq, 31, Iraq).

Living in the detention centre

Most participants had to stay in the detention centre, which they termed a "prison" before they were placed at the Vao Centre, which is their current place of accommodation. Thus, most participants had a starting point when they tell their story on Estonia and create narratives. Stories about their status of being refugee included mostly the period they spent in the detention centre and waiting to be transferred to the Vao Centre, where this research was carried out; which frames their narrative in Estonia:

> Once you are left from your country without passport and you are placed in a prison, being refugee becomes your only identity. You are a refugee and spend your time with other people in the prison who do not have any option to go anywhere but to stay in a prison. So, you are in the middle of an ocean (Ruhan, 31, Iran).

Many participants conveyed stories of treatment, not feeling human in the detention centre, and how this haunts them, which makes it difficult to cope even when they are placed in relatively nice place to stay:

> It is a nice place. You can go shopping, buy things, and eat. You are given money and you can sleep and talk with your family members back home. While I was in prison, I was given the chance to talk with my family only once in a week and only for five minutes with my own money. There was no internet, no communication tools. I felt I was stuck like a mouse gets caught in a box (Viki, 38, India).

A sense of not fitting in and being stuck in the middle of nowhere continues for a number of participants. They did not refer of being victims of racism, but the participant's stories generated narratives of racism in general. In research on Finish immigrants, Alitolppa-Niitamo (2004) found that in Finland. Somali refugees are being treated more negatively than any other immigrant group. Despite of the fact that the Estonian government is focusing on multiculturalism, it was evident from stories told by the participants that they had a view of their narratives on local structures.

> In the detention centre, even the amount of food was so low that you would feel hungry all the time. Food was given the same to all kind of people. Doesn't matter how big or small you are and how much need you have, you will get the same quantity. I was still relatively lucky as I am not a black. I think black refugees from Africa were treated even badly and refugees from Europe who look alike them were treated much better than us (Srimohan, 26, Sri Lanka).

Stories told by the participants communicated a feeling that their label of identity as refugee will not vanish, and this identity might place them into difficult situation to cope and adapt into a new society. Bhabha (1994: 12) stated that attempts to change the status 'the border-line community migration' would not be vanished. Vulnerability might be influenced by their economic condition, cultural standpoint, religious belief, and skin colour, as Fangen (2006) stated that refugees from Somalia might face a more vulnerable situation than other because of their poor financial condition downward and standard of living.

> I tried to find an apartment for my family after getting the permission and residence permit in the town. But I could not find any. Initially house owners willing to rent to me but whenever told that I am a refugee they hung up. I think it would be the same case while I would start looking for a job (Nish, 23, Afghanistan).

Being labelled as a refugee and the memories from the detention centre were the central narratives for some participants which even influenced two of the participants to change their status. Treatment from the host societies and the prejudice that they receive might reinforce their ethnic identity (Fangen 2007). While two participants decided to change their migration status, narratives about their homeland continue:

> In my opinion, it would be very hard to fit in this society as a refugee. My appearance is different in this country. Not all people are bad here. Some are very good, but some just do not accept us. I cannot forget the treatment that I received in the detention centre. I do not think even in my country in a normal situation people will be treated as badly. I have decided to find out a work. I am educated. If I get proper work, I will stay here as a worker not as a refugee (SM, 21).

Feelings of anxiety and not being focused on them by society and its human rights organization were evident. Participants continued their narratives on institution and memories that they faced at the detention centre. One participant even asked this researcher to do fieldwork in the centre:

> Since you are researching us, you had better visit the prison to see the real scenario. We are far better here at the Vao Centre (Meraj, 30, Iraq).

Feeling of being lost and life in Estonia

> Before arriving in Estonia, I imagined that it would be a very beautiful nice European country. It is very difficult being away from homeland than I anticipated. I have to accept it and will have to recognize that I am here, and I have to get used to it, but I miss my life back in my country (Raihan, 21, Palestine).

Their memories from the past in relation to their family and community drove their experience of their current life in Estonia. In a migratory situation, identification and habituation take place in sites, referred by Christou (2006) when he researched Greek migrants. Trying to find identity and feeling of belongings are not restricted by the home or the host societies. One Sudanese participant stated that:

> I have lost all my family members, my relatives and even neighbourhood back home but I had a beautiful life there. My memories are now my asset. They belong to me, and I will live my life with all these memories (Johnny, 24, Sudan).

As participants are quite detached from their networks back home, they conveyed the message of being alone and sad feeling while living in Estonia and a sense of disconnection. Despite of the fact that once they were placed at the accommodation centre from the detention period, they had the global communication system in the form of internet and other tools, they still felt they are disconnected with their former networks. Sense of family and community continues:

> The fact is in our country we live in an extended family, here we have to live like a nuclear family. I cannot have all my family member or neighbours here (Rahima, Palestine).

The sense of "self" and the culture of individualism was encountered by the most participants when they arrived in the accommodation centre. Most participants told stories which focus on collectiveness than individual self. They stated that they have been asked to focus on their selves rather than others or any country mate:

> Once I asked our accommodation centre's manager to provide four pieces of bed sheet for four of us from Sudan. I was told that I should only ask for myself. If the rest need, they should come and ask themselves. In our country, we do not feel this way. Even if you are not a family member, if you are just a known person, you could still do things collectively (Johnny, 26, Sudan).

Despite the difficulties that the participants faced at the detention centre and other senses of not fitting in, the narratives indicate that many participants are trying to cope

with their new atmosphere and are optimistic about re-establishing themselves in this new country and have to find a community feeling with other migrants or fellow refugees. Their collective narratives construct a narrative network through which refugees in Estonia can cope with the new environment:

> We need to come forward, and thankfully we know each other being there at the detention centre and also here and the accommodation centre. We have to work together and should help each other if any problems arrived. We need to get a way to build a strong refugee community in Estonia, so we could help each other and could show to the world that we are doing well (Jetendro, 29, India).

Respondents also focused on the language and the hope to gain better understanding of Estonian culture and system. This would help them to have better outlook of themselves and their children. Many participants had the idea that becoming established in this country depended on learning the language and forming relationships with not only own refugee community members but also with the host community:

> Going to school is important. There you learn language and you might have option to build up friendship with others. My children are going to the school and I am hopeful that they will have a better future in this country (a mother from Albania).

Discussion

The participants told stories in connection to their experience of the detention centre and the accommodation centre where they are placed afterward. The argument can be made that their glamorised memories of their homeland could be an obstacle to adapting to life in Estonia. This analysis presents the role of memories and the narratives in explaining refugees. Refugees are presented as significant agents with their own capabilities and resources; at the same time, it must be recognised that they have lost many things back home and that they have better experiences in the back of their minds. The outcome of this story telling and creating narratives was not viewed to prompted any policy making but to provide an insight about the ways refugees in Estonia think of their country and create narratives of adapting in Estonia; as Green (2004: 40) pointed out: 'A sense of coherent identity can be provided by composing our past.' This study also tried to identify how their social connection at the detention centre narritivize the host country in their story telling.

Participants' past and contemporary experiences along with their identity and the creation of narratives are interconnected. The findings of this study suggest that participants being displaced from their own country, and not being treated the way they portrayed a European country and coping with a country, creates a narratives that could either make them feeling being marginalized, which is different from the findings of some other previous researchers (Fangen 2007; Ramsden & Ridge 2012); this can be termed as "doubly marginalized people", considering the fact that the traumatic feeling that they faced while being displaced from their homeland. At the same time, many participants could create new narratives to help them to combine past and current situations to cope in their new land.

This study touches also on how participants draw their past idealistic way. This accentuate how this construction is important to adapt their present situation, where the narrative on their homeland becomes the source of the way of re-establishing themselves in a new country. This finding can be matched with findings that Eastmond (1993) and Chamberlain and Leydesdorff (2004) in their studies pointing out that what is familiar is a means of coping.

Understanding the participant's present experiences related to detention centre and their stories about it, told as a negative narrative, was the key point of the investigation. *Being* a refugee became the central point of their narration when they were asked about the experiences of being a refuge. This might be a point of departure for the researchers who deals with refugees and for the policy makers to figure how it can be dealt with; as Islam (2016) in his study on Estonia pointed out, very little academic researchers have been done on refugees in the country and since the country is receiving refugees the 'question can be asked whether Estonia is ready to receive … refugees who will mostly have background from outside Europe' (Islam 2016: 294).

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Povzetek

Zelo malo je raziskanega o beguncih v Estoniji in njnihovi konstrukciji naracije v novi družbi. Predvidoma begunci orisujejo spomine svoje domovine v izgnanstvu z namenom izgradnje svoje sedanje individualnosti v novi deželi in prilagajanje novi kulturi. Članek proučuje begunce, ki so nastanjeni v begunskem centru v Estoniji in anlizira njihove sedanje in pretekle spomine ter zgodbe, ki jih povezujejo z coping mechanisms, ko se s svojimi zgodbami prilagajajo na novo deželo. Članek temelji na kvalitativni študiji poglobljenih intervjujev in argumentira, da begunci svojo domovino orisujejo kot idilično zgodbo kljub being displaced; družino in življenje v skupnosti poudarjajo kot nasprotje individualizmu. Analiza kaže, da lahko specifične pripovedi proizvajajo dvojno marginalizirane posameznike, hkrati pa so ubesedene zgodbe in spomini pomembni gradniki za gradno proti-naracij.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: begunci, Estonija, naracija, pripovedovanje zgodb, identiteta

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