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And it feels like… home? – A qualitative study of migration-related emotions among international PhD students in Finland and the UK

Abstract

Migration—movement across time and space—is inherent in today's world. This has significant and permanent consequences to customary life courses, including the development of identity and belonging. As a result, 'feeling at home' is a complex and dynamic experience. Through the lens of emotions, identity, belonging and liminality, this paper explores how international PhD students develop a sense of feeling at home in the host country. The paper highlights a more nuanced way to understand migration from an agentic and emotional perspective of the involved individuals rather than as a global policy-level phenomenon treating mobile individuals as problematic subjects of support. The findings highlight the international PhD students' agency in developing a sense of belonging. The study offers a more nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between the structural and emotional elements of migration, which will—hopefully—help redirect political discourse toward a more humane approach, as it amplifies the migrants' own voices.

Keywords: migration, emotions, identity, belonging, liminality, international student mobility

Introduction

"One never reaches home,' she said. 'But where paths that have an affinity for each other intersect, the whole world looks like home, for a time."

— Hermann Hesse, Demian: The Story of Emil Sinclair's Youth

Migration refers to movement across time and space (Tsegay, 2023). At its simplest, international migration thus refers to movement across national borders, i.e. residence in a country other than that of one's birth (Bond, 2022; Tsegay, 2023). It implies relatively lengthy distances and relatively lengthy stays abroad (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2023). Consequently, for international migrants, 'feeling at home' is a complex and dynamic experience, often misplaced, replaced, and re-emplaced. The sense of feeling at home allows researchers to explore belonging and social ties among people who are dislocated and relocated (Yalçin et al., 2023). Particularly in pluralist Western democracies, which receive some of the largest migration inflows, the question of belonging is both political and emotional (Skrbiš, Baldassar & Poynting, 2007).

Overall, migration is an inherently emotional experience, comprising the construction of multiple belongings while simultaneously being in transit (La Barbera, 2014). However, despite myriad studies on the economic antecedents of migration, research on migration-related emotions is nascent (Farhannejad & Olivieri, 2020; Farhannejad & Ponzanesi, 2020; Belford & Lahiri-Roy, 2019). Although movement across geographical and socio-cultural backgrounds influences the material, relational and spatial bases of emotion (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015), there is little research on how emotions influence migration-related social experiences (Leon-Himmelstine & King, 2019; Belford & Lahiri-Roy, 2019). Moreover, whereas migrants' emotional relationship with their country of origin and the emotions prevalent in host nation nationals have received attention, less research focuses on the migrants' own emotional experiences (Zontini & Genova, 2022).

While there is continuous debate over the nature of emotions as social and intersubjective, or physical and biological (Boccagni & Badlassar, 2015), this paper adopts a multiaspect, cognitive approach and defines emotions as subjective short-term psychophysiological

responses to perceived triggers (e.g. Scherer & Moors, 2019). Subjective emotions are a novel viewpoint to the debate on interethnic relations, redirecting the tone of mainstream political discourse and reaching beyond debates over self-interest (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015). The subjective approach improves migrant representation, battling the commonality of viewing migration through the lens of "the other", mainly via foreign-media representation (Saddiqa & Anwar, 2019). Particularly understanding the emotions that guide migrants' life trajectories enables valuable insight into their subjective experience, identity and sense of belonging.

In studying identity and belonging, exploring when, where, and with whom migrants feel at home is an applicable and meaningful means for channeling the complex emotional experiences (Boccagni & Vargas-Silva, 2021). Migrants cannot escape their emotions and are frequently conflicted between different emotional states. Emotions that develop 'on the move' often simultaneously exist in proximity and at a distance, being both out of place and re-emplaced (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015). Many migrants experience strong emotions during their settling into a new society, either heightening or alleviating experiences of stress versus wellbeing, influencing the migrants' sense of belonging (Leon-Himmelstine & King, 2019). Emotions thus influence migrants' ability to integrate, identify and belong in the surrounding society (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015). In addition to migration per se, migrant emotions may be linked to the economic and political spheres of mobility, necessitating further research on all aspects of migrants' emotional lives (Farhannejad & Olivieri, 2020).

International PhD students are one of the fastest growing streams of migrants (Phan, 2022). They simultaneously face and need to adapt to both the often-stressful academic life and their new social surroundings in the host country (Pappa, Elomaa & Perälä-Littunen, 2020; Jia & Yeung, 2023). This may lead to experiences of being in limbo in terms of the academic profession (balancing between being a student and being a professional researcher) while trying

to assimilate into a new country and culture. These experiences make international PhD students a particularly interesting, but underexplored (Jia & Yeung, 2023) subject for migration research. Consequently, this paper explores *how do international PhD students develop a sense of feeling at home in the host country*. In answering this question, the paper builds on not only emotion, but also identity, belonging, and liminality.

This paper presents qualitative empirical evidence from international PhD students majoring in international business (6) and management (1) settling into Finland and the UK. Thus, this paper takes the viewpoint of a highly educated and somewhat privileged group of migrants, who may have more positive experiences than reported in migration research on average (cf. Engbersen & Snel, 2021; Schäfer, Schittenhelm & El Dali, 2023). The findings highlight the international PhD students' agency in developing a sense of belonging. In this process, the participants used for example anticipatory coping, sensemaking of their self-identity, probing in different social contexts, and creating a new in-group with whom to identify. The study offers a more nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between the structural and emotional elements of migration, which will—hopefully—help redirect political discourse toward a more humane approach, as it amplifies the migrants' own voices.

Conceptual background

Migrant identity construction and emotions

Identity is defined in this paper as "*a relational and contextual process that refers to how individuals and groups consider, construct, and position themselves in relation to others according to social categories such as gender, sexuality, culture, race, nation, age, class and occupation*" (La Barbera, 2014, 9). This approach highlights the role of in- and out-groups in an individual's sensemaking of who they are (Ali et al., 2018). Because migrants need to re-

construct their identity in order to cope with the changes in their everyday life as a consequence of mobility (Voicu & Deliu, 2024), migrant identity construction is an agentic experience, where migrants make sense of and give meaning to their experiences (La Barbera, 2014). Thus, understanding migrant identities necessitates understanding the focal migrants' agency (defined in this paper as "*the socioculturally mediated capacity to act*": Ahearn, 2001, 130) and social relations along with the surrounding social and cultural context (Voicu & Deliu, 2024).

Migration-related emotions, like identity, are relational in nature (Glavenau & Womersley, 2021). They stem from navigating the multiple mobilities involved in relocation, including the inherent spatial mobility, but also, for example, social and legal mobility (Liu-Farrer, 2022). Often migrants' emotions stem from subjective evaluations of wellbeing based on, for example, social networks and the achievement of personal aspirations (Leon-Himmelstine & King, 2019). Emotions help migrants make sense of and cope with the (im)possibilities of their mobile existence, and are thus elemental to migrants' repositioning themselves through mobility (Glavenau & Womersley, 2021). In addition, emotions are communicative in nature (Wise & Velayutham, 2017), and therefore help migrants navigate their social lives. Overall, migrants' emotions reveal unique insight into their experiences of connection with the environment, which directs the migrants' actions (Glavenau & Womersley, 2021).

Emotionally, migration is often related to feelings of nostalgia and other memory-induced experiences (Belford & Lahiri-Roy, 2019). Migrants may also feel lonely and unsupported when facing the uncertainty of the shift in social and physical surroundings (La Barbera, 2014). Furthermore, migrants experience distance and dislocation, which may lead to feeling emotionally responsible for family members left behind (Belford & Lahiri-Roy, 2019). Similarly, migration can evoke feelings of guilt, particularly stemming from a continuous moral obligation to care for those left behind, such as the migrant's parents. The notion of guilt may

also mean that a return is implicit in migration, especially for migrants for whom obligation to care is culturally embedded. (Baldassar, 2015.)

Overall, migration-related emotions may be possibility-enhancing, such as hope directing attention towards opportunities, or possibility-reducing, such as despair narrowing down attention and placing the migrant in the role of a victim (Farhannejad & Olivieri, 2020). Generally, while negative emotions may trigger ideas of leaving, positive emotions may do the opposite (Liu-Farrer, 2022). Feeling at home is an example of a strong emotional experience easing entry into a new social context. Yet feeling at home following international migration necessitates a reconfiguration of emotional attachments towards places as well as social contexts (Boccagni & Vargas-Silva, 2021).

Feeling at home: belonging and liminality

Humans are innate homemakers; even in difficult and uncertain conditions, people strive to feel at home and use their agency to accomplish this goal (Yalçin et al., 2023). Feeling at home is an extenuation of the social ties migrants create and uphold in both the country of origin and the host country. Generally, feeling at home refers to an emotional engagement with the immediate as well as distant social environment (Boccagni & Vargas-Silva, 2021). Feeling at home is associated with familiarity and safety when surrounded by an uncertain or threatening external context, thus indicating a tendency to uphold identity elements such as traditions, practices, or objects from the country of origin (Romoli et al., 2022). Consequently, it necessitates a sense of belonging.

Belonging refers to subjective recognition of membership in a group (La Barbera, 2014) reflecting social identification (Ali et al., 2018). Rather than static, belonging is processual and multifaceted in nature, changing over time, and dictating how humans conduct relationships

(Skrbiš et al., 2007). Therefore, migration often generates feelings of non-belonging, of not feeling at home (Engbersen & Snel, 2021), and may therefore impede feeling at home.

When migrants re-negotiate their identities, a sense of belonging to a social group or a physical place can act as a bridge between the individual and the external context (Voicu & Deliu, 2024). For example, migrants may tackle non-belonging through engaging with existing ethnic diaspora in the host nation (Phan, 2022). At the same time, migrant identity formation is relational process, necessitating recognizing the oppositional "other" in individuals or groups (La Barbera, 2014; Skrbiš et al., 2007). Indeed, social interaction with the "other", i.e. inter-group interaction, may be detrimental for feeling at home, particularly when migrants experience degradation by the "other" (Yalçin et al., 2023). As a result, migrant identities are often fluid rather than rigid (Belford & Lahiri-Roy, 2019), allowing migrants flexibility as social actors (Bradatan, Popan & Melton, 2010).

Belonging and non-belonging are therefore not categorical states, but indicate different levels of belonging as a self-representation of identity (La Barbera 2014). Migrants often exist in a situated and complex web of entangled inclusion and exclusion (Bork-Hüffer, 2022), yet, over time, feeling at home becomes more of a question of what is safe, familiar and orderly (Boccagni & Vargas-Silva, 2021). Nevertheless, shifting between belonging and non-belonging may result in migrants' living in-between, constantly in a state of transit in terms of their identity, no longer belonging "there" but not yet belonging "here", either. (La Barbera, 2014.) In effect, this in-betweenness refers to liminality: "*a multifaceted concept of passage or transition across boundaries and borders that can be experienced in the contexts of place and time*" (Elo et al., 2024, 3).

The notion of liminality derives from rites of passage, where one must first separate or detach from the old, second navigate through a liminal space with few identifiable attributes, and third

re-establish a novel state (Turner, 2017). Experiences of liminality are individual, identity shaping (Elo et al., 2024), and ubiquitous in human life (Thomassen, 2015). Thus, while classifying liminal personae is near impossible (Turner, 2017), liminality is a prism, which allows a deeper understanding of transformation (Horvath, Thomassen & Wydra, 2015). For migrants, liminality includes experiences of powerlessness and marginality; existing between two social worlds while belonging to neither (Simich, Maiter & Ochocka, 2009).

Migrants are able to live in the painful state of liminality empowered by the pursuit of happiness, which carries them over the period of pain and doubt often associated particularly with the initial phases of migration (La Barbera, 2014). At the same time, migrants often use coping strategies such as focusing on the positives or learning to accept and live with the negative aspects of a mobile life (Engbersen & Snel, 2021). Being able to vision a settled future enables migrants to view liminality as a temporary state on the way to belonging (Daslaki & Simosi, 2018). This highlights migrants' agency in following their aspirations (Boccagni, 2017). For migrants, agency is a way to construct and negotiate identity reflecting on specific social roles and contexts (Lanza, 2012). As migrants often have limited access to social and linguistic resources (Lanza, 20212), agency may be decisive in creating feelings of home.

International PhD student mobility

This paper takes a processual view of migration including the leaving, entering, and settling into social contexts. Thus, an international student migrant is a person in transit, moving across national borders and between social contexts (cf. La Barbera, 2014). Often, migration scholars use the push–pull theory to explore reasons for international students' leaving the country of origin and entering the host country (Gutema et al., 2023). While the rhetoric of forced and voluntary migration does not allow the consideration of various inequalities potentially motivating and influencing migration (Bond, 2022; Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022; Tsegay, 2023),

international student mobility tends to be voluntary, even when prompted by considerations such as not being able to study a particular subject in one's country of origin (Alves & King, 2022). Indeed, international PhD students often pursue degrees abroad even when coming from relatively prosperous backgrounds (Roy, Uekusa & Karki, 2021). Particularly within the European Union (EU) and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the push-pull forces are likely to be less nuanced and the role of relative national resources more pronounced (Mathies & Cantwell, 2022). The relevance of national resources is highlighted by the perception that international PhD student mobility results in multidirectional social mobility (Roy et al., 2021).

Regardless of the length of stay, international students are susceptible to host country policy and conditions, which may either support or constrain mobility (Gutema, et al., 2023). Whereas international student mobility most often implies a return (Alves & King, 2022; Da Wan, Kuzhabekova & Ispambetova, 2022), host countries tend to compete in attracting highly skilled migrants such as international PhD students (Gutema, Pant & Nikou, 2023; Liu-Farrer, 2022). For host nations and universities, international PhD student mobility is an asset in creating 'brain gain', leading to the promotion of early career mobility in an attempt to polish the international profile of the involved institutions (Mathies & Cantwell, 2022). Highly skilled migrants normally enjoy relatively high status and agency, but are simultaneously dependent on their social positioning in the new context when re-constructing their identities (Voicu & Deliu, 2024). Particularly highly skilled migrants, whose ethnicity is different from that of the host country, may consciously seek to highlight their social status in order to encourage a more positive social response to their self-defined identity (Koskela, 2021).

Apart from ethnic concerns, issues that may increase international PhD students' difficulties in settling into their new social environment include language barriers, host nationals' negative

attitudes, differences in daily lifestyles, limited social interaction, and differences in the political environment (Jia & Yeung, 2023). Similarly, issues that may complicate settling into the academic work culture include research-related challenges, career prospects, funding concerns, and lacking social support, potentially leading to harmful levels of stress (Pappa et al., 2020). Yet despite their high-skilled status as academics, international PhD student migrants often experience the reality of second-class citizens, simultaneously pursuing their academic career and working in low-wage, precarious positions (Roy et al., 2021).

These highly varied and nuanced experiences may give international PhD student migrants increased understanding of their social standing in the host nation as well as the academic sphere (Roy et al., 2021). Generally, international PhD students are able to harness their agency to reposition themselves in new and unprecedented surroundings in order to overcome adverse circumstances despite experiences of liminality. For them, liminality may in fact become a motivation towards heightened agency. (Phan, Pham & Ngo, 2023.) Yet settling into the academic culture alongside the host country social context complicates international PhD student's identity re-negotiation, as it adds a scholarly identity level (referring to the international PhD students' professional conception of themselves as researchers in training) to the mix (Pappa et al., 2020). International PhD students may therefore be more prone to adverse outcomes such as mental health issues (Roy et al., 2021). Therefore, in the following, this paper focuses on *how do international PhD students develop a sense of feeling at home in the host country,* paying attention not only to the societal but also the academic sphere.

Method

The study context

The number of international students in the EHEA has been growing steadily since the early 2010s (Mathies & Cantwell, 2022), indicating the necessity to understand their experiences. This study was inspired particularly by the Immigration Dialogues coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior in Finland. The Immigration Dialogues, organized in October–November 2022, called for more constructive and inclusive discussion on immigration. The Dialogues paid particular attention to issues preventing Finland from reaching its full potential, and easing immigrants' integration into the society (Ministry of the Interior in Finland, 2022).

Finland is known for four-year PhD programs in its 13 universities and no tuition fees for PhD students regardless of nationality (Study in Finland, 2024). Non-EU PhD students entering Finland need a residence permit for research, initially granted for two years (Finnish Immigration Service, 2024). While guidelines for performance exist, Finnish PhD programs are not performance-based in that they have no strict time limits and include very little coursework (Pyhältö et al., 2020). PhD dissertations in Finland can be written as a monograph or as a compilation of (typically 3-4) articles with a capstone introduction. Paid PhD positions are offered by universities and their graduate schools, but an increasing number of PhD students need to find external funding. Practical advice for early career researchers is offered for example by the Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers (2024). Under the Bologna process, Finnish doctoral education has sought rapid internationalization (Pappa et al., 2020), not least due to the pressing need to find solutions for issues raised by a rapidly ageing population. Nevertheless, highly skilled migrants from racialized ethnicities may experience heightened prejudice due to the low level of skilled migration in the country (Koskela, 2021), where the main stressors for international PhD students reflect intrapersonal regulation, challenges in doing research, and lack of supportive networks (Pappa et al., 2020).

Recognizing that Finland, while popular due to its high quality free education, may not be directly comparable to other contexts, the authors wished to include data also from another setting. According to Mathies and Cantwell (2022), between 2013 and 2019, Finland ranked as the 11th most popular destination for international students among the 28 EHEA countries studied, while the UK was the most popular choice. This directed the authors' attention towards the UK. The higher education systems of Finland and the UK can be meaningfully explored in the same study, as both countries are members of EHEA, and therefore subscribe to the same principles of harmonizing higher education across the area for example according to the Bologna Process and the Lisbon agreement, despite the UK's exit from the European Union (Mathies & Cantwell, 2022).

Compared to Finland, UK has a widely performance-based structure in PhD programs, emphasizing accountability (Pyhältö et al., 2020). According to Higginbotham (2024), full time PhD programs have tuitions ranging from £3,000 to £6,000 per year for UK and EU students, but tuitions are often considerably higher for other international students. PhD programs last three to four years, where roughly the first year is spent on completing a literature review, the second on gathering data, and the third writing up the thesis. Positions can be partly or fully funded, and grants are available. Non-EU PhD students require a student visa, which usually allows a stay for up to 5 years (UK Government, 2024). Despite UK's societal multiculturalism, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic PhD students are severely underrepresented in academia, where discrimination and exclusion still occur (Arday, 2021). In the UK, English language proficiency, social contacts, academic workload, cultural distance, and university support are among the decisive factors determining PhD students' wellbeing (Zhao & Schartner, 2024).

Data collection and analysis

The key data collection for this study occurred during an Immigration Dialogue organized by the authors in November 2022. The immigration dialogue functioned as a structured approach to focus group interviewing as a data collection method (cf. Morgan 2002). Due to the online nature of the focus group, attention was paid to technological arrangements, the appropriate size of the group, speaking in turns rather than naturally, and the moderators' role in directing the discussion (Bolin, Kalmus & Figueiras, 2023). The objective was to explore migration-related emotions reflecting the participants' entry and settling into Finland. The interests of the research were visible in the agenda set for the focus group, and the moderators directed discussion in order to give each participant equal opportunity to speak. The focus group occurred on Zoom and had five invited participants, two moderators, and a note-taker. The moderators' roles were divided between questions of more functional and emotional focus. While structured, the questions presented to the group were open and exploratory. The participants were asked to present themselves, reflect on their emotions when first entering Finland, reflect on what has been easy and difficult for them in settling into Finland, what kind of help they have wanted or received, and whether Finland could become their permanent home.

In addition to the immigration dialogue, the participants were asked to write a journal on their experiences based on the questions presented during the dialogue. The diary method enables the collection of personal, context-specific data (Bolger et al. 2003) such as emotional experiences, and allows the researcher to remain objective and detached from data creation (Hurmerinta & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki 2013), thus increasing trustworthiness. Two journals were subsequently submitted, one in February (4 pages, Times New Roman 12pt, 1.5 line spacing) and one in December 2023 (15 pages, Times New Roman 12pt, 1.5 line spacing), reflecting the duration since first arriving in Finland to submitting the journal. The journalists are not identified in order to protect their anonymity. Finally, in order to shed light on the possible idiosyncrasy of the Finnish context, two interviews again reflecting the focus group

questions were completed with PhD students in the UK in spring 2024. Table 1 describes the study participants. Table 1 does not reveal the specific university (3 in Finland, 1 in the UK) of the participants and gives approximate information for some of the details at their request in order to protect their anonymity.

Table 1 Study participants

Pseudonym	**Gender**	**Age***	**Born in**	**International experience**	**Entry to host country**	**Reason for pursuing a PhD abroad**
Mia	Female	40	Ecuador	Initially moved to Finland in 2012 for master's studies, returned to Ecuador	Moved to Finland for PhD studies in 2017	Free and high quality education in Finland
Farhan	Male	38	Pakistan	Master's studies in Sweden, had a post-doc position in the UK but returned to Finland	Moved to Finland for master's studies in 2013	Seamless continuation of studies
Said	Male	27	Tajikistan	Has lived abroad since 16, exchange studies in the US, bachelor's and master's studies in Latvia	Moved to Finland for doctoral studies in 2020	Finding an intellectual challenge
Zahra	Female	30+	Iran	Master's studies in Malaysia	Moved to Finland for doctoral studies in 2021	Wanting to return to academia in Europe
Olga	Female	25	Russia	Dual master's degree from Russia and Germany, but COVID-19 prevented physical stay in Germany	Moved to Finland for doctoral studies in 2022	Getting away from Russia, Finland second choice (after Germany)
Reema	Female	35	Saudi Arabia	Family lived in the UK when a child, master's studies in the US, started PhD studies in Australia	Moved to the UK for doctoral studies in 2020	High quality short term program within a short distance from home
Nazem	Male	35	Middle East	Bachelor's studies in India, master's studies in Australia	Moved to the UK for doctoral studies in 2021	Quality of education

*At the time of participation

While English was not the first language of any of the participants (including the authors as moderators and interviewers), English was their customary working language. Thus, while finer

nuances may have been missed, the participants' proficiency in English was such that no language-related issues emerged. The Zoom-meeting was audio-recorded for analysis, which occurred thematically based on the questions presented. The analysis process categorized different participants' similar experiences together to from a brief narrative of the emotional experience of migrating into Finland. The analysis process utilized the audio-recording, excerpting significant quotes into a transcription for further consideration. The journals were written in English and analyzed as documents informed by the themes identified in the analysis of the dialogue. Finally, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for similar thematic analysis. As the nature of the data was varied and the total amount was manageable, no special software was used to aid analysis, which instead occurred manually with notes taken in Microsoft Word. The identified themes and representative quotes are presented in Appendix 1.

Findings

Initial and evolving migration-related emotions

First impressions

The participants' first impressions of the new host countries were mixed.

> *"On the one side, overwhelmed and uncomfortable, and on the other side, welcomed and the feeling of belonging. And in between, many different nuances." (Mia)*

All of the study participants—regardless of their previous international exposure—experienced some level of loneliness when first entering their host country. This was emphasized by the COVID-19 pandemic, which coincided with most of the participants' entry—even to the extent of contracting the virus on the journey and spending the first weeks in the host country in

quarantine. For some, this loneliness became overpowering, leading to what they describe as depression. The main reason for loneliness was the lack of a social support network, which the participants subsequently found mainly among other international students.

> *"Although I like to believe that I am a fighter and I do not back down easily, however isolation has proven otherwise. As I was used to having a big social networks wherever I have lived around the world I have never experienced the feeling of loneliness before until I arrived to Finland."*
>
> *(Said)*

While Finns were considered interesting, attentive, and friendly, the participants reflected on difficulties engaging with them socially, mentioning for example that Finns tend to have their own close-knit groups established already in childhood. The logic of socializing in Finland was also different to what the participants were used to: people did not tend to gather in large groups as some had expected based on their home culture, but did what they liked—even alone. This encouraged Diarist 2 to change strategies: "*I stopped waiting for people to approach me. Instead, I started creating my own company.*" Similarly, the UK participants reported establishing friendships mainly with other international students, but in their case, the main reason for doing so was the extensive time spent at the university, leaving few chances to engage with locals not employed by their university.

> *"I wouldn't call it difficulty, but what I would wish for is that I could... an opportunity to interact more with English people. Because learning about the culture, that's one of the reasons I came here. I was lucky in Australia, I had Australian flatmates and friends. But here, I don't find opportunities, or maybe I don't have time for it after school, to engage with those who are*

born here and lived here too, I don't know. To learn more about, because I'm just more observing, I'm not experiencing the English culture." (Nazem)

All of the participants reported feeling welcome and at ease at their university from the very beginning, which also helped settling into the host country. All of the participants mentioned the support from supervisors, colleagues, and peers as essential in feeling welcome.

"Something that made me happy was settling into the university. Everything about doing research was easy for me. Everything was in order and I had the full support of my supervisors and colleagues." (Zahra)

Yet all also reflected on how the initial lack of friends pushed them towards harmful work practices with little work-life balance. For the UK participants, this still seemed to be the case.

Evolving emotions

Despite loneliness and even depression, all of the participants were more or less content with their situation as a whole at the time of participation. Some were taking on roles they wished they could have benefitted from at the start of their studies. For example, Olga was very active in organizing social activities for students and even established a new group for PhD students. Said reported becoming the sort of leader for his peers he was looking for himself, checking up on them weekly, making sure their mental health was good, and providing them with any assistance needed. Overall, settling into working life and finding mutual experiences with colleagues helped the participants find their place. Nevertheless, some of the participants found this path more difficult than others.

Social rejection by home country natives, experienced in both Finland and the UK, was an unexpected challenge. This was particularly painful, as the participants were hoping to find

friends that might share their experiences more deeply in terms of migrating from a specific home country to a specific host country.

> *"It was very funny to realize that all the* [home country native] *people I met (at least 4) made sure to have no contacts with me. They made it clear by behavior and words, that we are not friends and will never be, even if we have to spend more time together. I don't know why it was so hard for them to accept me to their company, but at some point I stopped trying to befriend any of them. Because every single time made me feel bad."*
>
> *(Diarist 2)*

> *"I tried when I came to the UK to build a community or be part of the Saudi community, but I felt I had rejection because they knew each other. They knew each other before me coming to them, like they had already this strong bond through them. - - I felt very bad because I invited them to my home. I felt vulnerable. But they weren't thankful. Twice I did it. So I tried really eagerly to be part of this community, but I felt rejection, to be honest. And then I moved on and tried different friends." (Reema)*

<u>Liminality and creating a sense of belonging</u>

Liminal experiences

All of the participants experienced some liminality. Most were of the opinion that migrants have a difficult time to enter the host country, because the social context is not designed and has not evolved to accept them easily. Particularly in Finland the lack of history with migration was seen as a key reason why systemic barriers and failures exists, hindering integration. The

mental experience thus also had structural elements. However, all of the participants also pointed out that stepping into liminality is a choice for them.

> *"All the time, something in my mind, that I'm not from them, I don't belong to them, I cannot speak like them. It is part of our destiny, it is part of our life that accept it, that it is our path, we choose it. We have to cope with it."*
>
> *(Zahra)*

All participants reflected on how having international experience made them feel separate from the home country ("*I'm culturally different. It's like I don't fit completely there.*" [Nazem]), while simultaneously being of foreign origin made it difficult to feel at home in the host country. In addition, many reported having adopted personality traits more akin to the host than the home country. For example, Farhan reported being more Finnish than Pakistani nowadays, preferring solitude and quietness rather than the more boisterous life in Pakistani families. For some, liminal experiences in the home country had even preceded migration.

> *"I had the same feeling when I lived in my home country. For a very long time I did not belong to that place, and now when I came to Finland, at many events that I attend I am always confused to being Finnish. I do not feel that I am a stranger to that place though I'm only here ten months."*
>
> *(Olga)*

Many of the participants shared stories of anticipatory coping: of preparing for challenges beforehand and building a good mindset. Being prepared for differences and possible challenges helped them face difficult situations as something ordinary and expected. They shared insights of overcoming their own barriers, which initially restricted building social networks. Particularly Diarist 2 and Nazem mentioned stereotypes as having created

uncomfortable emotions. Diarist 2 reflects on how an international group of PhD students asked questions that felt like they were looking for reasons to discriminate the diarist, and seemed disappointed when told that the diarist had not experienced blatant racism in Finland. Nazem reflected on being treated as a stereotype, for example being told that his meal choice was not halal based on his looks. This highlighted different experiences based on your nationality, and led to questioning one's inner experience.

> *"I feel sorry that we have a good country and people, and this politics doesn't let, you know... makes restrictions for us." (Nazem)*

> *"I had to reflect on myself again. I was questioning the meaning of my job, friendships, relationships, life-choices and so on throughout whole summer. Maybe at some point I was even very disappointed in academia, in research and felt that I lost orientation." (Diarist 2)*

Experiences of belonging

The group of friends the participants had built, their chosen family, was the single greatest factor in helping them feel like they belong in the host country. That people were willing to help and give advice from the first meeting created a sense of care and togetherness, which facilitated establishing belonging. Clear rules in terms of legislation and conduct at the university were also mentioned as something that eased belonging in both Finland and the UK.

A key element inhibiting a sense of belonging in Finland was the language. Only Olga reported some working proficiency with the language—even being sometimes mistaken for a native—while others found it very difficult to learn. While they reflected that English was perfectly fine for everyday matters, difficulties arose when official information such as medical advice was only available in Finnish.

“In terms of language, that is my personal incapability rather than the system’s problem. Nine years, almost ten, and still, I don’t speak a single sentence of Finnish.” (Farhan)

“I used to try to be actively involved in all sorts of meetings and gatherings for development of our department. However recently I have stopped it because all the meetings are in Finnish and even most of the coffee talks are also done in Finnish. This simply pushes us foreigners yet again to form our own ‘ghetto’.” (Diarist 1)

In the UK, the multicultural environment was important particularly to Reema, who contemplated for example on her teaching experience in Saudi Arabia (female only, Saudi only) and the UK (mixed gender, international classes). In contrast, Diarist 2 brought out how the multicultural environment leads to missed nuances indicating a need to find a new way of belonging.

”Also, because the reality you knew rapidly changes to something you never saw before, and in that environment you never fully belong. Just because you have no idea about the unspoken, unseen meaning and rules that apply. And sometimes it seems that even if you ran as fast as you can, you will never be able to get to locals anyways. I guess, that’s a bit metaphoric. But my choice was also to stop running and embrace the experiences and knowledge I already have, to stop trying to “fit in” but instead become comfortable in my own skin.” (Diarist 2)

<u>Feeling at home</u>

Fitting in the host culture and academia

Finland was praised for qualities like democracy, gender equality, sustainability, social welfare, and work-life balance.

> *"It's a society based on trust and if you are truthful things will work out."*
>
> *(Farhan)*

> *"This is what I meant by country being shaped by its people. Meaning that Finnish people do not ignore that they do have challenges with immigrants, but rather they try to face and find solution for those challenges by taking certain steps." (Said)*

Comparing their experiences with friends pursuing their PhDs in other countries, the participants considered Finland "*welcoming, supportive, and oriented on high quality result*" (Diarist 2). Yet the lack of diversity, and difficulties in finding employment as a migrant were mentioned as negatives. For example, it was rare to find a non-native sounding name in the official hierarchy of the universities in Finland, indicating a possible 'glass ceiling'.

> *"There is still this notion of mistrust towards the capabilities of foreigners. Even if they are hired, they are rather hired to lower position. This make me think that there is a 'glass ceiling' for foreigners within Finnish organizations." (Diarist 1)*

The UK was viewed as a prestigious, well connected, and well-organized place for getting your education, yet there, work-life balance was not easy to find, and both participants had troubles finding accommodation, to which the university did not seem responsive. Nazem brought up that when comparing his experience with friends pursuing their PhDs in other countries, the UK system seemed much tougher and more demanding.

Many reported that migration-related emotions emerged even before entry, particularly with regard to visa applications. All of the participants—both in Finland and the UK—experienced issues with either getting or renewing their visa, despite already holding proof of their PhD student position. Bureaucracy was somewhat overwhelming and the advice for completing necessary documentation was lacking in Finland. Similarly, getting a Finnish social security card, opening a bank account, applying for a strong identification, and registering your address with the Digital and Population Data Services Agency all caused ambiguity and stress. In contrast, experiencing safety and calmness was crucial in coping with the turmoil of migration in both host countries. Some participants reported purposely focusing on the practicalities, as they already felt safe in the host country. Others reported that due to unrest in their home areas, the host country still compared favorably in being peaceful.

In both countries, the low hierarchy at the university was beneficial for feeling at home. Due to the importance of building social networks with colleagues, full-time distance work was seen as problematic and undesirable by all participants. In the UK, networking events organized by the university was a crucial element in building the participants' social connections, whereas in Finland, it seemed that while colleagues were the primary social group, participants mostly found their social connections on their own. While all participants had positive experiences of university support, in the UK, the intensity of academic life meant that the participants did not experience the host culture.

> *"I am in the academic culture, like I didn't interact with the neighbours even, so I don't know the outside of academic culture. All my interactions are inside the university. So I don't know. And the university, as you know, is international. So I didn't have personal relationships or with the national*

culture, the British people and except only the people who are in the university." (Reema)

Finding a permanent home

"I don't feel lonely anymore, I don't feel homesick, I know where I belong, I have some friends, and I developed some routines. It wasn't an easy journey." (Diarist 2)

All of the participants regarded 'home' to be more about social relationships than a physical location. Some mentioned the family they have built from friends, others the family they left behind, but all agreed that people are more important than the space they call home.

"I feel comfortable in any country as a matter of fact I feel more comfortable in other countries then my own, for some reason I do not know why. But to answer your question shortly I would probably say that home is where family is. So in other words if I am surrounded with people that I trust and people who care about me I feel like that is a home for me at least." (Said)

While all of the participants in Finland reported wanting to stay, there were external circumstances that would influence the decision. Mia was moving back to Latin America to get married, Zahra and Said were worried about finding a permanent job in Finland, and Farhan was concerned for his parents, willing to move back to Pakistan to care for them if needed. Zahra and Olga also emphasized the effort they have put into making Finland home, and wanting to keep reaping the rewards of their hard work. Olga's perspective was also unique due to her Russian heritage.

"It's a difficult situation for me now and a difficult question, because my region now is in official state of war. And I don't really have options where I can go. Going back to my home country, it's a difficult topic for me now. And I do not see myself there because there I definitely have no future at all." (Olga)

Both UK participants reflected on not even wishing to establish a permanent home in the traditional sense. While for Nazem this meant openness to new opportunities anywhere in the world, for Reema, it meant being a world citizen.

"I feel that I've lived everywhere and I have friends everywhere. And I've adapted to all the cultures, the major cultures that I've been to. And even those that I had difficulty adapting to, I've understood the main flavor of the culture, if we can say this. So, I feel like a world citizen. And world citizen, they don't have a permanent home. The world is their home." (Reema)

For all of the participants, finding their own voice and becoming more familiar with their own values and personalities was crucial in being able to settle into the host country. For some, this meant accepting a reinterpretation of difficult events in their past, while for others it meant coming to terms with letting go of bits and pieces of their identity to be replaced with others.

"Maybe it's our destiny to continue like this, and kind of navigating the migrant identity every now and then." (Mia)

Discussion

As suggested in previous literature (La Barbera, 2014; Ali et al., 2018; Voicu & Deliu, 2024), the participants of this study experienced and constructed their identity relationally, emerging

from between the familiar and unfamiliar. Particularly the quotes from Diarist 2 show the agentic nature of this experience (cf. La Barbera, 2014; Ahearn, 2001; Yalçin et al., 2023), necessitating the migrants' own willingness and ability to act. The emotions expressed by the participants stemmed from the balancing act of renegotiating identity and belonging, reflecting the liminal experience of from—to (cf. Liu-Farrer, 2022). In accordance with Leon-Himmelstine and King (2019), the international PhD students' evaluations of their subjective wellbeing were closely tied with their perceptions of the quality of their social network. As expected, feelings of nostalgia, loneliness, and obligation emerged. Similarly, positive emotions were linked to achieving personal aspirations (Leon-Himmelstine & King, 2019), as visible in the participants' considering themselves privileged.

The international PhD students experienced emotions in both a possibility-enhancing and possibility-reducing way (cf. Farhannejad & Olivieri, 2020). In this study, the possibility-reducing emotional experiences, such as inability to learn the Finnish language or engage with the British culture, were strongly related to the PhD students' sense of liminality. All of the study participants were able to find ways to overcome these challenges, and direct their attention towards opportunities instead. Two different paths to this goal emerged: tackling the challenge in order to resolve it, such as Olga learning the Finnish language, or circumnavigating the challenge, such as Nazem establishing social ties within the academic rather than the British culture.

The international PhD students' experiences exemplify existing between two social worlds while belonging to neither, i.e. liminality. Yet they were able to continue pursuing their personal goals, simultaneously building a new situated identity. In addition to the expected coping mechanisms such as positive thinking (Engbersen & Snel, 2021) and envisioning a positive future (Daslaki & Simosi, 2018), the international PhD students (particularly Farhan) engaged

in anticipatory coping, which diluted the influence of liminality on their wellbeing. This indicates the necessity of agency in overcoming liminality and establishing a sense of belonging (cf. Lanza, 2012). Agency may be accentuated in the international PhD students' experience, as they pursue a PhD degree abroad solely for personal reasons (cf. Phan et al., 2023).

For the international PhD students in this study, feeling at home emerged as a result of establishing a presence in the new social context (i.e. making friends), but without severing ties with the old one (i.e. maintaining family connections). Thus, emotional engagement with the immediate as well as the distant social environment was simultaneous (cf. Boccagni & Vargas-Silva, 2021), and created familiarity and safety even when still surrounded by the increased uncertainty migration caused (cf. Romoli et al., 2022). As the PhD students' social ties developed, their sense of belonging changed (cf. Skrbiš et al., 2007) from initial experiences of non-belonging and liminality towards agentic and negotiated ways of belonging. Based on this study, it seems as if the length of the liminal period may be linked to the severity of wellbeing challenges suffered by international PhD student migrants.

Exploring their experiences through an emotional lens helped the international PhD students understand their own experiences in connection with the surrounding societal and academic culture (cf. Glavenau & Womersley, 2021). While all of the participating international PhD students experienced expected difficulties (such as language barriers, limited social connections, and concerns over career prospects), meaningful country comparisons are impossible to make based on the nature of the data. Nevertheless, it does seems that for the PhD students in Finland, a major concern was the societal culture, while for the PhD students in the UK, a major concern was the academic culture. This reinforces previous findings on the importance of different cultural layers and the necessity to view migration as intricate and context-specific (e.g. Pappa et al., 2020). It also signals that universities and programs seeking

to enhance integration may want to pay attention to both the societal and academic layer. While all of the interviewees experienced belonging in the academic culture, all also reflected on liminal experiences within the national culture, and difficult experiences within academia. The commonality of these experiences suggests that doctoral programs would benefit from more extensive socialization plans built into academic orientation, which might help PhD students integrate more easily, thus influencing their wellbeing and thereby performance as well as intentions to stay.

Conclusion

This study suggests that international PhD students develop a sense of feeling at home in the host country akin to a rite of passage while balancing between re-negotiating their identity in both the social and academic context. In the findings of this study, the separation element included the alternative and sometimes overlapping elements or anticipatory coping, detachment from the home country, re-negotiation of family dynamics, and physical relocation. Navigating through the liminal space involved sensemaking of the self-identity, probing in different social contexts, and tackling or circumnavigating challenges. Finally, re-establishing a sense of belonging necessitated creating a new in-group with whom to identify. Finding and enacting agency was crucial in making it to the final step.

Importantly, none of the participants referred to the natives of the host culture as the new in-group, indicating a need for a more nuanced understanding of migrant integration. For migrants, transformation does not need to occur from a home-culture native to a host-culture native, but can take the form of establishing different types of social ties. This may be a crucial element in developing integration policies that serve migrant needs better. This may also have implications for how migrant liminality is defined, as the notion of existing in-between the home and the

host culture strongly implies the desirability of becoming a native host-culture member. In contrast, the findings of this study indicate that it is not always necessary to experience belonging with the host culture natives in order to experience host culture membership.

The international PhD students' experiences were often mixed, connected to the host or home culture yet separate from it, necessitating interpretation and emplacement. How the participants made sense of their experiences played a crucial role in their settling into the new society. The experiences detailed in this study suggest multifaceted answers to the questions of when, where, and with whom migrants feel at home. In general, migrants may need to overcome liminality before being able to feel at home. While the duration of the liminal period varies, it seems that establishing social ties (i.e. the "whom") in the host context (i.e. the "where"—in this study, the social context formed by the participants themselves was central) is decisive.

The study largely confirms the nature of migration as both political and emotional (Skrbiš et al., 2007) adding a more nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between the structural and emotional elements of migration. In doing so, this study advances research on migration-related emotions from an individual viewpoint. Taking the migrant's own viewpoint, this study shows how emotions influence migration-related social experiences and ultimately direct individual-level processes and outcomes such as identity re-negotiation and establishing a sense of belonging. Improved understanding of the individual level will—hopefully—help redirect political discourse toward a more humane approach, as it amplifies the migrants' own voices.

As customary for qualitative studies with few data sources, many of the limitations of this study arise from the methodology. The participants represent a very specific group of migrants, whose experiences may be somewhat idiosyncratic. Therefore, future research in different contexts is necessary in order to explore the transferability of the findings. Similarly, a wider sample is

needed in order to establish the generalizability of these findings to the population of international PhD student migrants. Therefore, future research using quantitative methodologies is encouraged to explore these ideas in full. In all future research, it will be necessary to explore both Finland and the UK as well as other cultural contexts in more depth in order to test the logic of the findings.

Future research opportunities also arise from the findings. First, further exploration of the two paths detected in overcoming possibility-reducing emotions (tackle or circumvent) is needed in order to discover when, how and why migrants may use them. Second, as suggested by Voicu and Deliu (2024) and Phan (2022), Diarist 2 and Reema tried to establish belonging with a native diaspora in the host country, but were rejected. This was a particularly challenging and painful experience for them, and worthy of further exploration. Third, exploring the relationship between agency and anticipatory coping may provide novel insight into the diverse emotions migrants experience.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Thematic analysis

Original quote	Analytical category	Identified theme
That led me to feel very relieved, that I was in a privileged position. (Mia)	Initial emotions	Initial and evolving migration-related emotions
I felt privileged, because we reflect on these experiences based on our past. (Farhan)		
I used to think that I have an immune system towards culture shock, because I have left my home country when I was 16. … Turns out, I was not quite immune. … I was feeling quite lonely at first. (Said)		
I experienced a very tough day because I didn't know anyone in Finland. … I really felt lonely here for a week. (Zahra)		
I was panicking a lot, like how will I move, what if the visa will not be given to me, and I think I was trying to over request too many documents from people, but they were very willing to help me anyways, and I was very thankful for that. (Olga)		
Oh, it was difficult emotions because I had this experience in Australia. I felt that it failed. So I'm glad that my parents came to me to reassure me that this will be different and it is different. Now, looking back, it is different. So, and this is the fear was, this is one kind of emotion and also excitement because I don't know this place and there is a program and people to see and also feeling of warmth. Because I met my cohort, who are only two people, my cohort. But I met them in the first day I came, and we became very close friends. So this was a warm feeling. (Reema)		
So, I could see the cultural differences, and I could see the pressure, I think. During a PhD, three years, not many countries... When I compare with my friends doing PhD in other countries, it's very different. They have four years or five years, even six years for a PhD. But here, it's very condensed, and a lot of pressure at the same time, you have to juggle. With accommodation, huge issues. That was my main concern. I couldn't secure accommodation. (Nazem)		

That led me to feel very relieved, that I was in a privileged position. (Mia)	Evolving emotions	
There will always be this thing even within our countries that we would be uncomfortable in another city, the cultural differences or which we know and which we don't know, even some jokes which we can connect with or not, so having that kind of experience, I don't feel odd here at all. (Farhan)		
Over the time period my PhD journey that I was so excited about has become more of a burden then what I aspired it to be. I won't lie I have thought many times of quitting it, however the thought of how much Finnish taxpayers' money has gone into my education does not allow me to do so. (Said)		
Because in my home country I'm under a stressful situation, and I experience a lot of stress, when I came here everything changed for me, because here people live in peace and they are calm. … Here I am more calm and I can work without stress, it is for the first time I experience this atmosphere. (Zahra)		
I had kind of depression, I did, somewhere in the end of summer. It was very hard, it hit me a lot. But afterwards it passed, and now I'm feeling nice. Now, ten months into Finland I adapted. (Olga)		
I've been into many cultures because of my dad's work. And they spent five years in my childhood in London. But the experience is different from my childhood from nine to thirteen years old. The experience is different because before I used to be in the Saudi community in London and it was a big community, but now in the PhD time there is not such a big community like this here. And I tried integrating into the Saudi community, but I couldn't for many, I think, cultural reasons. So now, my friends are international. (Reema)		
My supervisors tell me I will be a very good researcher, and critical thinking and challenging — these sorts of things. But I found it too stressful. I also like it, but the time pressure and stress is just... I don't know if it's for academic career... That's what I ask all academics, "Is it as stressful as PhD?" And they gave me answers that worry me a bit, they say, "Yeah it might be even worse". So, I say, "I love research, but do I want it to do it in the pressure or just as a leisure?" (Nazem)		
It's a strange feeling, that you are never part of the place that you go, even if you call it home. (Mia)	Liminal experiences	Liminality and creating a sense of belonging
In terms of language, that is my personal incapability rather than the system's problem. Nine years, almost ten, and still, I don't speak a single sentence of Finnish. (Farhan)		

To become friends-friends with Finns is quite a challenge, because most of their friends are from their childhood. Getting into the circle is a bit of a challenge. (Said)		
Sometimes I think, it's not negative or sad or sorry, but sometimes I think I have harder life. … All the time I have to think about the behavior that I have. (Zahra)		
Of course it is very uncomfortable when you move to another country, to a very different environment. But for me it was a matter of time when I was able to overcome all my barriers and everything which inside me restricted me from going out and meeting new people. (Olga)		
It's a paradox. It was nice to be home in order to not worry about daily life chores and only focus on writing and studying. But it was difficult there because I didn't have friends. You are in between two worlds. You're not working. You don't have colleagues. and you're not in the PhD program with also colleagues or friends or students. So I felt COVID made me in the middle, not with those and not with those isolation. I felt isolation even if I was living with my parents, but I felt isolation. (Reema)		
You know, when I hang out my friends, I do something that looks a bit Western, and they're not used to it. But here, also, I'm looked at as a Middle Eastern. So, it's like you're neither completely. One example is, here people make stereotypes. So, you go and you want to order food, you order food, and they say, "It's not halal". And they don't know, maybe you don't care, maybe you care, but... So, culturally, the stereotypes are there, and when you go home, you might do something that you used to do in more... For example, language being more direct and open, that might come up a bit rude in some cultures, and these sort of things, little things. But I still feel my hometown as home if I have to choose one, name one. (Nazem)		
It was very easy to make friends. And also I think that the rules in general in Finland are very clear. Like there is no ambiguous spaces in the rules. (Mia)	Experiences of belonging	
50% of my life I have lived abroad and 50% I was raised back in my home country. … I was moving all my life with my father and my mother because of the nature of his job. That is the way of life for me. This is the place where I have lived the longest in my life. (Farhan)		
I was lucky to have a chance of living in different parts of world and meet all kinds of people. If there one thing what I really Finland for is its people. So far, I can say that Finns are amazing people. That alone has changed my mind to settle here in Finland. Because at the end of day any nation is shaped by its people. (Said)		

Something that made me happy was settling into the university. Everything about doing research was easy for me. Everything was in order and I had the full support of my supervisors and colleagues. (Zahra)		
Talking about the social circle and the close people, I have quite a few people, and they all live in different parts of the world. So having close people is not the most important point that makes me feel good or bad about a country or about a place I live, because I always have the people with me in my phone. (Olga)		
It's not like I'm just adapting to it. I feel part of it. And I feel like home also. I have another home here. (Reema)		
We share things, we give each other feedback, and not only academic, you know, socially. I'm an extroverted person, relatively, and I keep thinking... These two of them, we are just three that come every day, and two of them graduate this year. I say, "Next year, I'll be alone in this huge room which has 30 desks. I will be the only one here". Yeah, I feel... Yeah, I keep thinking about it. (Nazem)		
I was desperately looking for information on the websites and I couldn't find any information in English so I was trying to translate with Google translate. And then I finally found this health care center close to my building. I went there and I had the appointment with a nurse using Google translate because she didn't speak any word in English. I was very scared. I cannot recall feeling that desperate ever. (Mia)	Fitting in the host culture and academia	Feeling at home
Usually the problem comes with bureaucracy. … When I reflect on the whole experience there are many places where the information is very ambiguous about the processes themselves. (Farhan)		
For me I think that the hardest thing was work-life balance in a sense that since when I first came here I did not have much connections. I would just end up working during the weekends. (Said)		
Visa application for me was very hard because of political issues my country had in the area. The embassy of Finland in our capital asked us a lot of documents and requirements. I had acceptance letter of the university, and I start my work with my supervisor, but I still didn't have visa. (Zahra)		
To get used to Finnish bureaucracy was a little bit complicated just because it is a little bit different, and you have to consider a lot of things and a lot of steps and no-one tells which step goes after which. (Olga)		

Yes, I don't know if this is related or not, but accommodation. It's a different cultural thing also, because I requested from the university to be in women-only accommodation. And they gave me this request, women only, what do you call it? A women only place, but it was accepted that men will be there. In my culture, if we say women only, it will be women only. So I needed help in order to know my rights, I needed to speak up or not. Now, my friend told me, if you spoke up, it will be solved. So education in this like training, or education in those kinds of things. When do we speak up, when we don't have the right, like this kind of help will help, because if you're not happy at your home, how can you do research in the morning? (Reema)		
Well, more stability with the legislation. Like, more long-term things, because people want to plan. So, we change every day. I'm not suggesting what the legislation should be, that's up to the British people and who vote. But whatever it is, for me, it's a wish that it was stable, that you could say, "This is the legislation. It's going to be there for five years, ten years", not just something that suddenly one month or two months, or suddenly changes. (Nazem)		
Finland is my home, because I have family here. For me, family is not only blood related, I really feel that I have built my own family. … This is the family I have chosen. … This is my home, it's where family is. (Mia)	Finding a permanent home	
Personality wise I am more fit to Finland. It's not that I chose Finland, but Finland chose me. That OK, this is your home. - - It's a cultural thing that we, or at least many of us, feel this obligation towards our elders, our parents, and when they are at old age, one way or the other we want to make sure that we take care of them. From that perspective if I have to move, to exercise my Finnish right of free movement, I think I would not have a second thought. (Farhan)		
I have been living alone since I was 13 years old and my first experience of living abroad was when I turned 16, so in a way it is hard for me to say that my home country is home for me. So far I have live more than a decade of life abroad surrounded by different cultures and in different locations, so in a way I have learned to make my home every new place that I visit. (Said)		
I am thinking about living in Finland permanently. But two things are here that may force me to immigrate to another country. One of them is weather and climate, because I didn't experience living in this climate, and one more thing, it's language. Because in my age it's not easy and I think it is unfair to learn new language because I want to concentrate on my studies. … Every job in Finland the primary requirement is Finnish language. (Zahra)		

It’s a difficult situation for me now and a difficult question, because my region now is in official state of war. And I don’t really have options where I can go. (Olga)		
I don't like having a permanent home. I like traveling. So my next destination, I'm working to work in Spain. So I want to work in the education department in the Saudi embassy there. So this is why I'm learning Spanish now. It's my dream job. So I like to travel. I don't like to settle in. (Reema)		
Sometimes I say, "I should have just settled and then followed my passion. I could follow my passion after I settled". But I did the same with the UK. So, because there was no promise of permanent residency, but I, "Okay, I want to learn about a new country. I want to live in a new country". Yeah. So, I did that again. I sacrificed the settlement for a new adventure. And I keep telling this to myself, "Next time — settle", but maybe for post-doc, I'll end up in another country. (Nazem)		