Aspiration, Achievement and Abandonment in 'The World's Best Country': Merit and Equity or Smoke and Mirrors?

David M. Hoffman, Sari Pöyhönen, Carine Cools, Anatoly Stikhin, Driss Habti, Taru Siekkinen & Thomas Sama

Abstract. Finland is internationally valorised for its education system, quality of life and high-tech, innovative, competitiveness. However, a critical focus on institutional dynamics and trajectories of higher education careers illuminates questions about the reproduction of global inequities, rather than the societal transformation Finland's education system was once noted for. The purpose of this self-ethnography of career trajectories within Finnish higher education is designed to call attention to *institutional social dynamics* that have escaped the attention of scholarly literature and contemporary debates about academic work and practice within highly situated research groups, departments and institutes. Our analysis illuminates *emergent stratification*, in a country and institution previously characterized by the *absence of stratification* and the ways in which this reinforces - and is reinforced by – the tension between transnational academic capitalism, methodological nationalism and the resulting global division of academic labour that now cuts across societies, manifesting within the one institution Finland's general population trusts to explain, engage and ameliorate stratification: *Higher Education*.

Key Words: Academic Work; Mobility; Transnational scholarly precariousness; Stratification; Self-Ethnography.

Detailed Table of Contents

Editorial Note

Cornelis Martin Renes
University of Barcelona
mrenes@ub.edu

Catalina Ribas Segura
CESAG, Mallorca
catymallorca@yahoo.com

The following monographic study evolved from a paper given at the *Watershed* Cultural Studies Congress held at the University of Barcelona, Spain, 13-17 January in 2014. There, in a panel on the changing character of higher education, David Hoffman addressed the issue of abandonment amongst immigrant scholars attempting to get a foothold in Finnish academia. While Finland is, in theory, a top performer in the education sector and the envy of many a country for its high standard of welfare, democracy, freedom and equality, Hoffman argued that immigrant mobility within Finnish academia actually pointed into an opposing direction, refuting the reputation of equal opportunity that the country had forged for itself over a long period of time. Hoffman's team's research laid bare an emergent hierarchisation and stratification in Finnish academia identifiable as 'methodological nationalism', which responds to the transnational character of capitalism and aims to contain the forces of globalisation within Finnish academia inasmuch that access to, and mobility of immigrant scholars within the tertiary educational system are complicated precisely on the assumption that there is no competitive difference between national and foreign candidates for posts. In other words, there is a wishful thinking that in its assumption of equality and equity in fact obscures the very inequality that and informs permeates the career opportunities generated by the system.

Hoffman, of North-American origins, forms part of the Finnish Institute for Educational Research (FIER) as a senior researcher and works together with a group of immigrant scholars in the research group *Education and Social Change*, whose members had all signed the text that was submitted to the editors of the *Coolabah* post-conference issue "After the Water Has Been Shed" in response to a call for papers. Upon reading the essay, it became immediately clear that the topic addressed needed more space and attention than a mere article in a journal volume. The proposed essay was already 15,000 words long, and still felt it could do with more detail, development and clarification. The editors therefore contacted Hoffman and his team and proposed the possibility of publishing a monographic issue of *Coolabah*, entirely dedicated to their study. It would offer a springboard for a novel approach

to research in the tertiary educational sector by introducing auto-ethnography as the prevalent critical approach to tackle the problematics of researching a framework of which the researchers themselves form part, or from within. It would also offer a group of well-informed young-career academics an opportunity to voice a set of controversial ideas in a larger, international arena and so find transcultural and transnational support for their analysis. In these times of increasingly precarious academic work, which affects our younger generations of scholars, one cannot offer less.

Cornelis Martin Renes, co-editor
Catalina Ribas Segura, guest-editor

Barcelona, 21 December 2015

1. Foreword/Forward:
Studying and Interpreting a Context and Topic *Versus* Engaging and Changing a Topic in Context.
Fighting Fire with Fire

We are not very sure how many people read 'Foreword' sections. However, there are two types of scholars we have met during the course our study who might advise readers to read this Foreword. These two types of colleagues are as follows:

1. Many colleagues who are familiar with the work behind this publication have been highly encouraging and supportive of our efforts. We think this is because they have experienced – or are experiencing – the vague, arbitrary and harsh neoliberal, neo-colonialization of education, as a social institution, set of organizations and as a profession. In addition, many of those supporting our work specialize in the study of the powerful structural dynamics our team found ourselves caught up in. Some colleagues have *both* experienced similar situations *and* specialize in the study of scholarly precariousness. These three distinct groups are the scholars who got us through this.

2. Many colleagues we have encountered are highly uncomfortable with our topic, the approach we have taken – or both – and have actively encouraged us *not* to pursue the work or to carry it out in a way other than the way we have chosen. They explicitly do not appreciate the type of study we carried out, do not generally acknowledge the necessity that drove our methodological choices, nor have they appeared to understood the necessity and nature of our actions. This is nothing new in the social sciences and humanities; especially when critique is focused on power relations within the social institution of education; within higher education institutions, in general, universities and the professoriate in particular and on the academic profession (Abbas et al. 2013; Alvesson 2003; Bourdieu 1988, 2004; Tight 2012).

Love us or hate us: these two groups of scholars – as different as they are – have an important feature in common: *We have learned a great deal from both*. We are indebted to *all scholars* who have used their valuable time to share their opinions, comments, advice, reviews, experiences, insights and perspectives. Both sets of scholars have made valuable critical contributions which we have taken to heart.

We would especially like to thank the Editors of the open access publication *Coolabah*, at the Australian Studies Unit at the University of Barcelona, Dr. Martin Renes, Dr. Caty Ribas and Professor Susan Ballyn. Their support and encouragement has been unwavering, from the moment of our first meeting till now. We are also are grateful to Professor Bill Boyd, a long-time friend from Southern Cross University, Australia, who invited us to present our research in our first major transdisciplinary conference, *The 2014 Watershed Conference* in Barcelona. This event turned out to be a watershed for our study in the sense that we discovered a wildly diverse auditorium full of enthusiastic supporters from and across several countries,

disciplines and domains and met the Editors of this publication. In addition, our sincere gratitude goes out to CHEER Professors Louise Morley, Director of the Centre For Higher Education and Equity of Research at the University of Sussex, and Paula Mählck, Department of Education, University of Stockholm, each of whom gave us detailed comments on our manuscript and whose support is more appropriately measured now in years, as we have developed this study. We sincerely thank the reviewers of this manuscript for the considerable time and thought they put into the blind review stage of this work. We express our sincere thanks to the Academy of Finland, whose funding allowed the authors the possibility to pursue this study in the way we did. Last but not least, we thank the University of Jyväskylä, in general and the Finnish Institute for Educational Research and Centre for Applied Language Studies, and especially the colleagues who took the time to attend the interventions and presentations grounded in or otherwise linked to our study and especially those who read and or commented on our manuscript as part of our member-checks.

Returning to our reviewers, it was their comments that opened our eyes to the advisability of making our text more reader friendly and gave us key insights as to how this might be done. The result is this forward section to our study. The format of this section firstly spotlights *who* might actually be interested in reading this study and *why*. 'Why' is important because our study deals with power relations in the academy and the difference – paradigmatically speaking – between *unquestioning deference* to those in positions of power or *talking truth to power* and *action* aimed at constructive change. It is our position that unquestioning deference is a *road to nowhere* especially regarding the topic our study brings into focus: *Transnational scholarly precariousness*. The ability to talk truth to power*, in the way Wildavsky (1987) articulates, is a bare minimum considering the challenges the social institution of education currently faces. Our position of *critical advocacy and action* locates us in a fundamentally different paradigm from many we have encountered. If you are not fond of work of this type there is no need to read further.

Secondly, methodologically speaking, we locate and contextualize our journey with regard to two key dimensions that can be used to pinpoint nearly all qualitative research. These two dimensions are key to understanding both our methodological choices and the consequences of those choices. In addition, this section is designed – like a streetlamp – to turn perceived 'dark and potentially dangerous places' into 'routine scholarly terrain'. In that regard, this section is especially relevant for individuals and groups considering action in the face of arbitrary and vague power relations with an eye on constructive change, particularly regarding our topic. While jumping straight into methodological discussion might seem like 'putting the cart ahead of the horse' to many, we ask the reader's patience as we have come to understand that the dimensions we highlight illuminative fundamentally distinct sets of studies, all of which are interesting, but some of which are intuitively easier to grasp than others. This depends mainly on methodological convention and personal preferences.

Thirdly, we explicitly lay out the highly inductive, unplanned, yet serendipitous journey our team found ourselves on. That said, we also explicitly map out how our unplanned, opportunistic study maps on to a highly conventional reporting format. Structurally speaking, we also introduce a few features of the text that give different types of audiences the level of detail they may need, depending on their purposes.

We will now briefly elaborate each of the abovementioned features of our text more fully.

1.1. Audiences

The most interesting tensions we wrestled with as a team while doing this study ultimately turned out to concern our assumptions about different types of audiences. Because the authors are specialists from different generations, genders, countries, cultures, career stages, institutional settings and disciplinary communities, it took quite some time before we truly appreciated the nature of these tensions, which (considering our analysis) ironically turned out to be *unquestioned* assumptions. However, during the review stage, two important tensions that became clear to us concerned the distinction between 'specialist audiences, who generally share many points of departure to the extent they need little or no explanation' *versus* 'everyone else' – specifically, scholars or higher education actors and stakeholders present in the social institution of education, higher education institutions and our profession not primarily focused on the specialties that drew our team together. These specialties include international comparative higher education (two of us), international migration and ethnic relations (four of us), applied linguistics and communication (three of us) and, especially, scholars focused on academic work (three of us). The reason these particular focal specialties are important is because state-of-the-art findings in these specialties – within educational settings – by their nature potentially have important implications *across education* as a transnational social institution, a set of unique organizations and as a profession within *networked knowledge societies* (Hoffman & Välimaa et al. *in press*).

Because higher education is an extraordinary focal *nexus* (Scollon & Scollon 2007), when it comes to *history, biography and their intersection within society* (Mills 1959), the second key audience this study might appeal to is within the general social science and humanities, especially specialists studying social stratification, scholarly precariousness and socioeconomic precarity (Standing 2011) and related social justice issues. These specialists may also find our study unique and relevant to several established and emergent conversations within and across several national contexts.

Closely related to specialist audiences, are labour union and scholarly activists, as well as professional advocacy groups who may find the study highly interesting *in an actionable way*. This powerful paradigmatic, yet practical distinction separates our study from a vast body of work in the social sciences and humanities which has little or no practical utility. Nothing against scholarship with no application value (much of our other work falls into this category), but the topic in focus in our study here needs action. Our team neither shies away from being very explicit about this point, nor has it hesitated to report what we have done that has actually worked out fairly well. This is a fundamentally distinguishing feature of our study.

Beyond specialist audiences, we believe the work has a broad, general appeal to scholars everywhere concerned with the ways in which neoliberal ideology has resulted in *a growing transnational layer of precarious scholars, increasingly at the mercy of a shrinking professorate, core faculty and body of permanently employed higher education managers and administrators who directly benefit from the continued stratification of an increasingly precarious global academic labour force.* These people face very little actionable critique, as they are co-creating the neoliberal project to the determent of the social institution in which we work, our organizations and profession. We choose not to shy away from these colleagues and instead engage them on common ground – specifically, peer-reviewed publications and

organizational interventions based on our studies. In other words, as the title to our Foreword/Forward indicates: *'Fighting fire, with fire.'*

Last but not least, this publication will appeal to scholars in the social sciences and humanities with responsibilities in doctoral training, graduate-level course work and the supervision of early stage/career scholars, particularly those interested in the topic our study brings into focus and more particularly *acting on it* in a way that preserves the integrity and viability of our institution, organizations and profession.

1.2. Our Methodological Universe – And Yours

Methodologically speaking, to locate our study and contextualize our efforts we underline two key dimensions that empirically illuminate a field into which nearly all qualitative work falls. Specifically: *planned or unplanned studies*; and studies carried out by methodological *specialists or generalists*. These dimensions, in a contingency table, empirically illuminate and conceptually problematize four distinct types of studies:

1. Planned studies carried out by methodological specialists
2. Unplanned studies carried out by methodological specialists
3. Planned studies carried out by methodological generalists
4. Unplanned studies carried out methodological generalists

By 'conceptually problematize', we mean that the areas spotlighted by this conceptualization have important methodological implications. Each of these kinds of studies has its own challenges and *all are seen with regularity*. The reason we draw attention to these fundamental distinctions is because the study we carried out falls squarely into type 4, specifically; *an unplanned study, carried out by methodological generalists*. Unplanned studies are sometimes termed 'opportunistic' or 'tangential studies'. By *methodological specialists*, we refer to scholars who tend to focus, over time on a particular type or set of methodologies to the extent they develop an expertise far beyond the level of a person not experienced with a particular methodology. A generalist, on the other hand, might draw on a wide variety of different methodological approaches in the course of their work. The most important assertion we stress, particularly because of the wide variety of work the authors have both done and reviewed is that none of these types is inherently 'better' or 'worse' than another, normatively speaking. Empirically speaking, they simply constitute – symmetrically speaking – a set of possibilities.

Another key point which was very challenging to communicate in earlier version of this text is the fact that authors Hoffman and Pöyhönen originally began a very different (larger) 'Type 1' study (or *planned study carried out by methodological specialists*), which was funded to run between 2011 and 2014 together with several close colleagues.

It was during the course of our 2011-2014 study in which the authors – as a group – spotted the opportunity to do the 'Type 4 study' that you are now reading. In other words, the unplanned study was grounded in a planned study, however the methodology and purpose(s) of the planned study were not a good 'fit' for the topic and circumstances that came into view. Because of the compelling nature of the unplanned topic, the authors quite intentionally

selected a very specific methodological approach, self-ethnography as specified by Alvesson (2003), which was *designed precisely because this category of studies exists within a social institution (education), set of organizations (universities) and profession (scholars) which has a demonstrated persistent reluctance for robust self-critique, in general and in particular transnational scholarly precariousness.*

Methodologically speaking, the most important methodological implication of choosing self-ethnography was that the authors had never worked before, as a team, using this methodology. Each of the authors do have their own methodological preferences, levels of experience, even specialist expertise, but not with the particular methodological approach that best fit this topic. That said, the methodology was a much better fit than several of us anticipated and we were able to obtain the types of data we achieved in this study was far better than data several other specialist colleagues obtain on the exact same topic (in the exact same context) using alternative methodological approaches – although they are highly complementary.

The other key assertion our conceptual problematization lets us underline is that because this particular study was an unplanned study (by content specialists) carried out by methodological generalists, it bears very little resemblance to planned studies by methodical specialists (the conceptual 'opposite'). While this might seem like 'pointing out the obvious' we can assure you this distinction has not been clear to several colleagues.

The final feature of our study is another new section, following our discussion, focused on *methodological reflection*. This study was an incredibly rich learning experience. The level of interest in our topic is rising as academic freedom becomes more circumscribed (Baez, Rhoades, Metcalfe & Torres-Olave 2015; Hoffman *forthcoming*). Because of our very recent experience, we feel positive about encouraging other scholars to use ethnographic methodologies, especially regarding our key content specialist, advocacy-group and graduate student audiences, who are not familiar with ethnographic approaches to qualitative research. Our methodological afterward focuses on key thoughts, texts and ideas that have the potential to lower the threshold for actually carrying out 'up close' ethnographies. The reason we adopted self-ethnography is because it was, methodologically speaking, very 'plug and play' compared to many approaches practiced by specialist ethnographers. That said, precisely because of the fault lines, debates and disputes that divide ethnographers, it is all too easy for our team to see why many scholars might very well put off from using *any type of ethnographic approach*, particularly when exposed to the methodological gatekeeping our team encountered within and outside ethnography. This is not a criticism of ethnography; it happens in every approach, methodological orientation or mode of inquiry we are familiar with. In order to give future scholars a faster start than we had, our last section will detail a few key sources that we wish we would have been more familiar with, before we started. Our intent with this afterward underlines the rationale of Alvesson (2003), whose approach we chose to use specifically because it was an ideal 'fit', methodologically speaking, to the topic we in fact encountered, the way we encountered it and the setting in which the topic was encountered institutionally, organizationally and professionally.

In other words, it is clear now – in hindsight – how we can do even better in future studies. In this sense, our final section has been designed to give a faster start to colleagues who wish to adopt an ethnographic approach to these types of studies on these types of topics and avoid the rough patches our team encountered.

1.3. Structure of the Study

Having identified *who* might want to read this and *why*, as well as explaining our *methodological point of departure,* we now explicitly map the highly inductive qualitative study we did onto a conventional reporting format. In other words, *what* we did and *how* we did it. (See Räsänen 2014 for an excellent analysis of *autonomous academic practices* or the relationship between *who*, *why*, *what* and *how*.) The structure of our study flows much like many types of scholarly texts. In our specific case:

- Foreword: *Fighting Fire with Fire*
- Part I: Introduction. Context, Purpose and Objectives
  - (Review of literature)
    - Transnational Scholarly Precariousness: A Global Story
      - *Transnational academic capitalism – a primer*
  - (Description of context/setting): The Finnish Story
  - Purpose and Objectives
- Part II: Theory. Conceptual Problematization of Context
  - The Academy of Finland Project on Migration and the Labor Market
  - Aspiration, Achievement and Abandonment and Career Trajectories in Finnish Higher Education
  - Academic Work
    - *Unpacking Bourdieu's Approach to Scholarly Trajectory – a primer*
    - *Unpacking the Comparative Study of Academic Work – a primer*
      - Disciplinary Cultures
      - Mission Emphasis
      - Career Stage
      - Competitive Horizon
  - Ascriptive Characteristics and Social Constructs in Finnish Society: The Sacred and Safe *versus* the Profane and Problematic
  - Problematizing Academic Work *and* Ascriptive Characteristics: *The Tensions Between Aspiration, Achievement and Abandonment*
  - Conceptualizing Social Dynamics and *Who* We Are Really Talking About
- Part III: Methodology. Methodological Shift from Planned Study to Unplanned Study
  - Key Methodological Risks, Gaps and Our Methodological Dilemma
    - The Absence of Collective Agency
    - No Tradition of Critical Introspection
    - The Nature of Methodological Nationalism in (Finnish) Higher Education Studies
    - Speaking Truth to Power: A Good Idea?
    - Social Media and Transnational Scholarly Precariousness
  - The Rationale of Risk-Taking and a Methodological Crossroads
  - Moving Forward, Methodologically-Speaking, with Efficacy: Our Process
  - Methodology: Self-Ethnography. 'If you don't Write it Down, it Never Happened'
    - Data, Methods and Analysis
      - Rationale for Ignoring Convention

- Engaging Methodological Limitations: Backyard Research, in the First Person.
- Balancing Anonymity, Privacy and Efficacy: Incremental Member Check and Impact Aims
- Part IV: Analysis. Analysis of 'Academic Limbo'
  - Unquestioned Assumptions and Minimizing Misrecognized Transnational Scholarly Precariousness and Exclusion
  - The Unintended Consequences of Group-Think
  - Illuminating 'Disconnects' and Bringing AOF Back Into the Picture
    - Connecting the Dots: Aspiration, Achievement and Abandonment in Academic Work
    - 'Strategies' of Precedence and Potential: Hidden Populations Within Parallel Competitive Horizons
    - An Institutional Story
    - The Relationship Between People, Ideas and Funding
    - The policy and practice of (Human Resources) 'strategy'
- Part V: Discussion. Moving Forward in Terms of Education Studies, Policy and Practice
  - Unquestioned Assumptions: Folk Psychology, Zombie Discussions and 'Smoke and Mirrors Terminology'
  - Unintended Consequences: Analytically Illuminating Methodological Nationalism
  - Hidden Populations: The Nature of Complex Change in the General Population, Culture and Society
- Methodological Notes: *An Afterward*
- References

Making the structure of our text very explicit and hierarchically outlining the flow of sections allows us firstly to highlight the conventional parts of the text in advance. Especially because this study was unplanned, the reporting structure can be used to pinpoint *key decision points* where our team had to depart from convention – while ultimately staying within an overarching conventional process: A process of scholarly inquiry with a beginning, middle and end.

The main 'detours' in conventional structure in our text come in Part III, our section focused on methodology. Specifically, the point in the study where the *planned* methodological strategy: 'case study', was *changed* to 'self-ethnography'. That point in time is both pinpointed and explicated in detail in the sections: The Rationale of Risk-Taking and a Methodological Crossroads and Moving Forward, Methodologically-Speaking, with Efficacy: Our Process.

The justification of changing methodologies is explicated and articulated in terms of the risks, literature, knowledge, practice gaps and dilemmas we outline in the sections leading up to our decision to adopt a new methodological approach. Once the new methodological strategy was agreed on, we give a detailed account of the new, particular approach we chose.

The reasons for the selection of self-ethnography, as opposed to any other version of ethnographic approaches, were firstly because not all of our group were specialists with ethnographic approaches, with the exception of Pöyhönen. Ethnography, as a general

methodological approach or mode of inquiry covers an enormous literature. We selected Alvesson's 2003 approach to self-ethnography because it is very accessible to non-specialists and was in fact advanced, as a coherent approach, because personnel in higher education institutions are in an optimal position to take notice of far more than we often do in precisely the manner our team had the opportunity to do – and for exactly the same reason. It was even more appealing because each member of our team – as Alvesson points out – had very limited opportunity to focus on this topic.

Regarding the switch from a planned to an unplanned study, what is interesting to the authors is that these sorts of changes are made all the time in large research projects, particularly in complex, mixed-method and multi-method designs that run several years (Hoffman & Horta *in press*; Torres-Olave et al. *in press*). What is even more interesting, however, is that these types of changes are rarely critically scrutinized. It is easier simply to 'sweep them under the rug' (Bourdieu 2004) pretending they never happened. That said, because of the nature of this particular topic, we would claim that lack of reflection, critique and methodological creativity *causes* transnational scholarly precariousness (Hoffman *forthcoming*). While cause is a term that usually does not find its way into qualitative research, our analysis (*Part IV*) establishes the qualitative foundation for the explanation-building necessary to work in that direction (Miles & Huberman 1994).

Explicitly outlining the underlying structure (above) also highlights different ways our study can be read. Because our resulting ethnographic study was principally developed with content specialist audiences in mind, we have integrated *focused subsections* or 'primers' within our original outline which summarize specialist topics for general audience(s).

These subjections 'unpack' specialist topics for non-specialist audiences. These sections can easily be skipped for those familiar with the subtopic under discussion, but may be of interest, particularly for audiences who desire more detail.

All this said, we hope this initial foreword was helpful for the reader. In retrospect, our study is an example of what a small group of academics decided to *do* when directly confronted with a highly situated, arbitrary and vague set of circumstances that explain how transnational scholarly precariousness manifests in a specific national and institutional context. More than that, our efforts have been carried out in such a manner that has allowed us to constructively contextualize and engage the negative initial circumstances we met in a manner that has benefitted the institutes that employ us, as well as the University in which the research institutes are located in, in applied, practical and concrete ways. The reason our efforts succeeded was because our team has successfully grounded our efforts in state-of-the-art literature that explains the transnational nature of our topic, in a manner sensitive to local conditions and power dynamics. Because of our efforts, several new studies and interventions are in progress, as are our efforts aimed at contributing to the internationally significant advances reported in our study.

Both the context in which this study played out and the ways in which we chose to methodologically engage the topic are not generally known, nor practised. Because of this, the qualitative study we have done can be fairly regarded as both unconventional and high-risk. Ironically, it is clear the transnational neoliberal policy (which cuts across the countries in which our key audiences are located) valorises unconventional, high-risk studies. What makes this so ironic is that scholars themselves often are reluctant to acknowledge or value

efforts that do not conform to (low-risk), convention or canon. This is particularly the case when scholars and higher education are in empirical and contextual focus. More than anything, we believe this explains the dismissal and disdain experienced by our team from our first presentation of this topic in our local research group, as detailed in our analysis. It also explains why other leading scholars, particularly content specialists in our own fields have expressed admiration and encouragement of our efforts. This type of 'love or hate' reaction is nothing new or surprising in the social sciences and humanities, which is explained in the review of the seminal theoretical specialist literature that informed our efforts and analysis.

2. Introduction: Context, Purpose and Objectives

2.1. Transnational Scholarly Precariousness: A Global Story

This self-ethnography began in August, 2013. During this time members of our self-ethnography team, the authors of this text, have presented or drawn on our evolving understanding of transnational scholarly precarity in eight presentations of our topic, in five different countries. Our presentations have mainly focused on problematizing and explaining academic career trajectories and key career transitions experienced by scholars who aspired to both remain in higher education, *as a career choice* and Finland, *as their home*. Unlike many studies of migration related phenomena and (academic) mobility in Finnish society, our self-ethnography (Alvesson 2003) implicates native-born Finnish scholars, temporarily mobile scholars and scholars with a migrant background, each of whom experience key career transitions which are outwardly similar. That said, there are features of these transitions which are analytically and empirically distinct, due to complex, misrecognized (Bourdieu 1988) social dynamics within Finland's rapidly changing higher education system (Author1, Nokkala & Välimaa *forthcoming*) and the tensions between established and emergent forms of transnational scholarly precariousness (Author1 *forthcoming*).

It is fitting that this study will be published in a journal focused on Australian Studies. While the USA and Europe may be the *heart* of transnational academic capitalism (Slaughter & Cantwell 2012; Kauppinen 2012), many might claim Australia is the *soul*, as an early forerunner in implementing and modelling what would become the hallmarks and signature of the aggressive adoption of global, neoliberal, new public management and the commodification of higher education. And, similar to the USA, some of the most serious critique of the global stratification of higher education along private sector lines comes from Australian-born scholars (Currie & Newson et al. 1998; Marginson 2006; Robertson 2014).

In the context of Finnish higher education studies, it was Grant Harman, the former Editor-in-Chief of *Higher Education*, who on 5 September 2005 delivered a keynote in Finland's Higher Education Symposium prophetically centred on the wave of higher education mergers sweeping across Australia in the first decade of this century. His message seemed to have been alternatively interpreted as an *ominous warning* by some scholars of impending rationalization of higher education in the audience that this rationalization was in fact a great idea by others (i.e. government officials) and most likely not taken seriously by others. That said, many who did not fully appreciate the concerns expressed by Harman, nor the enthusiastic response by a senior Ministry of Education official, now work in one of Finland's newly merged higher education institutions. Our higher education system was rationalized within a few short years between Harman's warning and the uncritically, enthusiastic embrace of Finland's higher education system – as a whole – of the international agenda-setting that now defines, in part, transnational academic capitalism (Kallo 2009; Kauppinen 2012: Slaughter & Cantwell 2012). Recent comparative analysis now indicates the marginal place social justice issues have in Finland's contemporary higher education system (Hoffman, Nokkala & Välimaa *in press*). This self-ethnography questions the extent to which the nature of equality and inclusion in Finland's higher education system is quickly moving toward the social stratification characteristic of places like Australia or the USA, or

whether this is seriously considered, or even noticed within higher education studies in Finland.

2.1.1. Transnational academic capitalism – a primer

One of the most credible 'big picture' explanations for the emergence of transnational academic capitalism was recently advanced by (Pashby et al. 2014) whose critical comparative analysis explains the continuity of 'modern' (Kallo 2009) higher education, grounded in liberal ideology, in which prescriptive internationalization and higher education trends have never been subjected to serious critique. While mainstream social sciences and the humanities made considerable advances, liberal neo-colonial framing of internationalization and overly-narrow definitions of mobility were never subjected to theoretical debate and methodological development used in emancipatory paradigm shifts happening on the same campuses. Those advances continue to define state-of-the-art scientific debate linked to widening access and demystifying faculties to *all groups* found within societies, *not only elites* (Beck 1992; Bourdieu 1988; Pashby 2014, Trow 1974). This lack of scholarly horsepower left higher education specialists ill-prepared for the transnational ideological shift in which neoliberal supplanted liberal ideology. While a few higher educational specialists engaged this ideological shift as it was happening, the seminal efforts (Slaughter & Leslie 1997; Rhoades 1998; Rhoades & Slaughter 2004) were not aimed at internationalization, much less connected to the vibrant developments in thinking connected to mobilities or inclusion (Kahn & Pahlich 2001; Stevens & Dworkin et al. 2014; Urry 2007). Inside and outside Finland, a few early efforts critiqued the global implications of transnational academic capitalism (Currie & Newson et al. 1998; Marginson 2006; Kallo 2009; Ylijoki 2003) and incorporated more complex ways of thinking about mobilities (Marginson, Murphy & Peters 2009; Urry 2007). However, by the time Pusser et al. (2012), Slaughter & Cantwell (2012), Cantwell and Lee (2010) Cantwell and Kauppinen et al. (2014) began to get traction on *transnational academic capitalism*, higher education across the globe had adopted neoliberal new public management and increasingly narrow operationalization of innovation and internationalization. Finland passed neoliberal reforms as the 2008/9 global economic crisis unfolded, shifted its historical emphasis on inclusion and equality, in favour of high-profile internationalization and innovation.

2.2. The Finnish Story

When viewed from the *outside-looking-in*, Finland is frequently admired and valorised for the strength of its education system, quality of life and innovative, forward-looking artistic, high-tech achievements and economic competitiveness (Radcliffe 2004; Sachs 2004; Partanen 2011; Välijärvi 2006). However, from the *inside-looking-around*, a critical focus on mobility, broadly conceptualized, reveals key thresholds which have yet to be crossed by all population groups located in Finnish society (Forsander 2004; Hoffman, Sama, El-Massri, Raunio & Korhonen 2013a; Pöyhönen et al. 2011). In particular, our team's focus on higher education career trajectories and key threshold transitions reveals the double-edged nature of mobility and migration dynamics within one of the few remaining models of the strong, universal, Nordic welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1998). Higher education systems, around

the world, are increasingly falling into step with the highly normative, neoliberal, international agenda-setting efforts of agencies like the OECD (Cantwell & Kauppinen 2014; Currie & Newson 1998; Kallo 2009; Shahjahan & Kezar 2013; Marginson 2006), the cumulative result of which is an uncritical adoption of an emergent form of transnational academic capitalism springing up in several major higher education systems, as well as any organization that – literally – wants to 'do business' with them (Kauppinen 2012; Rhoades & Slaughter 2004; Slaughter & Cantwell 2012; Slaughter & Leslie 1997). Amidst these trends, it becomes a fair question, following Pusser et al. (2012) to problematize *the extent to which the public good higher education could offer all in society actually exists;* or, as Hoffman et al. (2013a) query:

> Are some groups and individuals 'outside' the working range of equity in contemporary higher education institutions in countries like Finland? Are there groups across societies that will not be found at certain strata of higher education systems or who are exploited across systems, as Cantwell and Lee (2010) argue? Are there persistent aspiration gaps within education and between societies (Bowden & Doughney 2010) and if so, how do we better explain them? Or are these types of questions, which once formed the bedrock of the Finnish policy of 'educational equality', no longer of interest to policy makers and the strategic management of higher education institutions in Finland – or relevant in Finnish society? (Hoffman, Nokkala & Välimaa *in press*)

2.3. Purpose and Objectives

The objectives of this article are to firstly present the background of this analysis, as it was a methodological response to an unanticipated opportunity that arose, within the context of a larger, ongoing study of migration issues related to the labour market in Finland. Secondly, we present the results of the self-ethnography (Alvesson 2003) as an institutional analysis carried out by the authors, designed to critically address and problematize the uneasy coexistence of working conditions and career systems which are, on the surface, talked about in terms of collegial equality and merit, yet have seldom been seriously considered with respect to robust, conceptually-driven and empirically-grounded analysis as to whether claims to equity or merit can be sustained when it comes to higher education careers (Hoffman 2007; Hoffman et al. 2013a; Husu 2000). We stress this because critical studies focused on our topic are not typically done in Finnish higher education studies, nor in higher education studies generally, nor in many countries, outside well-known exceptions like the UK, North America, Australia and New Zealand (Tight 2012; Hoffman, Blasi, Cools, Ćulum, Dragšić, Ewen, Horta, Nokkala, Rios-Aguilar and Saarinen 2013b). As will be detailed below, this institutional analysis is distinct, in terms of scope, from two follow-on studies more narrowly focused on the experiences and perceptions of the authors and the use of self-ethnography in organizational interventions. Thirdly, in our discussion we underline the value of this general approach, in particular with regard to explaining, understanding and avoiding methodological path dependencies typical to higher education research on mainland Europe in general and Finland in particular.

Our analysis focuses on institutional dynamics in which questioning assumptions is not always welcome, unintended consequences are ignored and misrecognized. Because of this, hidden populations – and their circumstances – *do not exist*. These are all important with regard to follow-on studies aimed at explaining key transitions which define a scholar's trajectory over time (Bourdieu 1988; Baldwin & Blackburn 1981) and in ways that will survive critical, comparative scrutiny outside Finland. The key concern driving our methodological position, analysis and discussion is precisely our critical focus on the relationship between higher education institutions, the societies in which they are embedded and the implications of our analysis in the Nordic context in general and Finnish Society in particular, because the system was noted for transformative equity in the 20th century. The only way we can approach the global topic of transnational scholarly precariousness is to firstly lay a conceptually problematized, empirically grounded analysis of the way in which this manifests our highly situated local circumstances. Secondly, problematizing this topic, robustly and methodologically engaging it, in a manner relevant to the state-of-the-art debate and international peer review is the only means available to both distance ourselves to the degree necessary for analysis that constitutes a contribution that merits anyone's attention. Thirdly, we assert the most meaningful contributions to the study of scholarly precariousness will be the relevance of findings to comparative designs which, in turn, offer the best road forward to critically framing, understanding and impacting scholarly precariousness in terms of scholarship, policy and practice.

3. Theory: Conceptual Problematization

This study began in a deceptively conventional manner. Our lives would have been easier had it stayed that way. However, this was not how things actually happened. The analysis we present below is instructive, especially in terms of the type of methodological reflexivity needed to pursue an unanticipated opportunity in the manner we chose for this study. More importantly, the authors are united in a need to articulate the reasons that justify questioning methodological convention, broadly speaking. Specifically, during the course of this study we firstly became concerned with the relationship between methodological nationalism in the way Shahjahan & Kezar (2013) use that term, in the Finnish context. Secondly, as we went forward, we developed unease with knowingly contributing to the silent, scholarly capitulation criticized by Currie and Newson et al. (1998), Marginson (2006) and Robertson (2014), when faced with a choice of turning a blind eye to 'international agenda setting' (Kallo 2009). As it links to neoliberal new public management, now entrenched across North America, Europe and beyond (Cantwell & Kauppinen et al. 2014; Slaughter & Cantwell 2012), Kauppinen (2012) aptly terms this *transnational academic capitalism*. As authors, we locate ourselves within the global scholarly conversations that have taken place over the last two decades and that trace their beginnings to Slaughter and Leslie's (1997) coining of the term 'academic capitalism', along with Pusser et al.'s (2012) sustained critique of the threat to the ideals of higher education as a public good. Currently, "now that we (in Finnish higher education) are in the business of academic capitalism, rather than simply studying it" (Author1, Nokkala & Välimaa *in press*), our critical methodological positioning, with regard to these powerful trends, should become clear in the sections that follow.

3.1. The Academy of Finland Project on Migration and the Labour Market

This self-ethnography is substantively grounded in a larger project titled: *Working age migrants in Finland: The roles of language proficiency, multilingual and multicultural practices and identities in integration into employment and professional communities* (Here and after identified by the acronym AOF). As we detail in our Foreword section, the distinction between the larger AOF study and this smaller ethnographic study was that the AOF study was *planned*, while this self-ethnography was not originally part of that plan. In that sense, it was an *opportunistic study*.

In the AOF study, the research team normatively problematized Finnish labour market dynamics in terms of *aspiration*: those who aspired to labour market participation; *achievement*: those who had achieved labour market participation; and *abandonment*: settings in which persons could be found outside institutions more accurately linked to aspiration or achievement (Pöyhönen et al. 2011, 2013). Our reason for problematizing social dynamics in this manner was grounded in the AOF team members' recent research in higher education studies and applied linguistics. When read together, our findings suggested many institutions inside or linked to Finland's labour market, particularly the research community focused on migration, had *missed* important social dynamics inherent in migration within Finnish society, as the country made a subtle, yet important shift from being a country of *net emigration* to a country of *net migration* (Jaakkola 2005). Our approach, in AOF, was to

carry out a series of arts-based, longitudinal, ethnographic, policy and case studies, focused on particular *occupational sectors* and in distinct *focal settings*. This included teachers, ICT engineers, artists, policy actors active in the migration arena and particular *areas* (geographically and spatially) that had either come under stress or showed particular potential with regard to better understandings of contemporary migration phenomena in Finnish society. Our purpose for looking across these sectors, groups and settings was to qualitatively illuminate key facets of migration that remained opaque, especially amidst normative institutional reaction to migration-related phenomena. AOF team members argued institutional reaction obscured far more than institutions had managed to constructively engage or impact. In order to do this the AOF team developed a wide variety of unconventional strategies aimed at simultaneously providing *better explanations of migration-related phenomena* and *impacting* the settings, groups and individuals implicated by our participative strategies of engagement. These included an arts-based project of producing a theatre play, proactive participation in national-level policy debate and government service provision (Pöyhönen & Tarnanen 2015, Hoffman 2013) and working within NGOs.

3.2. Aspiration, Achievement and Abandonment and Career Trajectories in Finnish Higher Education

Within the AOF study, as a higher education specialist, Hoffman proposed to begin with a case study focused on the notion of *abandonment*, as he had become familiar with several scholars who had attempted migration to Finland, but subsequently left for combinations of professional and personal reasons. Hoffman had always been interested in these scholars as a source of unique experiences and perceptions, from an equally unique position. This perspective and position was qualitatively distinct from either scholars who were Finnish nationals, by birth, scholars who only temporarily visited Finland, with no intention of remaining or scholars who had migrated to Finland and stayed (Hoffman 2007). As the AOF study began, Hoffman began listing persons he wanted to request to participate in interviews, during the case study he would lead as a sub-project of AOF. In order to guide a conceptually-driven purposeful selection, Figure 1 was designed.

3.3. Academic Work

The conceptual coordinates that illuminate the social dynamics which, to a large extent, shape the trajectories (Bourdieu 2008) of scholars in higher education systems like Finland are quite clear (Hoffman, Nokkala & Välimaa *in press*). To construct an analytically-driven purposeful selection (Creswell 2002) regarding the topics the AOF team were interested in—which would also be conceptually and empirically meaningful in international comparative higher education studies—Hoffman conceptualized a variation of a three-dimensional construct he had used in previous multiple case studies of Finnish higher education focused on the mobility of university personnel (Hoffman 2007, et al. 2013a, *in press*). The main conceptual starting points in a case study of this nature are drawn from *theory of the middle range*
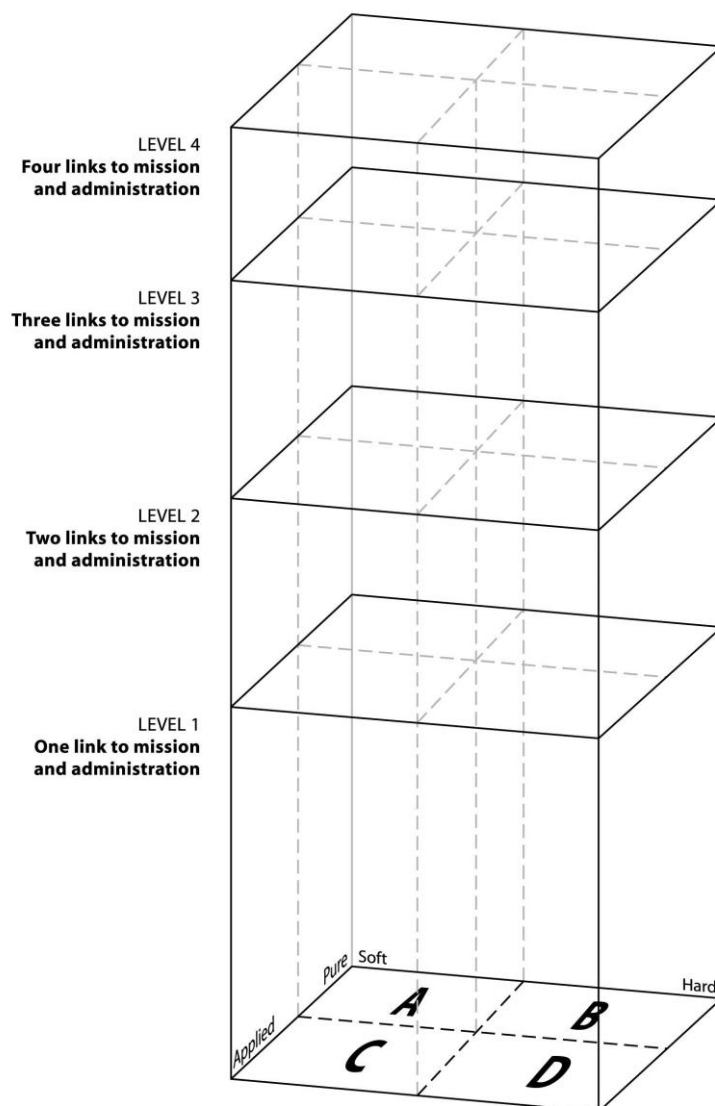
Figure 1. Conceptualization of Analytically-Driven Purposeful Selection

(Merton 1968), relating to ways in which contemporary university *mission or missions* are geared towards public or private goods (Pusser et al. 2012), *career stage* as a developmental process (Baldwin & Blackburn 1981), *scholarly productivity* (Fairweather 2002) and *disciplinary cultures* (Becher & Trowler 2001). Beginning with a purposeful selection inside universities based on these conceptual coordinates insures that fairly different perspectives within potential higher education positions are taken into account. Scholars within *columns* (A,B,C&D), have a lot in common, as do scholars who have more or less duties with respect to university missions (Levels or rows 1-4) (Hoffman 2007). These conceptual coordinates, as a point of departure, especially when combined with the analytical approach developed by Bourdieu (1988), explain career trajectory in a far more convincing fashion than most approaches to mobility, within the broad category of *academic work* (a staple category of higher education studies) in Finnish higher education. This is because the complexity of what is either assumed, routinely ignored or entirely missed in Finnish higher education employment, as is outlined in this self-ethnography, is far more interesting than what is routinely studied (see critical analyses by Hoffman 2007; Hoffman et al. 2013a; Husu 2000,

2001). In the most simple terms possible, this is because the 'professional side of the story', conceptually speaking, is only 'half a story'. The other 'half' of the story, in Finnish higher education, is often unproblematized.

3.3.1. Unpacking Bourdieu's Approach to Scholarly Trajectory – A Primer

Bourdieu's (1988) conceptualization of *field*, *capital* and *trajectory* provided considerable insight into academic work during the social transformation associated with the student movement in France in the late 1960s. That said, his theorization and explanation of scholarly trajectory remains far more powerful – across many settings – than alternative explanations known to the authors (see Hoffman et al., *in press* for the way in which this theorization was operationalized in a comparative higher education study).

The homology of *trajectory*, as used by Bourdieu (1988) is useful regarding insight into the path of individuals with respect to the tension between *a priori* social relationships and the human capacity for change or agency. Trajectory is used to analyse the degree to which the career path of an academic is in part determined by essential properties which define a given *field*. A field is defined as a delimited social space where positions and relationships between positions are defined in terms of the possession of specific forms of *capital*. Different forms of capital are specific types of power, used in a given field, that determine specific position, movement and indicate potential relevant to both. (Bourdieu 1988; Wacquant & Bourdieu 1992). The positions an academic has occupied in the past, presently occupies, and is likely to occupy in the future, correspond to clear positions which are normally not created by that academic. Rather, the positions exist in the field of higher education, in this case, the Finnish national university system.

Whether or not movement between positions within a field is understood by the persons occupying them is clear in some fields, where the forms of capital are very clear, e.g. on a soccer field or battle-field, less clear in others, e.g. kinship relations in extended families in unfamiliar societies (Bourdieu 1990; Wacquant & Bourdieu 1992). In any case, what remains clear in many fields is that objective positions exist, regardless of the people who occupy those positions. This in and of itself makes analysis of movement between those positions possible.

The field-specific capitals of *academic and scientific power* are the two most important forms of capital which govern durable social relationship patterns that simultaneously delimit and determine power relations within distinct academic fields, as well as one's trajectory through those fields. Academics who act with respect to *academic power* are focused on the social dynamics which will reproduce *the next generation of academics* in a given faculty, institute, department or basic unit. Academics concerned with *scientific power* are concerned with *the advancement of state-of-the-art knowledge in their discipline*. Relative position in either type of field is maintained in fundamentally different ways; for example, the control of a subordinate's time and departmental politics in the former and the publication of scientific texts and innovative lectures concerning disciplinary developments in the latter (Bourdieu 1988). In his last work, Bourdieu (2004) also advanced the concept of *administrative power*, as a particular form of emergent capital increasingly important in higher education

institutions, as well as specialized research institutes. This coincided with the attention given to transnational academic capitalism (Kauppinen 2012), in particular in the work of Rhoades (1998), Slaughter and Cantwell (2012); Rhoades and Slaughter (2004) and Cantwell and Kauppinen (2014).

3.3.2. Unpacking the Comparative Study of Academic Work – A Primer

Globally speaking, several focal theories of the middle range are fruitful when it comes to saying something relevant, in general or new, in particular, regarding academic work, as it is understood by higher education specialists. To zoom in on what we are talking about we present an excerpt of the purposeful selection strategy used by a Finnish-based team in a recent six country comparative study of higher education (Hoffman et al. in press). The conceptually-driven approach builds directly on and elaborates the work of Bourdieu (1988, 2004). In order to establish a basis for comparison and develop future research designs with regard to replication and increasingly robust approaches; particularly with regard to the limitations of any qualitative methodology, the following substantive and conceptual starting points are discussed in terms of the *analytically-driven purposeful selection* (Creswell, 2002; Yin, 2003) that often inform empirical focus in studies of academic work.

3.3.2.1. Disciplinary Cultures

Becher and Trowler's (2001) analytical coordinates concern two focal points. One is the cognitive component of *what* is studied by an individual and basic units in terms of the *hard-soft, pure-applied* dimensions that delineate the substantive context to which scholars orientate – along with their attendant attention to theory and linked traditions of inquiry and discourse. The other is a social component that illuminate *how* individuals – and ultimately, basic units – carry out their scholarship, in terms of dimensions that draw our attention to distinctions illuminated by *urban-rural* spectrum, in relation to the settings in which scholarship is actually carried out, as well as *convergent-divergent* orientations to potential topic(s).

3.3.2.2. Mission Emphasis

Välimaa's (2001b) analysis of career patterns in Finnish higher education illuminates crucial distinctions between the missions of *research* and *teaching* in Finnish higher education, in addition to mission related dynamics affecting scholars who assume *administrative* responsibilities. His findings clearly underscore the consequences in terms of career opportunities linked to the missions and activities within Finnish HEIs. Välimaa's analysis was elaborated by Hoffman (2007) and Hoffman et al. (2013), who assert a more nuanced approach that seeks to illuminate the distinctions between activities in HEIs related to research, teaching, service, administration and strategic level leadership. In particular, in the

analysis leading to Hoffman et al. (2013) a focus on the rapid expansion of 'new professionals' (Rhoades 1998) who are neither teachers, researchers, strategic managers or engaged in service, i.e. any mission of the university, but whose activity is perceived to be critical for the control and steering of scholars by non-scholars (Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012; Hoffman et al., 2013; Rhoades, 1998).

3.3.2.3. Career Stage

Baldwin & Blackburn's (1981) study of career stage – as a developmental process – serves to underline the distinct perspectives researchers can expect to encounter when trying to understand phenomena within HEIs, from very different *experienced-based assumptions.* These perspectives manifest at different points in individual career trajectories. The views of an HEI from the perspective of a senior strategic-level leadership position, a tenured professor, a lecturer, a temporarily employed graduate student or research assistant are akin to the blindfolded group of people describing the proverbial elephant. This empirical contrast is often far more meaningful, depending on the topic, than a focus informed by a single career stage or other perspective. While all of the aforementioned perspectives have potential value, the contrasts between early stage, early career, mid and late career operational, support and management personnel are particularly important in multiple case studies, if empirically-grounded, holistic analysis is the 'end game' of a case study.

3.3.2.4. Competitive Horizon

The heuristic of competitive horizons in contemporary Finnish HEIs, was advanced and grounded analytically by Välimaa & Hoffman (2007) and empirically grounded by Hoffman, Välimaa & Huusko (2008), Raunio, Korhonen & Hoffman (2011), as well as conceptually problematized in relation to methodological nationalism (Shajahan & Kezar, 2013) by Hoffman et al. (2013; *in press*). The heuristic illuminates three fundamental horizons can be analytically illuminated by the orientation of an individual or basic unit to their most important competitors, in terms of resources. The dynamics that underlie these orientations are produced by the tension between *reproduction* within the structure of a discipline and *transformation* of (or linked to) that same discipline. This tension was conceptually and empirically illuminated and advanced by Bourdieu (1988), its implications highlighted by Brennan (2002), and confirmed within the Finnish context by Hoffman et al. (2008; 2011.) Attention to this heuristic draws attention to the social dynamics of basic units and individuals operating at the cutting edge of their disciplines/specialities at *world class*, where the most important norms are linked to scientific power (Bourdieu, 1988; 2004), specifically, the power to transform one's discipline/speciality. In contrast are *local heroes* who transmit and translate knowledge, but take no part in producing it, primarily orientating to the reproduction of the next generation of local scholars through the control of the time and resources of others. Between these two extremes are *national champions*, middle tier scholars, who attempt some type of balance between transformation and reproduction, often without necessarily recognizing this as such. The heuristic of competitive horizons draw

attention to the challenges of managing HEIs, as activity at all horizons are in demand because they correspond to the global division of academic labour, while at the same time these are often thoroughly misrecognized (Hoffman et al., 2011) in normative-level policy and organizational debate, where prescriptive fashions and fads (Birnbaum, 2000) lag far behind, or are completely disconnected from the empirical space occupied by established and emergent stratification that defies convenient and obvious framing.

The purposeful selection using these four criteria to the extent possible ensures that not too many similar types of personnel participate in interviews from units that are too similar.

3.4. Ascriptive Characteristics and Social Constructs in Finnish Society: The Sacred and Safe *versus* the Profane and Problematic

In addition to occupational/professional coordinates, a complete range of ascriptive characteristics is needed to get full traction, conceptually and empirically speaking, in a purposeful selection of this nature. Ascriptive characteristics are characteristics of a person or group that cannot be changed by individual effort, for example, gender, age, kinship, skin colour, national origin, sexual orientation, physical disability and ethnicity (Beck 1992). Complex intersectionality regarding the relationship between *achieved* or professional characteristics and the *ascriptive* characteristics that empirically exist in Finnish society remains largely unproblematized in many studies of Finnish higher education employment (Hoffman 2007; Hoffman et al. 2013a; Husu 2000, 2001), as well as professional practice, as this study spotlights. This is the reason why it is easy to locate domestic or local 'explanations' of – and approaches to – academic work and career trajectories in higher education employment in Finland that amount to little more than stilted folk psychology that more accurately illuminates the Finnish variant of methodological nationalism than robust approaches needed to provide viable explanations of career trajectories (Hoffman 2007; Hoffman et al. 2013a; Husu 2000, 2001; Shajahan & Kezar 2012) or robust, transparent HR policy. A specific example of this is detailed in the section: 'The nature of methodological nationalism in (Finnish) higher education studies' (below). By 'viable', we mean designs or practices that would be conceptually or empirically meaningful in comparative studies geared to state-of-the art knowledge on academic work.

The previous paragraph might be regarded as polemic in the Finnish context by many. However, when contrasted to the convoluted social dynamics encountered during this study, the authors are more comfortable with being polemic. By 'convoluted', we mean the long-standing avoidance by higher education actors of directly engaging conceptually viable, empirically-grounded explanations of persistent challenges experienced by scholars caught up in migration and mobility or implicated by these dynamics. These social dynamics remain largely unexplored and fundamentally misunderstood in our local context. This is because some ascriptive characteristics, like gender, are actively linked to *equity discourse*, while others, like ethnicity, national origin, religion and skin colour, are thought about – in everyday practice – under a successive 'hit parade' (Bourdieu 1988) of ill-defined and routinely unproblematized 'smoke and mirrors discourses', such as 'multiculturalism', 'integration', 'internationalization', 'diversity', 'multiversity' and 'good relations' (Blommaert 2009; Hoffman 2013; Hoffman, Saarinen & Cools 2012). The notion of race as a

social construction (Berger & Luckmann 1966) is extremely problematic in the Finnish context (Cantwell & Lee 2010; Rastas 2009; Beach & Lunneblad 2013), where it is in many cases denied altogether – and ironically – by persons of colour, who realize what Habti terms the 'ethnic penalty' of using his own name in email correspondence. While all ascriptive characteristics are 'technically' covered by legal statute concerning discrimination (as is the case in most countries), in everyday life the combination of 'sacred and safe' ascriptive characteristics like gender, mother-tongue and age rests uneasily alongside ascriptive characteristics covered by the umbrella of 'smoke and mirrors discourses', which are united by the fact that *no one agrees on their meanings and they remain unoperationalized in research designs that purport to study academic work*. Both rest uneasily beside the 'profane and problematic notion that shall not be mentioned': *race*. What these three parallel discourses accomplish is the unintended consequence of thoroughly obscured, *misrecognized* (Bourdieu 1988) constituents of biography that may – or may not – have relationships to the rather clear terminology (by contrast) linked to *academic work and social theory that explains career trajectories*. Put another way, the unproblematized reality that results from de-linking achieved and ascriptive characteristics can be formulated in terms of the aphorism coined by W.I. Thomas (Marshall, 1994): the *Thomas Theorem*: "Because equality in everyday academic life can be experienced as meaning nothing, it means nothing."

3.5. Problematizing Academic Work and Ascriptive Characteristics: The Tensions Between Aspiration, Achievement and Abandonment

Mills (1959) wrote that the essence of the sociological imagination was the understanding of *history, biography and their intersection in society*. Following Mills, and Bourdieu (1988), the relationship between academic work and ascriptive characteristics was problematized within the AOF study, as we had a strong hunch this would shed light on *key challenges across Finnish society with regard to migration*. This is because all teachers – as well as the majority professionals working with all of Finland's most important institutions, organizations and professions – are educated within Finnish higher education. Because the 'intersection' in focus in this particular study is higher education and the topic is academic work and migration, it is difficult to avoid 'biography' in the way which is routinely done inside contemporary Finnish higher education institutions (Hoffman 2007; Hoffman et al. 2013a). We would further underline that, historically speaking, Finnish society and education have been fairly characterized by the relative *absence of social stratification* (Välimaa 2001a). This said, the rationale of the approach of the AOF research project, in general, was a critical re-examination of contemporary migration-related dynamics. The most recent research of the authors suggests new approaches are needed to interrogate and problematize relationships like those brought into focus in this study.

3.6. Conceptualizing Social Dynamics and Who We Are Really Talking About

During the initial meetings of the AOF research team, two key ideas came up that AOF researchers felt were preconditions to articulating new knowledge on migration in the Finnish

context. Firstly, we had to avoid regarding AOF's conceptual problematization (*aspiration, achievement and abandonment*) of our approach as static, if we wished to avoid the normative thinking that we suspected of *creating* so many blind spots in the initial institutional reactions to migration-related social dynamics in Finland in the previous two decades. AOF researchers had a strong hunch that it was most likely *undetected movement within and between actual settings* and concrete focal contexts (*aspiration, achievement and abandonment*) that our approach brought into view as interesting and would provide new knowledge with regard to phenomena missed in first-generation studies of migration in Finnish society. Because much of Hoffman's previous work on academic work, mobility and migration had focused on Bourdieu's (1988) homology of *trajectory* in its relation to academic careers, the idea of dynamic complexity within institutional settings like higher education was unproblematic and in line with the AOF study as planned.

A second central idea, one that originally grounded the terms aspiration, achievement and abandonment, was that the AOF team's problematization, unlike many previous studies of migration substantively, conceptually and empirically illuminated the *general population* of Finland, not only *persons with a migrant background* (Pöyhönen et al. 2011, 2013). The importance of this, in the context of academic work in Finland, is getting past the *pseudo debate*, most often carried out at the level of folk psychology, concerning precarious higher education employment in Finland. This 'debate' often begins with anecdotal claims that non-Finnish scholars have perceived or experienced discrimination in competition for positions, especially permanent positions. A 'debate' of this nature played out in the Finnish press during this study in which this type of assertion was levelled by Rice (YLE 2014). The inevitable responses to anecdotal assertions of discrimination are – of course – more anecdotal assertions, like "Times are tough for foreigners and Finns alike" (Primmer 2014). In other words, 'it makes no real difference who you are'. The challenges and opportunities faced by all academics in Finnish higher education are 'the same for everyone'. While it is not difficult to find willing participants for these pseudo 'debates', the similarity of both positions is that *neither* makes reference to the wide body of international research literature in which answers to these types of 'claims' are routinely illuminated, problematized and addressed, including the recent studies of this topic in the Finnish context cited throughout this study.

The reason this pseudo-debate is confined to the media, lecture halls and pubs is because actually substantiating these claims requires theory, methodology, data analysis and peer-review by content specialists. Folk psychology, anecdotes and personal opinions do not contribute to explanations of the way in which transnational scholarly precariousness manifests in Finnish higher education, except perhaps as ethnographic data explaining a great deal, in terms of context, what higher education actors focus their attention on and, more importantly, *what they miss*.

In the context of higher education, it is clear that academic life – at all competitive horizons – *is* often very challenging for everyone involved (Hoffman et al. *in press*). That said, concerning migration, the AOF team had begun to doubt if a focus *exclusively* on persons with a migrant background, which many approaches take as a point of departure, *missed* important phenomena integral to better explanations regarding key institutions and social structure in a quickly changing society. What is clear is that media-driven pseudo debates, like many studies of academic work in Finnish higher education, operate at *very low levels of abstraction* (folk psychology) that favour *untenable personal projections, anecdotes* and

opinions over robust *methodology, theory* and *data analysis* (Teichler 1996; Hoffman *forthcoming*), packaged in conceptually ungrounded, unproblematized, uncritical, asymmetrical approaches that over-focus on individuals, while ignoring social structure (Hoffman et al. 2013).

While the above-mentioned hunches of the AOF team formed a promising point of departure to separate debates of folk psychology *versus* debates between scientists, the actual beginning of the interviews, in conjunction with wanting to focus on empirically illuminating and explaining trajectory *within and between the focal settings of aspiration, achievement and abandonment in Finnish higher education,* spotlighted an immediate set of dilemmas and challenges. These dilemmas and challenges changed the course, methodologically speaking, of the studies and interventions Hoffman would lead within the AOF project.

4. Methodology: Methodological Shift

As the AOF studies got underway between 2011 and 2013, two series of events were happening concurrently—as so often in academe—which initially seemed quite unrelated. These two events were *methodologically grounded* in an entirely different set of studies and *practice-orientated*, related to Hoffman's position in his research group *Education and Social Change* at the Finnish Institute for Educational Research (here and after, FIER). However, the way in which these two events came to be highly interrelated shaped our subsequent approach, in part, to the self-ethnography and interventions carried out by the authors, all of which were grounded in the AOF project, but unplanned.

The first of these events was grounded in a series of studies focused on *research team dynamics and ICT-based research team collaboration*, within a European Science Foundation (ESF) research program (Hoffman et al. 2014). During this series of studies, Hoffman and his colleagues initially designed a conventional, mixed-methods (sequential-exploratory) study to engage an unanticipated opportunity to study an under-researched topic within higher education studies on academic work. During the initial write-ups of those efforts, Hoffman and his colleagues received strong encouragement regarding the focal topic selection, but a stark caution, in particular, with regard to the use of interviews and surveys within higher education studies, which were already 'over-relied' on within the power-laden social dynamics of universities. Specifically, a conference discussant advised the team to take a far more critical stance that combined with a methodological approach that better fit the unique perspective that the team was working from and which would allow them to avoid the traps inherent especially in interviews of university personnel. This was *self-ethnography*, as advanced by Alvesson (2003). After reconsidering the topic with respect to the critique of that particular discussant, the team adopted a self-ethnographic approach within an advocacy/participatory paradigm (Creswell 2002), aimed explicitly at *improving the situation the team found themselves and their field of studies in*.

The second of these concurrent events occurred under the auspices of Hoffman's membership of a research group in FIER, which was focused on *higher education and social change*. At that time Hoffman was managing this group. In this capacity, Hoffman, over the course of several months, had become increasingly aware of the circumstances of two early-career researchers with a migrant background, Sama and Cools, with respect to their aspirations at FIER. Both appeared to be capable researchers, having recently earned doctorates in two fields highly complementary to the interdisciplinary mission of FIER: social and public policy and speech communication. In addition, an early-stage researcher and doctoral student, Siekkinen, had recently joined the team and Hoffman had been discussing potential project ideas with her, as she sought funding that would allow her to begin her dissertation. Based on both of his previous studies of academic work and personal experience, negotiating the doctoral and post-doc career threshold as a migrant in the Finnish university system, Hoffman identified with the key career transitions Sama, Cools and Siekkinen were in and the way in which these would define their career trajectories within higher education. In ideal circumstances, Sama, Cools and Siekkinen would find ideas that were viable in terms of funding and institutional support, the key to a way forward along their respective trajectories. However, with regard to the problematization of aspiration, achievement and abandonment, it was equally clear that their institutional status was highly precarious and depended on social

dynamics that were as uncertain and contingent as they were misrecognized (Bourdieu 1988), and dangerous (Hoffman 2007, Hoffman et al. 2013a).

4.1. Key Methodological Risks and Gaps: Our Dilemma

What was equally clear, based on the methodological realities of this situation, was that Sama, Cools and Siekkinen fell squarely into the conceptual problematization outlined by the AOF study (Aspiration, achievement and abandonment), and the sub-study that Hoffman intended to begin focused on academic work within higher education. This was because each of them faced the imminent prospect of leaving an institution in which they had achieved a precarious foothold through research team membership in the case of Siekkinen and Cools, which Sama also aspired to.

Based on his recent experience with self-ethnography (Alvesson 2003; Hoffman et al. 2014), Hoffman now knew the original case study methodological approach *planned* for his focus on higher education (as a sub-study of AOF) was actually problematic, both methodologically and ethically. This was because negotiating the career transition faced by a fresh post-doc, in the case of Sama and Cools, or an aspiring doctoral student, in the case of Siekkinen, was both time-sensitive and urgent. Hoffman had to consider, in light of fresh experience, whether or not adopting a more critical and participative research design, as he and his colleagues had done in their study of research team dynamics, was in order. Specifically, the skill-set and socialization process post-docs and doctoral students rapidly need to learn was obviously what Sama, Cools and Siekkinen needed, rather than to be merely interviewed as to their highly uncertain precarious situation. Further, Hoffman had studied the trajectories of academics in Finnish universities and was familiar with the unique challenges regarding migration and mobility dynamics. In that light, interviewing Sama, Cools and Siekkinen seemed to border on the unethical, compared to the potential inherent in actively seeking a better understanding of the nature of the structural dynamics, cultural forces and limits of agency that would in effect determine their professional outcomes in the field of Finnish higher education in general, and FIER in particular.

Hoffman, Cools and Seikkinen were already acutely aware of the risk entailed in studies of this nature, as higher education studies are generally not a showcase for critical approaches to power relations within academe (Alvesson 2003; Hoffman et al. 2014, 2013b; Tight 2012), and in Finnish higher education studies in particular (Hoffman et al. 2013a; Hoffman, Saarinen & Cools 2012). Because of the obvious risks entailed in executing a novel, critical approach to studies of academic work in Finnish higher education in the first person, Hoffman contacted Habti, one of the other scholars he had originally intended to interview in the AOF case studies. This was because, unlike most mobility specialists in Finland, Habti's recent dissertation firstly focused on the mobility of scholars with a migrant background –
and secondly, he was, himself, a migrant as were Sama, Cools and Hoffman. As a new funding period was approaching with regard to several national sources of post-doc support, both Sama and Habti had recently approached Hoffman to discuss post-doc topics. Habti, while recognizing the risks of this type of study, also understood the irony of the team's position, in the sense that scholars the world over are generally *encouraged* to seek new knowledge in high-risk/high-gain studies. In the words of Marja Makarow, Vice President for Research, Academy of Finland, "Your aim is to conduct cutting-edge research. Our aim is to

fund it" (Academy of Finland 2014). That said, both Habti and Hoffman knew the approach they discussed, despite the fact that it was novel, high risk/high gain, posed serious risks within Finnish higher education, where criticism is often personalized and contentious topics are not routinely raised in everyday communication (Carbaugh 1996). While academic freedom offers a fig leaf of leeway for critique (Kahn & Pavlich 2001), all the authors of this self-ethnography are acutely aware that there exists no established tradition of pointed critique in higher education studies in Finland on topics of this nature.

There are numerous examples of early stage and early career researchers like Sama, Cools, Siekkinen and Habti invoking advocacy/participatory knowledge claims (Creswell 2002) toward their own career trajectories, amidst the denial or minimization (Bennett 1993) of the relationship between achieved and ascriptive characteristics and salient social constructions in the context of academic work (Bird 1996; Castellanos & Jones et al. 2003; Howard-Hamilton, Morelon-Quainoo, Johnson, Winkle-Wagner & Santiague 2009; Li & Beckett et al. 2006; Thompson & Loque 2005). This acknowledged, none of the studies cited in the previous sentence was carried out in Finland or mainland Europe. Three clear risks needed to be understood by our team before we could move forward.

4.1.1. The Absence of Collective Agency

Margaret Archer (1995) draws the useful distinction between the *agency of a single individual* and the more powerful forms of agency inherent in *groups of individuals*. The reason why our team's topic is not as obvious as the groups who have published the studies cited in the previous paragraph is a subtle combination of the very low numbers of persons with a migrant background in the Finnish general population (as detailed below) and the even lower numbers in senior positions in the most important academic basic units and government agencies whose scope of interest could (potentially) include topics like the one on which our team has decided to focus in this study. As Hoffman observed in his initial entry in the field notes kept during this study, on 23 August, 2013:

> …the most compelling of the potential interview participants are early career scholars (migrants)—at postdoc level (having recently completed their PhDs)—who are having significant difficulties in the key transition to their first post-PhD post and early stage researchers, trying to get their PhD going. Regarding these persons, I find myself in a difficult position in one sense, as methodological approaches that have been used before for groups in this position are simply not in use in Finland. The first reason they are not in use was the topic of our latest article (Hoffman 2013a), i.e. methodological nationalism. And the second reason is that those types of studies have been carried out with homogenous groups that have at least a modicum of collective agency, in the sense they share key ascriptive characteristics. The group I have, though, is defined by complex intersectionality that is mot picked up by local framing. The post-docs, all at early-career, are Thomas (Sama), a black African male; Driss (Habti), a North African male who uses the term 'ethnic penalty' to describe him using his own name in correspondence, as well as the other ascriptive characteristics that describe him; Carine (Cools), a female early-career researcher from Belgium; while

> Taru (Siekkinen), a young, Finnish female single parent at early-stage[i]. This primary group is also different, because we are both friends and colleagues. I am giving them advice and actively helping them in their efforts to go forward, including them in projects both of mutual benefit that—if successful—will allows [*sic*] them to advance in their careers. There are a lot of reasons to do this. The most important one is that—despite rhetoric on equality in Finland—it's much easier to make a case for emerging ethnic stratification than a 'level playing field', defined by merit.

While some in higher education studies are not used to the presentation of data and field notes 'in the methodology section', we respectfully remind the reader that in empirical studies that confront convention, it is precisely methodological reflexivity that allows us – Sometimes – to avoid the 'blind spots' made up of unquestioned assumptions, unintended consequences and which, in our case, *hide entire populations in plain sight*. Specifically, in 2013, 22,119 persons of Finland's general population of 5,451,270 or 0.41% are "persons whose native language is a foreign language" (Statistics Finland 2014). The empirical distinction between the 5,429,151 native speakers of Finnish, Swedish or Sami and what government statisticians refer to as "persons whose native language is a foreign language" grounds an interesting feature of methodological nationalism in the Finnish case. Specifically, these "persons whose native language is a foreign language" have *nothing* in common but for the fact they are non-native speakers of Finnish, Swedish or Sami, yet they are frequently conceptually and empirically 'aggregated' in studies of education carried out by government agencies charged for evaluating the central challenges linked to this 'group', stretching that term quite broadly.

4.1.2. No Tradition of Critical Introspection

As Bourdieu (1988) wrote, studying one's situation amidst more powerful scholars who misrecognize that they are reproducing power relations – while believing they are entirely up to something else – is a sure-fire recipe for making life-long enemies and producing 'books for burning.'

Finnish higher education studies are not well known for taking a critical, inward-looking approach at the way in which we operate. This has not changed between the time Bourdieu made the above-cited observation through Tight's (2012) recent review of higher education's major journals and books, in which critical studies are conspicuously absent compared to mainstream social science and humanities literature. Further, our own studies, which have been cited throughout this text and broached this area, have not produced *any* evidence contrary to these claims. Rather, they have confirmed a persistent, uncritical path dependency, characterized by a lack of imagination, conformity to convention and risk aversion (Hoffman 2013b, 2014). During this study, as things turned out, we would directly encounter this tendency on two distinct occasions, both of which are elaborated in our analysis below. There are solid examples of contemporary critique in Finnish higher education studies (See Kivistö & Tirronen 2012) and even on academic capitalism and precariousness employment of scholars (See Nikula 2012 & Ylijoki 2003), but these studies, while critical, do not fully address contemporary migration, nor transnational scholarly

precariousness (Hoffman *forthcoming*) in a way that is actionable within the settings in which it manifests.

4.1.3. The Nature of Methodological Nationalism in (Finnish) Higher Education Studies

We have published and are finalizing accounts that explain the elements that comprise the variant of methodological nationalism (Shajahan & Kezar 2012) one will encounter in Finnish higher education (Hoffman et al. 2013a; Author1, Nokkala & Välimaa *in press*). The central element of this is explained in the cited studies in terms of the *competitive horizons* formed by the tension between *reproduction* and *transformation* and the social dynamics of scholars whose work results in one, the other or both in three distinct strata, all of which are in high demand in several countries around the world. The competitive horizons heuristic posits the strata of the *world class*, *national champions* and *local heroes*, all of which orient to three distinct sets of cultural logic which shape and define distinct social structure and the nature of agency within and between these strata. Like Shahjahan and Kezar's (2013), critique of methodological nationalism, the competitive horizons heuristic references the nature of the global division of scholarly labour and the way in which this manifests in highly situated circumstances. It follows that distinct sets of *national idiosyncrasies* (Kogan 2002) and variations can be articulated – as has been done in the above-cited studies which our team has discussed – *most often in ways that avoid discussion of methodological nationalism entirely*. This is because, locally, the social dynamics that look like methodological nationalism at distinct competitive horizons (from *outside* highly situated settings like FIER) comprise the beliefs, values and norms – or cultures – that inform the social dynamics of everyday life *within* the social structure of one's immediate work environment in subtle, nuanced ways that cannot be 'seen' using the highly conventional methodological routines employed to 'study' academic work. A concrete example of this was a survey on academic careers received by Hoffman, Pöyhönen and Siekkinen during this study, on 17 September 2014, from the university which employs them. In this survey, 'equality' was asked about in five questions, but only operationalized conceptually in terms of *gender* in two questions about equality and discrimination respectively. All other ascriptive characteristics and social constructions needed for a problematization of contemporary academic work and equality that would be relevant to state-of-the-art debate or international-level comparative studies of academic work were missing. There was one open-ended question: "What else would you like to say about your experiences of work or equality?" The substantive, methodological, theoretical and conceptual assumptions underlying the de-linkage of biography and academic work are beyond the scope of this study, but worth highlighting, as they underline the general approach to studies of academic work in higher education studies in Finland. To be fair, it is also worth pointing out that this is an example of institutional research and should be judged in that context. To be critical, the intersectionality that is missed in 'studies' like these is more interesting than what is purported to be in focus.

4.1.4. Speaking Truth to Power: A Good Idea?

To be fair, it is not difficult to locate higher education researchers extremely aware of the (above) risks that needed to be pointed out to each member of the team who participated in

our self-ethnography. During the course of this study, Hoffman participated in two key presentations as an organizer (Hoffman, Rhoades, Lee & Shajahan 2013) and as an audience participant (Abbas, A., Ashwin, P. & Trahar, S. 2013), both aimed squarely at the conventions that prevents working scholars—in many cases—from getting traction on interesting topics and, in our case, topics that affect the nature of their very existence—*ironically*—through the study of that same existence. But, to be blunt, this community of critical scholars is spread out over vast distances, across far flung countries and continents. Both of these presentations were in national and cultural settings (the USA and the UK), where critical scholarship on topics like these is more of a norm than frowned upon and where *speaking truth to power* in the way Foucault (1979) or Wildavsky (1997) use the phrase is lauded, not damned. In earlier studies Hoffman and his colleagues (Hoffman, El-Massri, Sama, Korhonen & Raunio 2011; Hoffman et al. 2014) as well as Habti (*forthcoming*) have encountered colleagues and reviewers who expressed reservations and thinly disguised suspicion or irritation about using the established methods and modes of inquiry cited throughout this text in which working scholars step out from behind the cloak of passive, third-person, anonymous convention to critically question power relations in ways apparently outside the experience, approval or working knowledge of those presenting extra-paradigmatic critique. In all cases, the colleagues in question seemed to either be genuinely unaware that studies of this type are routinely carried out in several countries across the globe; unfamiliar with the paradigmatic basis that necessitates the wide variety of traditions and modes of inquiry currently in use in contemporary social sciences and humanities; and unable or unwilling to evaluate studies of these nature – or some combination of these possible explanations (Hoffman 2013b). However, in no case did those same reviewers hesitate to attempt an extra-paradigmatic evaluation. As this type of amateur gatekeeping is unfortunately not unusual, the authors frame this as an opportunity to sharpen their argumentation, analysis and general scholarship skills.

4.1.5. Social Media and Transnational Scholarly Precariousness

Regarding social media, the same 'disconnect' our team was experiencing between higher education studies in Finland and mainstream research within the social sciences and humanities was true regarding the vibrant, ongoing global conversations which squarely address the exploitation of the aptly termed *New Faculty Majority* (2014). In social media, a population of *Precarious Faculty* (2014) that now outnumber permanent faculty and staff cuts across the globe; they make up an invisible *Adjunct Nation* (2014) in which "improving the quality of higher education by advancing professional equity and securing academic freedom for all adjunct and contingent faculty" is important, yet apparently unnoticed in groups and institutes like ours as emergent *transnational scholarly precariousness* (Hoffman *forthcoming*). While these parallel social movements engage in "education and advocacy to provide economic justice and academic equity for all college faculty" by promoting "stable, equitable, sustainable, non-exploitative academic environments that promote more effective teaching, learning, and research" (New Faculty Majority 2014), and *Justice For Adjuncts* (2014), scholars in places like FIER seem completely disconnected from these global sites of contention that frame and spotlight "Non-negotiable sites of struggle" (MLA subconference 2014) in which *Adjuncts and Contingents Together* unite (2014) "adjunct and contingent professors at campuses … to address the crisis in higher education and the troubling trend toward a marginalized teaching faculty that endangers our profession". Methodologically

speaking, the idea we could better connect with ICT-based activism bore fruit eventually, by connecting with members of Finnish-based work life scholars Hentonnen and LaPointe (2015), who were using a combination of publications, training and a web-based approach (www.valtamo.fi) to engage the relationship between the ways in which transnational academic capitalism within Finland manifested across Finnish society.

4.2. The Rationale of Risk-Taking and a Methodological Crossroads

With respect to established and ongoing debates surrounding the ways in which the social stratification of the academic workforce clearly implicates higher education as a whole, along with the distinctive research literature on academic work, it is not problematic to conceptually and empirically locate the situation of the authors, locally speaking, within wider, established conversations and debates at the national and global level. That said, much of the active debate and above-mentioned research have missed the ways in which migration and mobility further complicate the social dynamics of academic work, with a few very important exceptions, such as Cantwell & Lee (2010), Mamiseishvili (2010), Pillay (2010) & Torres-Olave (2013). While that might seem like 'pointing out the obvious' to some, the problem for our team was contending with the reality that those same individuals did not appear to be *doing* anything to ameliorate the scholarly precariousness.

In terms of our direct experience, the obvious risks and the emergent trends in our field, our self-ethnography team as individuals and as a group was left with the decision to (also) turn a blind eye to the situation we found ourselves in locally, or attempt to constructively engage with it, through our scholarship, in ways that were going on primarily outside mainland Europe and Finnish higher education in general, and FIER in particular. During the period of time Hoffman became aware of the methodological crossroads the team was at, he decided to talk about risks with his colleagues, who were actually caught up in these dynamics to see what they thought, as individuals.

4.3. Moving Forward, Methodologically-Speaking, with Efficacy: Our Process

In the case of FIER, Hoffman met with Sama, Cools and Siekkinen individually, and proposed that they, together, study their collective circumstances as a group because of the commonalities regarding the professional circumstances they were immediately facing or had faced in the past.

We aimed to begin by studying our immediate circumstances and relate these both to the mainstream literature in the social sciences and the humanities focused on scholarly precariousness in general, and engage the way in which transnational academic capitalism was manifesting in FIER, in ways that were being engaged in distant locations but which had not yet been apprehended locally in a way that we could connect with. In this sense, we decided to directly investigate transnational scholarly precariousness (Hoffman *forthcoming*) and the way in which it manifested in our immediate surroundings.

To do this, firstly as individuals and then as a group, we decided to target *settings*, *seminars* and *conferences* in which our ideas could be presented, advanced and critiqued. These could then be developed as *conference presentations and papers*, then *journal articles*, and other types of publications. These, in turn could support ideas for *funding applications* and for use in our respective *teaching practice* and *service*. We agreed and decided these efforts need not to be thought about as an exclusive future career focus or long-term orientation. Rather, we approached this topic as a set of issues that is currently unresolved in our local environment and which are viable topics in their own right. Moreover, it was clear that working with novel ideas, as they evolve from peer presentations in conferences and seminars, and then developed into viable publications and funding ideas, was *a skill set all scholars who aspire to positions in academe are better off acquiring sooner, rather than later*. Finally it was equally clear that *the precarious professional path Finnish higher education scholars needed to negotiate was a minefield of unquestioned assumptions that were having unanticipated consequences far from understood with respect to 'hidden populations', especially those caught up in mobility and migration dynamics.*

Ultimately, with respect to a wider, more critical appraisal of the literature and the larger, international-level on-going conversations that concerned our topic, our group had the option to 'sit on the side-lines', hoping someone else in a position of power would notice the literature, knowledge/practice gap we had identified and constructively address the situation, or act ourselves. This study is a result of a decision to act on these circumstances, rather than wait.

The concrete set of practices the group agreed to was firstly to begin working on the topic – as perceived by the group, using self-ethnography, as outlined by Alvesson (2003) for the same reasons Hoffman and colleagues had chosen the approach in their 2014 study (*cited above*). In addition, we proposed to work on other distinct types of related, parallel efforts relevant to career development and service projects if and when chances presented themselves – whether discussing and developing funding ideas and publication proposals, in the case of Siekkinen, Sama and Habti; or the review of journal article write-ups and discussing career strategy, in the case of Cools.

Finally, Hoffman asked the group members to begin keeping field notes, in order to record their observations and reflections and sent them Alvesson's (2003) article, which details the rationale and general approach of self-ethnography, the team would use.

4.4 Self-Ethnography: 'If you don't Write it Down, it Never Happened'

> While the conventional researcher (with an anthropological orientation) may ask "What in hell do they think they are up to?" the self-ethnographer must ask "What in hell do we think we are up to? … On the whole, students of organizational culture within one's own national context suffer from a lack of imagination making it possible to accomplish studies not caught up in the taken-for-granted assumptions and ideas that are broadly shared between the researcher and the researched. Too much of organizational life is often too

familiar. For academics studying other academics this is an especially strong problem (Alvesson 2003: 171&177).

The moment the most urgent questions and preoccupations of scholars in universities mirror social transformation in society is precisely the time for sociologically-driven inquiry (Bourdieu 2004). Finnish society is facing a challenging transformation, especially in terms of demographic pressures, still too often thought about in inward-looking, normative, institutional terms that do not explain the alternatives open to us, because they obscure the global nature of the social dynamics shaping structural change in highly situated national and local settings. The extent to which this is actually recognized in a way that is *actionable* in higher education or society is not difficult to call into question (Hoffman, Nokkala & Välimaa *in press;* Pöyhönen & Tarnanen 2015). Because this is the case and not otherwise, shifting methodology, in order to break away from approaches that seem to reproduce social stratification rather than ameliorate it, seemed worth a try.

Our analysis below focuses on data that cannot be framed using what Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2012) term *zombie categories* or 'smoke and mirrors' jargon (Hoffman, Saarinen & Cools 2012). Zombie categories are ideas that once were used to explain a great deal (often by themselves) or by referencing grand theory, like class or globalization. Smoke and Mirrors jargon is 'policy-speak: terms or discourse adopted, borrowed or translated from other countries which are used to design policy and practice aimed at what are seen, by some, as 'new' situations in Finland, like migration and internationalization. Examples include multiculturalism, diversity or good relations. These zombie categories and jargon are routinely substituted for conceptually viable and comparatively meaningful *ideas* that explain our topic at a higher level of abstraction. As an alternative to the methodological path dependency we critique above, producing an empirically-grounded qualitative analysis involving a small group is often the first step on the road to a deeper, wider understanding, explaining – even *engaging* – challenging topic. As a qualitative, ethnographic write-up, the work stands or falls on its own and can be evaluated by anyone familiar with the basic principles of qualitative research (Creswell 2002).

Self-ethnography, although unfamiliar to many in Finnish higher education, is a way to illuminate our topic, using the lived experience of *those inside the institution* of higher education. A variety of insider-ethnography, Alvesson (2003) defines the approach as follows:

> A self-ethnography is a study and a text in which the researcher-author describes a cultural setting to which s/he has a "natural access", is an active participant, more or less on equal terms with other participants. The researcher then works and/or lives in the setting and then uses the experiences, knowledge and access to empirical material for research purposes. *This research is, however, not a major preoccupation, apart from at a particular time when the empirical material is targeted for close scrutiny and writing. The person is thus not an ethnographer in the sense of a professional stranger or a researcher primarily oriented to studying the specific setting. Participant observation is thus not a good label in this case, observing participant is better.* Participation comes first and is *only occasionally complemented with observation in a research focused sense* … the idea of a self-ethnography is

to utilize the position one is in also for other, secondary purposes, i.e. doing research on the setting of which one is a part.
(Alvesson 2003: 174-175, *emphasis added*)

It is very important in our case to underline the episodic nature of self-ethnography, in which fairly long periods of time go by between times the authors were able to focus on this study. This was first and foremost because this was a curiosity-driven, opportunistic study for most of the authors, except Hoffman & Pöyhönen. Secondly, all of the authors were engaged in other studies and duties linked to our jobs alongside this study. Finally, we had no explicit direction on the study other than what we decided was the most appropriate course of action given our circumstances. The main reason we chose Alvesson's (2003) approach was because it was articulated precisely for the institutional setting we were in, as well as a good fit for the very limited amount of time we had for the study. In addition, the approach was very intuitive and accessible. Finally, the ethnographic data, in and of itself, proved far more interesting than the types of data many colleagues were using to study what outwardly was the same topic.

Alvesson draws an important distinction between self-ethnography and auto-ethnography. He points out that the 'self' in the former draws attention to what is happening *around* an individual, the social dynamics, structure and culture an individual is caught up in, while the 'self' in the latter focuses attention on deeply personal experiences felt *inside* an author and what they need to share with a wider audience. In other words, self-ethnography refers to notions of what *others* do and say when a person is a participant in the setting and the analysis of the meanings these doings and sayings might have while auto-ethnography focuses more on a person's *own* doings and sayings in a certain setting (Eriksson 2010).

Alvesson stresses the distinction between the "*careful documentation and interpretation of social events that one is witnessing*", which is the signature of self-ethnography and the introspective, autobiographical, even confessional style of auto-ethnography. As in many ethnographic approaches, introspection is not necessarily out of place, as long as it relates to the overarching analysis, which is the goal – and central challenge of most ethnographic write-ups (Alvesson 2003:174-175, emphasis added; also Clifford & Marcus et al. 1986; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 1995). Because of the multiple roles we have inside the institution and the situations we are involved in, our study combines *both aspects*: a self-reflection of what others are doing and saying, and how we give meanings to these, and analysis of what we are doing and saying and the meanings behind these.

The central advantage our team relied on was that direct observation (Adler & Adler 1998) in settings where naturally occurring events are taking place allows researchers to reduce their dependence on oversimplified, surface-level accounts that often remain at a very low level of abstraction. This allows researchers to craft an analysis of phenomena that those observed may be entirely unaware of, which by definition would be difficult if not impossible to engage in either in a survey or interview.

Alvesson also draws an additional distinction between 'conventional' ethnography and self-ethnography, stressing that, rather than focusing on a setting *outside one's 'home-base'*, the focus is *on one's 'home-base'*. His elaboration of this is worth citing:

> While conventional ethnography is basically a matter of the stranger entering a setting and "breaking in", trying to create knowledge through understanding the natives from their point of view … self-ethnography is more of a *struggle of "breaking out" from the taken for grantedness of a particular framework and of creating knowledge through trying to interpret the acts, words and material used by oneself and one's fellow organizational members from a certain distan*ce. In the first case, we have the researcher as burglar, in the second as a run-away. The burglar researcher wants to overcome obstacles in order to get in contact with a target of interest, the run-away-researcher struggles in order to create sufficient distance in order to get perspective on lived reality. (Alvesson 2003: 176, emphasis added)

Our approach to ethnography also differs that from *a conventional team ethnography* in which an analysis of settings and situations in which research team members are not personally involved or 'insiders'. Our strategy breaks with what many view as 'traditional methodology' in order to analyse social dynamics that have not been adequately critiqued or analysed within our institutional settings. Thus, it is not 'breaking in', but 'breaking out' and conceptually distancing and situating ourselves with regard to everyday activity, both as individuals and as a team.

A major problem in higher education research in general, and Finnish higher education studies in particular at this time, is the overly-narrow range of topics engaged and methodologies, theories and methods used. '*What is not' studied*, like the topic we explore here, *in some cases is far more interesting than 'what is'*. (Abbas, Ashwin & Trahar 2013; Ahola & Hoffman et al. 2013; Hoffman, Rhoades Lee & Shajahan & 2013; Shahjahan & Kezar 2013; Scott 2013). In a comparative sense, this topic seems equally 'underexplored' in several countries, illuminating the tension between areas linked to economic competitiveness (much more studied in Finnish higher education) and social cohesion (much less studied in Finnish higher education studies) (Hoffman, Saarinen & Cools 2012).

Many topics, particularly academic work and migration (as two discrete topic areas in Finland, each implicating two distinct groups of scholars) are studied via reactive implementation or 'follow up' studies, policy research, discourse analysis, and approaches that rely on surveys and different types of interviews. However, in the context of higher education studies, the authors have developed deep reservations about these conventional, over-used approaches, in particular that, in general, surveys in these areas are often conceptually ungrounded and unproblematized, as was the case in the career survey received from the author's university (described above). Interviews, in particular also, easily trigger 'impression management', 'script following' or 'storytelling', far more often than profound insights into everyday assumptions that seldom are questioned (Alvesson 2003; Johnson 2002). Reactive or 'follow up' studies of reform focus on consensus-driven events, rather than the 'bottom up' logic of curiosity driven approaches that are sceptical, as a point of departure, of approaches that over-rely on the assumption that authority figures have a good grip on the most urgent needs linked to higher education and social change.

Higher educational settings, particularly universities, are often good candidates for self-ethnography (Alvesson (2003: 171, 176), because issues linked to personal, institutional and occupational prestige and reputation, complicated by organizational and professional loyalties, are often at the front of people's minds—*especially* in interview situations. Further,

self-initiated, emergent topics, while having the potential to be highly interesting and catch attention, demand, as we have found out, careful attention to methodological 'fit'. The thick(er) description (Geertz 1973) we opted for, in our development of this topic, carries many risks. However, these were assumed because we needed to methodologically move forward, in a manner that allowed critique by our peers and development of the topic and engagement, aiming at impact. *Impact*, in particular, is not something higher education researchers in Finland are famous for. While our efforts can only be understood as an initial first step, it is one that cannot be simply 'skipped' on the way to illuminating the most fundamental dynamics that run within and across national, organizational, cultural, generational and disciplinary settings whose relationships to each other are simply not understood as such (Hoffman et al 2014; Hoffman, Nokkala & Välimaa *in press*).

Alvesson (2003) warns that the self-ethnography carries the additional risk of 'backing off' sensitive topics and taboos, resulting in less-than-bold analysis in order that everyone involved 'save face'. In order to avoid this, an incremental member-check (as detailed below) of participants within the scope of the study seems warranted in order to address this challenge. The approach to known challenges—the risks we face as we conduct this study and submit it for peer review—are summed up well by Alvesson (2003:183-184, emphasis added):

> In general, research suffers from the inability of researchers to liberate themselves from socially shared frameworks. *That evaluators agree may not be a sign of objectivity as much as culturally or paradigmatically shared biases* … The trick is to get away from frozen positions, irrespective if they are grounded in personal experiences or shared frameworks. *A problem is that staying within socially shared frames and biases may make research life easier – while what is seen as personal biases are sanctioned, proceeding from and reproducing socially shared biases may be applauded.*

It is highly probable that we will encounter colleagues in the course of these studies who would have appreciated us (more) for adopting the biases we critique in this study, while lauding the 'egalitarian fabric' of what is often uncritically represented as a 'shared' social feature of Finnish society and her educational institutions. As should be very clear in our problematization of our topic above and our analysis and discussion below, we neither share the biases illuminated in this study, nor see uncritical framing as viable, *especially where education is concerned*. This is because education is the single Finnish institution that almost everyone in the general population passes through, in some form or another (Saukkonen 2013). If we as 'clever scientists' are unable to come to grips with how social change plays out within our own building(s), using the tools of our own areas of specialization, explaining this in *any other context* or topic seems dubious.

Finally Alvesson's (2003) attention to power dynamics, which is starkly evident in contemporary higher education institutions and manifests in *the power to include or exclude* (Välimaa, Papatsiba & Hoffman *in press*), convinced us that a sustained examination of our topic would be well served by framing our efforts to date—as well as taking the next steps forward—in terms of self-ethnography. Our scope of analysis includes individuals and groups with a great deal of power, working in tight proximity to individuals and groups who have none. Because of this, methodologically speaking, we can hopefully engage our topic in a

constructive manner that allows us to lay a qualitative foundation for further development which is open for all concerned to critique.

4.4.1. Data, Methods and Analysis

The switch from Hoffman's original approach (within the AOF study) from *case study* (in 2003) to our team's new methodological strategy of *self-ethnography* immediately freed us both from the traps inherent in interviewing within higher education, especially those detailed in the previous section, and allowed us to rely primarily on our own *direct observations* (Adler & Adler 1998), which, ethnographically speaking, took the form of *jottings* in the margins of our calendars, on our phones and reflection in our *field notes* (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 1995). In addition to our field notes, an important source of data was *email communication* and *recorded conversations* of key meetings and discussions between AOF team members, including Pöyhönen and Stikhin from our Unversity's Centre for Applied Language Studies (CALS).

As is noted by Alvesson (2003), self-ethnography is not a full-time pursuit and is most usually episodic, in the sense that our team's ethnographic access to our topic meant that while we engaged in collecting data, thinking and communicating about our topic, this study occurred in the background of the myriad of other responsibilities and life events each of us was involved in. While this is quite usual for some in our team, it was quite new for others.

Because of the methodological shift we experienced, our analysis is presented in the form of an ethnographic write-up, in which the evolving text has been continuously framed and reframed, in ongoing iterations amongst the authors, based on our data, focused conversations on this topic and with respect to successive presentations of this topic, in several types of venues, including local research team presentations at the Finnish Institute for Educational Research, where Hoffman, Cools and Siekkinen were employed and the Centre for Applied Language Studies (here and after CALS), where Poyhönen & Stikhin were employed, dating from August, 2013, and several international conferences, till the present time.

Our iterative writing process as analytical inquiry (Richardson 1998) is aimed at the type of holistic ethnographic write-up you are reading. As such, *our analysis of the 'blind spot' we discuss, is a methodological outcome of our team's iterative reflection, collaborative writing and analysis of ways of thinking about and doing research that constitutes everyday reality to some researchers, while remaining completely invisible to others* (Hoffman et al. 2014). The analysis we present lays an empirical foundation for further efforts, including the analysis of policy and practice related to several substantive issues spotlighted during the time in which this journey took place, as well as the further conceptualizing of the topic we engage below. While those topics are all beyond the narrow scope of this article and handled in follow-on studies, what remains is this account of our initial insights, which resulted from taking a calculated risk on a methodological road less-travelled.

4.4.1.1. Rationale for Ignoring Convention

Surveys and interviews in particular stand little chance of gaining traction on this topic, unless as part of a mixed-method study, in which viable substantive and conceptual connections that will stand up to robust international peer review can be made. Our assertion is based on Tight's (2012) observation that higher education researchers over-rely on *the accounts of others*, as opposed to observation and critical engagement of naturally occurring events. In a study of this topic, researchers relying solely on surveys or interviews will either be asking senior scholars or 'key informants' to account for phenomena they have caused (intentionally or inadvertently), or cannot otherwise explain or engage, despite research literature and discussion surrounding this issue as it exists in the global or Finnish context. On the other hand one can query early stage/career or mid-career scholars about dynamics they may be entirely unaware of. Given those realities, the idea of *asking people questions they cannot answer* may very well be a methodological 'road to nowhere'.

4.4.1.2. Engaging Methodological Limitations: Backyard Research, in the First Person.

Researching one's own professional context or 'backyard research' involves known difficulties, particularly regarding power issues, information disclosure and assumptions of bias (Creswell 2002: 184). That said, these difficulties can be outweighed by the fact that one's 'backyard' can also be a unique context which would pose other researchers significant access problems (Johnson 2002). In this regard, it is our belief that researchers using the approaches we critique in this study would have little or no chance accomplishing the analysis and discussion we present below using the methodologies higher education researchers in Finland are more comfortable with.

Despite the methodological advances made in the 20th century, it is not difficult to find scholars who are very squeamish about stepping up and critiquing their own organization, institution and/or profession *in the first person*. This denies the empirical and conceptual reality that "sometimes, the social scientist becomes his or her own object of study: it is their life which is the focus … the focus may be on the sociologist's own 'insider' life but it is connected through sociology to an 'outsider' world of wider social processes" (Plummer 2001: 32). When the voices 'connecting the dots' between our biographies, history and a particular intersection in society (Mills 1959) belong to the researcher, it is hard to deny Ellis and Bochner's maxim "to show how important it is to make the researcher's own experience a topic of investigation in its own right", stepping away from writing "in passive third-person voice … written from nowhere by nobody" (Ellis & Bochner 2000: 734). This effort seeks to avoid "contributing to the flotilla of qualitative writing that is simply not interesting to read because adherence to the model requires writers to silence their own voices and view themselves as contaminants" (Richardson 1998: 347). In short, our efforts involve connecting our own direct observations to a wider set of concerns central to social science and higher education.

Despite the voices immediately above, every time we have sent a study arising from the advocacy/empowerment paradigm (Creswell 2002) we are working in for initial review to a higher education publication, the use of *actual names* and *events* within our own *institution*

and *specialty*, as Bourdieu (1988) found, disturbs the sensibilities of some reviewers in the highly conservative higher education research community (Hoffman et al. 2013b). To be frank, this issue has caused worries also amongst the authors of this very article, because of our knowledge that power issues are unavoidable. The risk to be excluded or marginalized even further is higher for some of us than others.

This said, all of the studies have been published, with the names of the people in the situation. Because this is so commonly seen as a limitation underlines the risks the authors are taking with their careers and credibility. That said, given the 'disconnects' we are working within, we would assert this is not actually a methodological limitation, especially as this study is well-situated in the international literature and the global debates relevant to our topic. Rather, we are pointing out a normative limitation, in our fields of specialization and *how – or if – our specializations inform state-of-the-art inquiry and impacts institutional practice*.

4.4.1.3. Balancing Anonymity, Privacy and Efficacy: Incremental Member Check and Impact Aims

While we have no issues with calling attention to the topic we are explicitly researching, we do draw a distinction within the ever-widening group of colleagues who we did not originally anticipate becoming caught up in our analysis. As was noted by Hoffman and his colleagues (2013b), the scope of a self-ethnography can sometimes widen, quite quickly, based on *direct observation of unanticipated events related to a study already underway*. These events which, by definition, cannot be anticipated, nevertheless introduce a valuable opportunity to actively engage people in the widening scope of analysis. Since our study did involve a quickly evolving scope of analysis, our team is engaged in an *incremental member check*. We originally did this explicitly with the members of our research team in our initial seminar presentation of this topic (see analysis section, below). However, as becomes clear in the analysis, our actual scope of analysis could be said to be FIER, as a whole, as well as the CALS, in which the AOF project and some of the authors (Pöyhönen & Stikhin) were based.

When the study reached a point where a larger member check could be done, especially with regard to FIER, an invitation to a conference presentation of our study (in progress) was made to FIER personnel in August 2014. This, in turn generated a follow-up request by FIER personnel to present our analysis within FIER. This was carried out in October 2014 in an in-service training event. During that presentation we stressed that the data in our analysis below has been altered in such a way as to render identification of anyone other than the authors anonymous until such time that these persons indicate this is – or is not – necessary.

Finally, follow-on studies and interventions will result from our efforts, consistent with the rationale for the *approach* to transnational scholarly precariousness we have developed in general and the *situation* of the individual authors in particular. The first, this institutional analysis, is aimed at a contribution to the body of literature on academic work in higher education studies in general and Finnish higher education in particular. It was presented at the *August 2014 (Finnish) National Higher Education Symposium*, in Jyväskyä, Finland. The second was more narrowly-focused on the potential of self-ethnography as a research-based organizational intervention, in the annual conference of the *Finnish Society for the Study of Ethnic Relations and Migration, in Helsinki, Finland, in October 2014*. A third paper on the

nature of transnational scholarly precariousness, focused on tensions illuminated by an ethnographic focus on the individual perceptions and experiences of scholars, was presented at the annual conference of the *Association for the Study of Higher Education*, *In Washington, D.C., in November, 2014.*

All participants in the scope of our research have been or will be made aware of and invited to attend these presentations and comment on the draft manuscripts of these studies. As the catch phrase of 'evidence based policy' is so often bandied about in the same uncritical manner as the 'smoke and mirrors' discourse we critique above, we assert our studies form both the basis for this, as well as further research on the issues we have identified in our studies, but which are outside the direct scope of this write-up. The added value of this type of incremental procedure is to stimulate discussion on the type of alternative, conceptually problematized, empirically-grounded analyses necessary to get traction on increasingly refined *better explanations* of the topics we bring into focus in studies of this type. Active debate and discussion of this type is necessary to counter the tendency of asymmetrical consideration of topics, especially in studies of internationalization, migration and mobility, which often over-focus on only narrow facets of topics of this nature, at the expense of robust, symmetrical accounts which are comparatively viable and constitute new knowledge, ready for international peer review at the state-of-the-art.

5. Analysis: Analysing Our 'Academic Limbo'

The following analysis, in the form of a focus on three vignettes, is a 'thin slice of a thick description'. In order to achieve focus on the institutional context, along with the purposes of this set of studies (as detailed above), we have been selective in our initial focus, spotlighting particularly revealing and fundamental moments and events during the course of our study. In this regard, it is first and foremost the *unquestioned assumptions*, *unintended consequences* and *hidden populations* obscured by *institutional dynamics* that is the most relevant to our initial published account of this study.

While this approach could be fairly criticized as 'half a story', we would firstly counter that higher education studies in Finland, particularly those focused on internationalization and mobility, are flooded with studies that ignore the power of social structure at the expense of unquestioned assumptions linked to methods favoured by researchers operating within paradigms covered by the umbrella of methodological individualism. This specifically concerns the upward conflation (Archer 1995) that results from an overreliance on interviews, surveys and policy research, combined with under-reliance on critique (Teichler 1996, Tight 2012; Hoffman et al. 2013b). These researchers often assume and seek a focus on *intentionality, rationality* and *agency*, none of which we encountered during this study, nor typically encounter with regard to topics of this nature cited throughout this text. The methods and data most relevant to our institutional analysis is *direct observation of naturally occurring events*. Secondly, the highly situated *individual* accounts, needed to form a more holistic, comprehensive picture of this analysis are handled in an identical manner, and published in the companion article as detailed above. The literature, policy and practice gap illuminated by our efforts as a whole indicate first and foremost *analytically grounding a qualitative, empirical analysis* that lends itself to further studies with respect to state-of-the-art scholarship, policy analysis and collegial debate and practical organizational intervention.

5.1. Unquestioned Assumptions and Minimizing Misrecognized Transnational Scholarly Precariousness and Exclusion

The nature of our situation, as a group, became clear *the first time we presented our ideas* to the research team in which Hoffman, Cools and Siekkinen were based and in which Sama was trying to become employed. This research group, *Education and Social Change*, meets regularly to present its members' research in progress, to discuss results and new ideas, and invite visitors whose work is of interest to the team. On 20 November 2013, our self-ethnography team presented the set of ideas we had become interested in and received what was perceived by the authors as a 'mixed reception'.

Hoffman had noticed on previous occasions that calling assumptions regarding the nature of equity into question in Finnish society in general and Finnish higher education employment patterns in particular sometimes provoked defensive reactions on the parts of individual group members. Now that a *group* was doing work on this topic, the reactions seemed stronger, reminiscent of the first time Hoffman, Sama (along with El Massri, Raunio & Korhonen) had presented the work which led to their 2011 and 2013a publications. Following

this initial presentation, Hoffman wrote up his thoughts in his field notes—as an email to the self-ethnography team—the following day:

> The most important ideas that came out of yesterday's presentation is that we have a realistic chance to try something that's not been done before in our institute, probably this university, maybe even Finland … What I mean is that we find ourselves in a position in which 'the normal way of doing things or framing issues' is not consistent with a reality we are trying to pursue in our careers … Last week, in a different conference (on a different continent), I organized a Symposium panel that focused precisely on the type of situation our group is in at the moment. Specifically, situations that have not been successfully resolved, adequately problematized, conceptually-speaking, nor studied in empirically meaningful terms. Nevertheless, those kinds of situations exist and we are fully caught up in one of them … The point in our Symposium (in the USA) was to spotlight scholars who had also encountered these sorts of situations and, recognizing them for what they were, created a novel approach that allowed them to overcome the 'traps' of normative substantive framing, inappropriate use of theory, using methodological approaches or methods that allowed the phenomena to remain obscure, vague, conflated, elided, etc. (methodology that obscures more than it reveals) and empirical foci that do not allow traction on the topic in focus. Specifically, *in our situation, the way in which things are normally dealt with and thought about is perpetuating the situation, rather than resolving the situation* … The most important confirmation I got that we are really onto something were the comments, especially those offered by one of our senior colleagues, all of which I understood, but also which reveal the normative contours of how a topic like ours most 'typically' might be thought of, if approached by senior scholars in FIER, drawing on the framing which – in many ways – has created the situation we are in at the moment. This is not the same as saying senior scholars in our system have deliberately created this situation. Rather, the social dynamics have emerged, very slowly and subtly, over a long period of time. The reason we notice them now is because of the contradictions and paradoxes between what people 'say' they are trying to do and what they 'actually' do. This is nothing new in social science and the humanities – and these contradictions and paradoxes are precisely what we are going to study …   A second set of comments from a different senior colleague were far more relevant and concrete as to what we need to do now, i.e. decide on the kind of data we will use and how it will be analyzed   …   My main point is: not many scholars get to identify and study a fundamentally 'new' topic   … I recognize that the circumstances drawing us together at the moment are not ideal and I do not take them lightly. That said, this might be the most interesting, novel study being carried out in FIER at the moment. We can change this situation, while at the same time, moving us forward in our respective career paths, in ways that are respected and recognized in our fields. Thanks for yesterday!

It was very clear, during our first presentation that some members of our team, especially senior scholars, were having difficulties trying to 'place' or take seriously the approach our self-ethnography team was using. One of these colleagues characterized Sama's comments

more as a form of 'therapy' than scholarship, suggesting we 're-label' our approach in terms of approaches they were familiar with. However, another colleague, while unfamiliar with the approach we were using, offered practical, general hints that would help our team move toward types of generic framing that would help those unfamiliar with the overarching paradigm and methodological approach 'get' the idea via connecting the dots between substantive framing, theory, data, analysis and discussion.

The most interesting aspect of this discussion for Hoffman was not the reaction of the senior scholars in the research group, it was the negative reaction of the self-ethnography team, especially Sama and Cools, who perceived the reception of our ideas as the minimization of a situation the research group did not really understand, or as a rebuke for having brought the topic forward. As Cools wrote in her field notes:

> I was not surprised of all these 'critiques' and negativity … The way our colleague said 'Yeah yeah I also had these periods of unemployment' ... shows how unimportant and alien this subject is. Or perhaps it's actually 'too close' and that's why it is hard to talk about it more openly? … I agree some may have had the impression of having seen our presentation as a therapeutic kind of event; still, what we do is scientifically grounded. We know more about this because of what we're doing. In the end, it may have a therapeutic effect on us, why wouldn't it? … Afterwards, though, one always has very mixed feelings and wonders: Did I reveal too much? Do our efforts make me (therefore: us) too vulnerable?

During the presentation, Siekkinen and Cools had been quite open about the fact that a common linkage between them, Sama and Habti was that they currently had no funding or formal positions. This was particularly problematic in Siekkinen's view, whose typical employment contacts had been mainly for extremely short periods of time, on very small contracts, often month-by-month. Further, when asking advice on the way forward, Siekkinen told Hoffman a senior scholar had advised her to *apply for mobility funding*. This advice empirically illuminated two key links to both migration debates in the Finnish context, which often *only* focus on persons with a migrant background, both of which have the important policy implications discussed in the last section of this study. The first of these was shown in Siekkinen's reaction to this suggestion, an emphatic *"S/he knows I'm not going anywhere!"* Siekkinen, a young, single parent, has no desire at this time, nor the realistic possibility, to pursue the funding schemes she was advised were a 'way forward' in her career. Even if she wanted to try this option, the practical difficulties would be considerable, compared to a person without a child. The structural consequences of early stage and early career mobility are serious, especially in the Finnish university system, where mobility delays career progression and causes many to avoid mobility entirely (Raunio, Korhonen & Hoffman 2010). *Local circulation patterns* (Vabø 2003) often confine the geographic territory of Nordic scholars. The most important mobility pattern in Finnish universities – specifically, the local and national patterns – is *no mobility,* a pattern entirely missed by many, as it is an assumption (Hoffman 2007). 'Invisible' mobility assumptions like these are seldom questioned, therefore they are unproblematized and projected, as was the case with Siekkinen's mobility 'option' for solving 'her' problem. This, by definition, means the migration-related implications are unseen, as well. Siekkinen, when characterizing her own scholarly efforts termed her scholarly status during this period of time as *'Academic Limbo'*.

Looking back, the basic ideas our team presented on 20 November 2014 ironically underlined a set of truths that might be called uncomfortable except for the fact they are not recognized, as 'truths' at all. I use the word ironic to underline Alvesson's (2003) observation that it is the *irony* of the situation we find ourselves in within universities that justifies the use of ethnographic methods to more closely examine the difference between what we *believe* we are doing and what we are *actually* doing (Bourdieu 1988). Specifically, what we find ironic in our particular situation is that our FIER research group specializes in the study of 'academic work' and has even sought funding during the time this study was in progress to study 'why scholars leave academia'. It is clear, on the one hand, that many in FIER could say the answer to this question is not particularly well understood in the Finnish university system. However, the main difference between our self-ethnography team's understanding of 'why scholars leave academia' and other approaches we are aware of is our *direct experience of confronting the assumptions our analysis spotlights* in this study, and *the means we are using to actually answer that identical question*. The main unquestioned assumptions we highlight appear above, in our problematization of our topic in terms of theory of the middle range (Merton 1968) in the introduction to this study. First and foremost are assumptions that avoid questioning the relationship between robust conceptual explanations of social stratification, that have *existed for decades,* and the well-known conceptual coordinates of academic work, both of which are simultaneously masked and avoided in favor of the Finnish variant of methodological nationalism as it plays out in basic units (Becher & Kogan 1992), focused on low competitive horizons like education (Shajahan & Kezar 2012; Hoffman et al. 2013a). These social dynamics are so powerful that the connections between the circumstances of our self-ethnography team – discussed in our 20 November 2013 presentation – *were not connected with the question* 'why scholars leave academia' even though three scholars considering 'leaving academia' were sitting around the same table with other scholars actively seeking funding to 'better understand' the same topic.

It was already in this session where we began to realize there were few or no 'safe' places for early-stage/career scholars to talk about their experiences without feeling ridiculed and patronized for raising the topic, inside our own institute.

5.2. The Unintended Consequences of Group-Think

The type of social structure and organizational dynamics our team has become interested in cannot be problematized as *intentional* or a result of *conscious thought* any more than can the problematization of 'why scholars leave academia'. Rather, it is probably more accurate to assert that *not thinking* about emergent patterns of transnational precariousness (Hoffman *forthcoming*) and what these patterns imply about our potential as an institute are a result of 'group-think'. In other words, our policy and practice (group-think), especially when it comes to apprehending the types of challenges we spotlight in this study, more accurately fall under the category of *unintended consequences*. The idea of unintended consequences was observed on 26 November 2013 as Hoffman attended an institute-wide meeting of FIER. The purpose of the meeting was re-thinking FIER's institutional strategy. Hoffman has been employed in FIER since 2002 and has participated in these types of events on two other occasions. What was striking, as the members of several different research groups, support staff and management gathered offsite in a local hotel, was *not who was present*, both generally and specifically. It *was who was absent*. The day after this meeting, Hoffman

emailed two of the Professors leading the reformulation of FIER's strategy. The body of the email reads as follows:

> I'm not sure exactly how the strategic development process will go from here, but I wanted to make one observation on the cluster of topics that included social inclusion yesterday. In our small group discussions I tried to raise the idea that we - as an institute - are not very good in this area, and for an educational research institute in Finland, this is not viable.
>
> In terms of these types of topic, demographically speaking, the most interesting things that were discussed yesterday were not, in general, 'the areas and themes in the exercise' and 'who' was discussing those things, in terms of individuals and groups. The most interesting things, in terms of literature/knowledge/practice gaps were 'who was not in that room' and 'the topics and themes this prevents us from seeing, articulating, problematizing and engaging'. As a group, I'm wondering if we really notice(d) what a homogenous group we are, in several aspects. When thought about, in terms of the global trends introduced in the opening lecture, I get the idea that 'we don't know what we don't know', which is dangerous, because of the power inherent in education as the only institution most people in society pass through. The capacity to constructively critique and study these types of topics are what I found most missing in much of yesterday's discussion … I hope FIER, as an institute can develop the critical capacity to engage topics like these, because some of our competitors in Finland are already moving on this, but we might be in the best position to speak to this, in Finland, if we chose.
>
> I think there are some significant potentials in this area, because – comparatively speaking – several European countries are in a similar situation because of demographically-driven phenomena.
>
> Sorry if I'm repeating something someone else mentioned yesterday, but I never heard much critique within the ideas that were mentioned, except for our colleague's observations about social inclusion. The other comments that came close to this had too many unquestioned assumptions that won't stand up to the kind of robust conceptually driven, empirically grounded problematization I'm thinking of.
>
> Hope this kind of comment is not too critical, it's meant to be constructive, as it implies opportunities to research things that are 'not seen' by many, particularly in education.

An excerpt from Hoffman's field notes from the same day gives further context to the email:

> What I found most odd 'missing' from that session were firstly the people on our (self-ethnography) team who are 'unofficially here' (like illegal migrants or something). Secondly, of the 44 people in the room I found it surreal that there was such a narrow range of people, in terms of ascriptive characteristics. I especially thought it weird that people either did not notice this or if they did (which I really wonder about) chose not to talk about, when thinking of the 'hot topics of the next two decades'.

More specifically, the persons in the room on the day we discussed the best strategic FIER focus can be mainly described in terms of 'sacred and safe' ascriptive characteristics. The

only two exceptions to this were Hoffman and one other early-stage researcher from an EU member country. This is not the same thing as saying the ultra-narrow demographic profile of FIER's personnel is good or bad, in normative terms. But it is direct observations of this nature and thinking about their implications that, as was pointed out in the email to the strategy committee, illuminate the potential downside of 'group-think'.

The broader context for these observations concerns FIER's nationally mandated status as an autonomous, interdisciplinary research institute, thematically focused on education. In addition to semi-regular reformulations of institutional strategy, Hoffman has also been present in panel FIER's presentations to two visiting international evaluation teams. On both occasions, FIER did not shine, compared to other institutions on the campus in which FIER is situated. The units who did exceptionally well on both occasions can be fairly said to operate at world class competitive horizons (See Hoffman, Nokkala & Välimaa *in press*). This is not exceptional in the sense that no university is composed of world-class units – across the campus. What is highly interesting in FIER's case is that a traditional rationalization of our mediocre international evaluation results has been that visiting international panels have not 'understood' the nature and the importance of FIER's 'national mission', which can be easily missed if only the empirical proxies linked to world class competitive horizons are used when comparing FIER with institutes which focus mainly on cutting-edge, high-risk/high-gain, state-of-the-art outcomes.

Alternative interpretations are that FIER personnel might not be doing an excellent job in explaining the nature and importance of our national mission; that we actually do not understand what might be the most important aspects of the changing nature of the national mission ourselves or that international evaluation panels are 'blind' to what FIER has presented in the past, because the empirical proxies that indicate the nature and importance of our national mission simply are not one of the criteria they have developed or been supplied with. It could also be the case that what we have regarded as very important 'traditions' are actually not all that interesting regarding the relationship between cutting-edge scholarship and high impact societal needs in 21st century Finland. The narrowly-framed, deductive, 'in-the-box' approach to a 'strategy for the future' carried out by a culturally homogeneous group of scholars seems like a sure-fire recipe for another mediocre international evaluation, rather than any other type of outcome.

Considering the bigger picture of global scholarship, the challenges and potentials of the institutional analysis presented in this self-ethnography are, ironically, *beyond the state-of-the-art* in education in several countries with identical challenging demographic pressures Finland now faces. Specifically, there is a rapidly-aging, culturally-homogenous (in terms relative to other EU or OECD countries) and rapidly-retiring workforce in a culturally, linguistically and geographically isolated society, which is highly ambivalent about the 'place' migrants 'should' occupy in the workforce (Forsander 2004; Jaakkola 2005; Koivukangas 2003; Pöyhönen & Tarnanen 2015). Even generally, critical, conceptually-driven, empirically-grounded comparative studies of the relationships between ascriptive characteristics and career trajectory within academic work are not what higher education specialists in mainland Europe are known for (Tight 2012; Hoffman et al 2013b). Because of FIER's relationship to education as a societal institution, the potential to more broadly approach strategy, in terms of policy, practice and what is actually known about Europe and Finland's most exigent challenges, is open to us.

In other words, the way in which we are 'not thinking' about how social stratification plays out *within academic work*, prevents us, by definition, from considering whether or not social stratification is any longer an issue of concern within our internationally valorised education system, of which FIER occupies a unique position (Hoffman *forthcoming*). An interesting subtext to this was the theme of the 2014 Higher Education Symposium, hosted by FIER, where this analysis was presented: *Eriarvoistuva korkeakoulutus?* or: 'Is Higher Education becoming more unequal?' The 'strategy process' observed during this study, if it relies on the kind of efforts defined by 'driving through the rear-view mirror of precedence', has not seriously grappled with that question in terms of policy, practice or impact, dismissing it as something that occurs under the zombie categories critiqued in our introduction and our discussion, that have never before yielded any progress, nor are likely to in the future (Author1 2013). As long as the discourse on sacred and safe ascriptive characteristics remains 'disconnected' from the profane and problematic; short-circuiting meaningful analysis of both in relation to academic work, it is not easy to see how groups of the type involved in our 'strategy process' will be able to problematize and engage the theme of the conference they ironically hosted on the theme: *Eriarvoistuva korkeakoulutus?*

5.3. Illuminating 'Disconnects' and Bringing AOF Back Into the Picture

Up till this point, what was clear was that there were four fundamental 'disconnects' our team was experiencing. The most fundamental is a growing, global annoyance, amongst higher education specialists outside mainland Europe, with conventional approaches that prevented us from creatively engaging *topics that matter*. This was clear both in the 2013 Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) and Society for research on Higher Education (SRHE) annual conferences in the USA and UK, and specifically in the above-cited symposium facilitated by Hoffman and a workshop focused on novel methodological approaches to higher education in the SRHE conferences (as cited above). While Shahjahan and Kezar (2013) and the SRHE conference panel of the same year were both focused outwardly on methodology, Shahjahan and Marginson (*personal communications in those presentations*) underlined the importance of the need for a *holistic appraisal of topic selection, general approach, the use of theory, methodology and methods, and write-up conventions*.

A second 'disconnect' was the perceived lack of interest in the type of topic we are focused on locally, in our research group and institute, when contrasted to more conventional and traditional modes of inquiry and topic selection. When analysed ethnographically, this disconnect manifests between the *top floor* and the *shop floor* (Cantwell & Lee 2010). This disconnect becomes visible when considering the lack of serious thought given to the ways in which transnational scholarly precariousness manifests in concrete settings like FIER (Hoffman *forthcoming*).

The third area apparently outside the consciousness of those immediately around us was the way in which our topic was playing out, internationally, within social media. This seems a further irony, especially surprising because members of our FIER research team are focused on both 'why scholars leave academia' and 'the emancipatory potential of social media within networked knowledge societies' (Välimaa, Papatsiba & Hoffman *in press*). Despite what we 'say' we are interested in and what is in fact happening in the world around us, our

FIER team is having challenges drawing connections and conclusions ourselves, and putting these into practice within our own institution.

The 'disconnects' between the state-of-the-art scholarship and academic practices focused on our topic and the precarious circumstances of the authors became visible in the fourth and most powerful way when presenting this topic to our peers *outside Finland*. It was in front of critical audiences, in seven international presentations following upon the original presentation, to our local research group (above) as it evolved, and which ended, full circle, in Finland in August 2014. In conversations with colleagues from across the globe, our topic evolved when speaking with peers interested in both the established literature on social stratification and the ways in which distinct forms of methodological nationalism, across several countries, generate a set of hollow rationalizations for ignoring the issues we were engaging, or for remaining ignorant of the relationships between social stratification in the ranks of higher education personnel and social stratification across societies.

Our general approach and specific topic resonated in the international conference audiences in the USA, UK, Spain and Germany. Comments were encouraging, constructive and followed up after each presentation, with discussions from members of the audience who we now recognize as a transnational population which is visible – *if one knows where and how to look* – across several countries. That said, this population 'vanishes', like a magician's trick within the smoke and mirrors of zombie categories, methodological nationalism and local institutional dynamics.

5.3.1. Connecting the Dots: Aspiration, Achievement and Abandonment in Academic Work

The last trip of the 2013 was a research team visit by several members of the AOF research team to Dublin. It was on this trip that it became clear that several members of the CALS component of AOF were, analytically speaking, in the same situation as the FIER early-stage/career researchers Cools and Seikkinen or Sama, who wanted to join our team. Pöyhönen and Hoffman discussed this and agreed that Hoffman would brief Stikhin on the self-ethnography and see if he was interested in joining. Following that meeting, Stikhin agreed to consider the approach, together with those of us who had begun in 2013. A further advantage of widening our team's efforts to include specialists from CALS was that the critical modes of inquiry that make higher education specialist squeamish are 'business as usual' in the scholarly landscape of CALS. This structural feature underpinned the efforts that led to the Hoffman's collaboration on the AOF project from the beginning. Finally, the strategic focus of CALS, when thought about in terms of our analytical framing (see Figure 2, below) is much clearer than FIER's.

The most interesting aspect of our focus on analytically illuminating academic trajectory, using a fundamentally different methodological approach, was a symmetrical series of empirically-grounded studies of the *institutional nature* of the set of phenomena that came into view, as well as key *individual experiences and perceptions*, the combination of which we believe may have remained untouched by the unquestioned assumptions that prop up the local variety of methodological nationalism we critique in this study, especially with regard

to higher education employment and transnational scholarly precariousness (Hoffman *forthcoming*).

As mentioned above, due to the narrow focus of this write-up, we make a virtue out of necessity and focus the last section of our ethnographically-driven analysis on *institutional dynamics that better explain and situate the circumstances in which a scholar's trajectory is characterized by further achievement beyond critical career thresholds or ends in abandonment.* The most interesting question raised by our framing is the critical question: *Who abandons who?*

5.3.2. 'Strategies' of Precedence and Potential: Hidden Populations Within Parallel Competitive Horizons

Taking a step back, trying to gain conceptual clarity and distance to this topic, one thing becomes very clear. The central irony of developing a better understanding of our topic demands symmetrical conceptual problematization of the social dynamics this study brings into focus. This is especially clear with regard to the original problematization the AOF team began with regarding *aspiration, achievement and abandonment*. What we have observed is the tendency to project, conflate and misrecognize *individual* narratives, anecdotes and projections and confuse these with 'explanations', while not realizing more powerful explanations are actually being obscured within the social structure of major societal institutions like higher education. This is a challenge that has been well addressed by scholars like Archer (1995), Beck (1992) and Bourdieu (1988, 2004). In migration and mobility literature, in general and the AOF project in particular, this presents a difficulty for addressing the focal notion of *abandonment*. Can abandonment be explained in terms of particular individuals or is it more of an institutional story? In other words, *who – or what – is* abandoning *who* or *what*?

5.3.3. An Institutional Story

The reason our approach and topic was *misrecognized* and disturbing (Bourdieu 1988) in FIER but recognized and resonated in the USA, the UK, Spain and Germany was because *topics like ours are more powerful institutional stories than individual stories*. And institutional stories are 'out of reach' to those using substantive framing that hides more than it clarifies, ideas not powerful enough to address complex topics; to those ignoring theoretical conversations in which important questions pertaining to topics like ours decades ago are asked, explained and answered; and to those employing methodological approaches that channel our efforts into seeking the wrong answers to the wrong questions from individuals who *simply have no idea that the social dynamics that actually explain why what they perceive as 'reality' are remarkably different when viewed using a different set of assumptions.*

This is not the same thing as saying the experiences and perceptions of individuals are irrelevant. Robust analyses of individual accounts are crucial to gaining symmetrical traction on the multiple accounts of these circumstances that exist. But it is the highly situated,

dynamic and particular set of intersecting cultures most relevant to the social structure we focus on in this study *that already exist*, before any of us ever stepped into the FIER or CALS research institutes, that institutional analysis illuminates. These social dynamics determine, define and delimit, to a very large extent, the positions and stakes within that field, which in turn illuminates both potential and *actual* individual scholarly trajectories. These social dynamics *have not changed* since Bourdieu (1988) articulated the tensions and struggles that distinguished *scholars who merely focus on simple reproduction*, within their immediate sphere of influence from *scholars who transform the world through their relentless search for new knowledge*. Because of the nature of today's higher education institutions, the stratification of the global division of scholarly labour under a hegemonic regime of transnational academic capitalism, the power of the social structure that will be encountered by an early stage or early career scholar, stepping into, for example, FIER or CALS, is not usually comprehended any more than a fish comprehends water. The main challenge we face in the analysis of institutional dynamics, though, in higher education is that at institute or department level, the leadership was trained as *scholars first*. Leadership, by contrast, prompted Teichler to quip 'higher education leadership, management and administration is the last bastion of amateurism' (U. Teichler, personal communication, August 28, 2002). In that instant Teichler articulated a remarkably similar rationale to Alvesson for using self-ethnography, in order to *avoid* interviewing scholars about explaining *anything* having to do with institutional leadership. As he wrote earlier:

> Ironically, research on all higher education, as well as the mobility and international aspects of interest to us here, is paradoxically both a rich and vulnerable position because it addresses actors who, besides believing that the nature of society and culture can only be fully understood through systematic research, are also convinced they understand their own living environment (i.e. higher education) perfectly well without it (Teichler 1996: 343).

Teichler made these insights at the turn of the century and his position explains our pause about interviewing senior scholars about an institutional-level inability to grasp and engage the topic we present, via their own individual-level perceptions or projections; at least as an initial step. It is important to note the linkage here: *both are important*. In this study, within small or medium sized research teams and institutes, *individuals were 'not understanding each other' – within an institutional framework*. Theoretically speaking, this is interesting because the way in which explaining trajectory from the moment aspiration is articulated till the moment abandonment occurs, in a comparatively viable, robust manner, *has been possible for decades*. We already know the empirical proxies, organizational practices and the essential analytical touchstones needed to do this, using several well-known approaches, at several levels of analysis, using tested methodologies suited to established goals that correspond to key audiences: our peers, students, policy-makers, practitioners, stakeholders and the communities our higher education institutions are located in. But regarding scholarly precariousness *we don't do any of those things*. This is interesting, in and of itself.

Rather, we act 'as if' this were some kind of new situation, when in fact it is rather generic in terms of organizational dynamics and domain. What we sense many experience as 'new' is a complex combination of salient cultural (sets of) values that form the basis for the social structure that informs the social dynamics of each particular competitive horizon in any given higher education system, institution or basic unit. And in the case of our teams the types of understandings we have of these social dynamics give important hints as to the nature and

potential of agency, especially collective agency, which up to today presents urgent challenges to the authors of this study as individuals, the research group(s) we belong to and our respective research institutes.

5.3.4. The Relationship Between People, Ideas and Funding

> Doesn't happen all that often, but I woke up this morning, and sometime during the last 1.5 hours realized I'd cracked the conceptualization that might facilitate discussing the circumstances of our self-ethnography group that might lead to a better understanding (ourselves) while at the same time rendering this *situation* clear within FIER.
>
> The reasons this happened are important, as they constitute a coincidence (literally) of several key events: Realizing Louise Morley is on her way and the potential this brings our self-ethnography group in August; wanting to explain the potential of self-ethnography, in general and the nature of transnational scholarly precarity; an invitation received from Mainz, Germany to talk about this; my first FIER board meeting and a board member's incisive question regarding a permanent appointment and the policy analysis I did for the Ministry of the Interior on the (zombie) notion of 'Good Relations.' … In essence, it comes down to the institutional prism (FIER) in this case and the nature of the work that occurs here, which can be explained (in many ways) by conceptual problematization (February, 2014: Field Notes/Hoffman).

Hoffman, upon realizing the connections between these events and issues, got out of bed, made a pot of coffee and wrote up the field notes (above) and the conceptualization (below). It is important to note that several (other) key events that underpinned these thoughts fall much more under the scope of significant *experiences and perceptions of individuals* and, thus, fall outside the scope of this institutional analysis. Of all the coincidental events and issues mentioned in the field notes entry (above), the single most significant concerned the meeting of FIER's Board, of which Hoffman was a new member in 2014. During the year's first Board meeting, on 30 January 2014, one of the agenda items was the nomination of a Project Researcher based on their considerable scholarly merit for a permanent position. Hoffman was very familiar with this researcher, as they had gone through the same graduate program, had several areas of complementary interests and had worked in two very challenging research projects together, both of which turned out well and one of which— coincidentally – was a highly unconventional, critical self-ethnography (Hoffman et al. 2014). In addition, this researcher had unique resources regarding established national and international networks, untypical to many research teams. Because of all these things Hoffman spoke strongly in favour of the hire. The most interesting thing, though, regarding this topic and the board's transformation of a precarious position into a permanent position, was a question from one of FIER's board members to the professor who presented the nomination to the board. Specifically, the board member firstly asserted that many scholars would like to attain the type of permanent position that the board was considering. But their question was more complex. S/he wanted to know *how well known the procedures that resulted in a researcher becoming permanently hired by FIER were.* Hoffman knew this was an awkward question, as there has never been a transparent procedure for this at FIER. In

addition, it was equally clear that the candidate under consideration *had* worked it out. As clear, after working on the individual projects of our self-ethnography team, was that *recruitment, selection, promotion and retention* in FIER remains a mystery shrouded in institutional-level dynamics, for many. This single question from the FIER board member spotlighted one of the most interesting questions that can be asked in comparative higher education: What is the difference between 'what we think and say we are doing', as an institute and 'what we are actually doing' (Bourdieu 1988; Hoffman, Nokkala & Välimaa *in press*).

5.3.5. The policy and practice of (Human Resources) 'strategy'

		Strategy of action, practices and outcomes	
		Purposeful linkage to strategically robust substantive framing and conceptually focused action, that can be elaborated empirically – and evaluated comparatively – in terms of domain & mission(s)	Ad hoc reaction to stimuli in the field (domain & mission[s])
Strategy of policy (values, norms & beliefs)	Transparent, clear and unambiguous, with regard to pursuit of outcomes, within domain & respect to mission(s)	Transparent policy + robust action	Transparent policy + ac hoc reaction
	Opaque, vague, and ambiguous, with regard to domain & mission(s)	Opaque policy + robust action	Opaque policy + ad hoc reaction

Figure 2. Problematizing Scholarly Policy and Practice

In terms of our direct observation of strategically framing policy and practice at both the level of FIER and within our own research group, the institutional context can be normatively

problematized, in terms of policy and practice, using a contingency table. In simple, pragmatic terms, the contingency table problematizes the tension between what we *say we are going to do* and what *we actually do*. This is important because the development of coherent, viable individual, group and institute-level scholarly agendas can be used to articulate the relationship between groups and institutes to people, ideas and the resources necessary for purposeful action in the field of higher education.

Because *there are no more crucial resources in higher education than human resources*, this is what Hoffman believes the FIER board member was driving at, as well as wanting to know if the procedures s/he questioned were fair and transparent. It is crystal clear that the answer to her question, in reality, is *no* for some scholars employed by FIER. The evidence for this, in retrospect is evidenced in the 'case by case', *de facto* 'procedure' which is the only 'procedure' that has ever existed in FIER regarding permanent positions. The fact that there are persons permanently employed means that a set of circumstances existed at the time of their hire. However, the flip-side of that procedure is that no one on the 'outside' can speculate what type of circumstances would have to arise, in order to trigger the chain of events leading to a permanent hire. From inside FIER, this can be determined, but only within highly circumscribed circumstances of the type there were being considered in the board meeting Hoffman attended. What is equally clear, upon more reflection, is that the degree to which the authors themselves accept the arbitrary and vague nature of policy and practice in FIER. This 'non-procedure hiring procedure' is a good fit with the highly normative tenets of transnational academic capitalism that in fact creates, explains and sustains the Darwinian necessity of an emerging transnational scholarly precariousness. But these understandings or – more precisely *non-understandings* – of the determinants of trajectory also illuminate another clear option: *rejection*. It could be the case that a scholar comes to understand the norms, values and beliefs that they perceive govern the institutional setting in which they aspire to work: *the 'worst of both worlds' combination of opaque policy and ad hoc reaction combined with arbitrary and uncertain power relations.* In this case, as Morley (2014) points out, it is no surprise that outright *rejection* is a foreseeable outcome of this type of understanding. Institutionally-speaking, it is quite clear that FIER's strategy, to any of us, is either:

- transparent, clear and unambiguous with regard to the pursuit of outcomes within the domain of higher education and with regard to mission(s), or
- opaque, vague, and ambiguous, with regard to domain and mission(s).

The same is true of FIER's institutionally-framed actions. What we do day to day is either:

- purposefully linked to strategically robust substantive framing and conceptually focused action, that can be elaborated empirically and evaluated comparatively in terms of domain and mission(s), or
- ad hoc reaction to stimuli in the domain and with respect to mission(s).

This type of either/or framing forces an exaggerated oversimplification because of the large number of 'moving parts' discussions of strategy and practice entail. That said, the points our analysis brings into view are key because, holistically speaking, a scholar aspiring to enter the field of higher education will find a place in the field in which they are comfortable – or not –

because of (or in spite of) their understanding of the social dynamics that can be used to situate them in relation to the global division of scholarly labour.

A more important, underlying facet of this analysis is the idea whether or not an institute, group or individual has conceptually problematized policy or practice at all. It is not difficult to locate individuals, groups and basic units that *have* and those who *have not*. This idea, in turn, illuminates the institutional tension between teams, units, departments and institutes *focused forward, on the transformative potential that defines the state-of-the-art* in contrast to a *referral backward, on the tradition and precedence of reproduction that have always determined collective action.*

Whether or not an institution, basic unit or research team has articulated 'why they do what they do' is far more interesting than asking individual scholars or 'key informants' to answer that same question in a survey, interview or looking for clues as to these issues in policy documents. In the absence of clearly articulated HR strategy, or any other kind of strategy, the methods we have avoided (surveys, interviews, implementation studies) are open invitations to story-telling, script following impression management, folk psychology and 'policy-based-evidence' (Alvesson 2003; Hoffman et al. 2013b).

The most important proposition this type of framing brings into view is foundational. A scholar who aspires to and achieves a *viable and recognizable* position in an institutional setting in which policy is *transparent* and practice is *robust* is in a fundamentally different position in the field than a scholar in an *marginal* and *exceptional* position in an institutional setting in which policy is *opaque* and practice is *ad hoc* (Hoffman 2007). The trajectories available from these analytical coordinates illuminate the points of departure with which achievement and abandonment with regard to higher education career trajectories can be better explained than when using approaches that do not attend to the social structure which bears on career trajectory, the theory that explains it and data that allows something new to be said about it.

6. Discussion: Moving Forward in Terms of Higher Education Studies, Policy and Practice

There are two central challenges our team faced in this study. They are inextricably fused within the same sentence. Specifically, creating a conceptually viable, empirically-grounded *shared* understanding of the events and issues brought into focus in our analysis of contemporary academic trajectories through the field of Finnish higher education. By conceptually viable, we mean an account that will survive the critical scrutiny of international peer review and also be interesting enough to constitute a meaningful contribution to the comparative study of the issues brought to light in our analysis. This is a challenging goal, because even a cursory examination of the intersections of situated migration dynamics and mobility phenomena within locally-framed debates will reveal far more examples of the unquestioned assumptions, unanticipated consequences and hidden populations obscured by combinations of persistent methodological nationalism and aspiration gaps than novel insights.

However, more challenging than producing a study that is meaningful in terms of international state-of-the-art scholarship is working toward a *shared* account locally. This is not the same as saying an account where all involved parties agree on every aspect of the analysis and enjoy reading it. It is saying there is a daunting set of tensions illuminated by this study, even though the scope of our analysis is narrow.

As is shown in our analysis, advances in this area are problematic, precisely because they are inextricably bound to topics scholars seldom problematize. In the case of academic trajectories, this can be seen in the contrast between institutional dynamics in FIER that have evolved over a several generations. This has generally been an inward-looking, normative field of studies (Education) versus CALS (Applied Linguistics), which in general is home to greater methodological variety, much more at ease with critique and generally more international in character. Yet, despite these outward-looking differences in research institutes that are located on the same campus, the highly heterogeneous 'hidden' population of scholars who are both implicated in migration dynamics and in highly precarious career situations are in plain sight, as is their situation. Institutionally, our analysis suggests we accept a certain amount of collateral damage in our Darwinian *'train the best, discard the rest'* HR recruitment, selection, promotion and retention strategy. We use the term strategy broadly in the sense that 'no strategy is strategy'.

This said, the way forward in an analysis of this nature is paying close attention to the fundamentals of our craft:
- What are the debates and issues in state-of-the-art scholarship and practice regarding this (or any) topic?
- What are the optimal paradigmatic and methodological approaches that provide the 'distance' to think about and study a situation we are in the middle of?
- What theory provides the best most potential, with regard to new knowledge?
- What are the best questions we can now ask, as a result of what we've learned?
- And what can we learn from alternative interpretations of identical events and critique?
- Are their better explanations or paths forward?

- What are the implications of what we have learned?

Solid qualitative work allows analytically grounding better *questions* and setting up the circumstances, methodologically, in which the *problematization* necessary for *explanations* can be sought concerning situations that are not understood very well. At its best, qualitative designs even allow us to consider alternatives that were not visible prior to problematizing a topic, in a way that breaks the surface level friction of folk psychology, where unquestioned assumptions govern everyday reality. In the social sciences and humanities there are several alternative paradigm/methodology combinations from which most topics can be approached. The self-ethnography we chose for this study analytically illuminates new knowledge, in a manner that allows international-level, state-of-the-art critique and potential engagement of a highly situated set of circumstances that was not possible prior to the presentation and publication of the study.

In addition, methodologically speaking, this type of study militates against the hazards of methodological nationalism in general and unnecessary over-reliance on a narrow spectrum of what is actually available in the worlds of paradigmatic approach, substantive framing, standpoint, operationalization of theory, methodology and methods. Because of these features, *highly problematic circumstances* come into view, in a manner that can be *further researched*, even as new knowledge illuminates *key policy topics*, which in turn spotlight *practice intervention points*. Regarding the substantive framing of our topic, we now turn to the problematization, introduced at the outset of this study to clarify our analysis and what it means within the context in which it was carried out. Merit and equity, in any form, do figure in explanations of academic trajectory in many places. As our analysis indicates, what is interesting about their relationship is the extent to which this relationship is problematized, or, in our case, to what extent it is *not*.

6.1. Unquestioned Assumptions: Folk Psychology, Zombie Discussions and 'Smoke and Mirrors Terminology'

In the studies Hoffman, Cools, Habti and Sama have carried out on academic work, the internationalization of higher education, and the (academic) mobility and migration of university personnel, it is common for us to encounter 'smoke and mirrors terms' as they are bandied about in Finnish society, like *multiculturalism*, *internationalization*, *integration* and *diversity*. These examples of zombie discussions (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2012), *par excellence*. These terms have been used in many places to reference many types of issues. However, it is instructive to note that in the societies in which those terms were originally used, they illuminate far more fault lines and contentious conflicts than uncontested success stories of social cohesion. In Finnish society and culture in general and Finnish higher education in particular these terms, paraphrasing Rhoades, might best be thought of as 'terms that illuminate phenomena higher education researchers ought to be problematizing and studying, rather than mindlessly perpetuating neo-colonial stratification of the global academic workforce' (Hoffman, Rhoades, Lee & Shajahan 2013). In Finnish society, these zombie discussions obscure much more than they reveal, particularly when they take on the character of slogans, unthinkingly – and often unconsciously – used to bifurcate, reify and essentialise (Clarke 1999) discourses used on *sacred and safe* ascriptive characteristics at the

expense of the *profane and problematic* characteristics and social constructions integral to our biographies we prefer to ignore and pretend do not exist, especially country of origin, mother tongue, race or skin colour.

This topic can be *understood* and *explained* in a far more rigorous, critical manner that lends itself to comparative study and international-level peer review; it can be *engaged*, *taught*, *mutually understood* and *critiqued*. This cannot be done by everyone, but by more people in either positions of institutional responsibility, positions of trust and senior personnel than is the case at the moment in settings like FIER. This said, as is evidenced by our analysis, the scholars who are analytically illuminated by our findings best not wait for senior-level scholars to figure this out. By the time they do, it may be too late.

The stakes are highest for individuals in groups present in Finnish society, but who are absent from the settings in which direct observations were made in this study. FIER is not unique in this regard, rather it is representative of the key disciplinary fields and institutional settings from which scholarly critique, policy analyses and practical interventions *could* emanate, but have not, up till now, on the kinds of issues highlighted in this study. These types of focal settings are not difficult to locate in Finnish higher education (Hoffman 2007; Raunio, Korhonen & Hoffman 2010). But, as our analysis suggests, finding leverage for intervention in the social structure that produces these sorts of settings, while less than obvious, first begins with their analytical illumination.

6.2. Unintended Consequences: Analytically Illuminating Methodological Nationalism

More than anything else, our team is driving a methodological stake in the ground in sparsely populated territory, at least with respect to the overly-normative world of higher education in Finland and Finnish higher education studies. Explaining higher education trajectories of groups and individuals is not particularly hard. It can be done a variety of ways, thanks to substantive, theoretical, methodological data analysis and general approaches and modes of inquiry that in many cases have existed for decades. What is more challenging, though, as forward thinking scholars in the social sciences and humanities have always known, is confronting the convention that blinds us and, by definition, limits our methodological options. During the course of this study in the major higher education conferences we highlighted in our analysis, international groups of higher education specialists were focused specifically on overcoming the self-inflicted limitations that seem to characterise higher education research and most probably explain why we, as a field, are simply not taken as seriously as other disciplines and fields of study who also regard higher education as an important focal context (Kosmützky & Nokkala 2014).

The most important methodological advantage illuminated by our approach is the use of naturally occurring events that throw a spotlight on the difference between 'what we believe we are doing' and 'what we are actually doing', at the institutional level. We assert that while this only yields qualitative interpretations, we will happily compare our conceptually-driven, empirically grounded analysis against the folk psychology that produced and perpetuates the

dynamics we analyse and see which approach produces better explanations with regard to our topic, going forward.

In the same way, remaining outside the networks in which the global stratification of the academic workforce is discussed *every day* while we busy ourselves with unthinking compliance with the international agenda of neoliberal transnational academic capitalism *rather than our own* introduces the question Robertson poses: *Why?* (2014). If we let others do our thinking for us on the issues that actually define the integrity of scholarship, we forgo choices that our (non)approach to academic practice obscures as choices at all. This includes our HR 'strategy' and whether it prevents us from seriously considering the theme of the most recent conference in which we presented this topic: 'Is Higher Education becoming unequal?'

The approach we take to this study may be controversial to many inside our research group, FIER, university and at system-level. That said, what kind of social scientists or scholars in the humanities would wish to be employed in a setting in which alternative points of view are not actively sought, welcomed and critically debated? While it is not difficult to find settings that fit that description, state-of-the-art social science and humanities *are not one of them*.

As the section heading explicitly indicates, our analysis does not indicate whether the kind of dynamics we focus on are purposeful. Actually, the opposite is the case. Our point is that, as Scott (2013) bluntly pointed out when speaking about leadership in higher education, 'we need to raise the level of our game. To get better at what it is we do and have the potential to deliver.' While there are many ways to do that, they are not to be found using the approaches to this topic we critique in our analysis.

6.3. Hidden Populations: The Nature of Complex Change in the General Population, Culture and Society

One of our original analytical points of departure in the AOF project was empirically verified in this self-ethnography. Migration and mobility phenomena, as general demographic phenomena, cannot be studied by drawing untenable conceptual and empirical distinctions that narrowly focus only on 'persons with a migrant background'. Migration and mobility dynamics – across all domains in Finnish Society – *implicate the general population*. This is especially the case within the institution of higher education, in which overly narrow forms of mobility are uncritically valorised, promoted and used as a major empirical proxy by some of the most well-known global rankings of higher education institutions. As Siekkinen's dilemma vividly illustrated, the career advice she routinely gets at regular intervals is identical to the advice Sama gets: *Leave*. To take this one step further, many of the authors have families in which the line between Finnish citizens, residents and migrants become very blurry. The policy implication of this finding is crystal clear. *Where we go, they go* (maybe). The second most immediate policy implication of this involves highly skilled knowledge workers in a society where the dependency ratio is headed in the wrong direction, regarding persons *inside* the labour force, supporting the rapidly retiring baby boom generation *outside* the labour force. In the permanent hire discussed in the analysis (above), Hoffman summed up FIER's position when considering whether or not FIER should permanently employ a

highly mobile and highly capable scholar: "We need her, a lot more than she needs us." This was true of the highly mobile scholar in question, but it implicates the hidden population, many of who currently desire to work in FIER in spite of the working conditions, not because of them. When this is the dynamic that defines the people doing the hiring – and those they hire – the potential of any basic unit or institute is fundamentally distinct from selecting personnel based on something other than 'settling for what's available in terms of past practice'.

More complex is the question the ethnic stratification our analysis brings into view as it links to the data-driven decision-making inherent in transnational academic capitalism and the precariousness of an emergent heterogeneous 'invisible' precariat (Standing 2011). Regarding scholars with a migrant background an emerging policy question is: 'Who is it more advantageous to employ': a highly performing mobile scholar, for example using the Academy of Finland's FiDiPro funding scheme, or the EU Marie Curie Mobility grants; or should we assume the much tougher job of developing local talent who survive the 'train the best, discard the rest' *de facto* HR policy, which thrives in conditions of institutional dynamics characterized by *opaque policy* and *ad hoc reaction*? In the second type of HR conditions 'the most suitable candidates' are often hired, not 'the best candidates' (Raunio, Korhonen & Hoffman 2010; Hoffman, Nokkala & Välimaa *in press*). This highlights institutional conditions where those sought are not necessarily scholars willing to take risks in opening new pathways in research, but confirming and continuing traditions and neither questioning nor upsetting status quo power relations.

Taken further, this illuminates a combination of temporarily employing top performers, while subjecting locals to the 'train the best, discard the rest' HR policy regarding recruitment, selection, promotion and retention. It is possible to ask, at the level of policy, whether this is 'the best of both worlds' or 'the worst'. And according to whom? The policy implication of this combination illuminates a clear choice regarding groups which can be found in Finnish society, but who are not employed by our research team, nor whom were present in the meeting in which FIER sought to identify 'the most challenging topics to study, regarding education in coming decades'. And the policy implication that follows, as was pointed out in the email to the Professors in charge of the FIER strategy group, is having a thematically-focused, interdisciplinary research institute in which assumptions that obscure these dynamics and policy implications are unnoticed, ignored, uninteresting or perpetually confused. This is specifically so as to whether there is a relationship between perpetuating reproduction of transnational, global inequities within a specific institutional setting, *versus* problematizing our ability to include the personnel *best able to study any of this* outside, and inside, the walls and halls of a university.

7. Methodological Notes: An Afterword/Afterward

Looking back on the interesting journey of our team leaves us with no regrets, but very clear ideas as to *what we would do differently should this type of opportunity arise again*. Opportunistic, critical studies focused on power relations are not for everyone and there are some methodological tips we would underline for others, should they decide to adopt an ethnographic approach to topics like academic work in general, or scholarly precariousness in particular.

The first concrete piece of advice we would stress is not to hesitate to use ethnographic approaches, but *prepare* if you do not have a great deal of experience with them. Even for those generally familiar with specific types of qualitative strategies (other than ethnography), we advise reading Creswell's 1998 title *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. The distinguishing features of ethnography, contrasted to other types of distinct qualitative approaches, are not something to take lightly. More importantly, if collaborating with other team members who do not have a lot of experience with the general features of qualitative research in general, Creswell's 2002 *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches* offer's solid contrast between the general approaches to research that your colleagues are familiar with versus those that are not. For a first time attempt at a qualitative, ethnographic approach, Alvesson's (2003) approach to self-ethnography is a good choice, particularly for higher education specialists who decide to take the leap and say something theoretically meaningful about their immediate surroundings. That said, now that we've used self-ethnography, we've been fairly humbled by the depth of the literature as much as the power of the general approach, and considering other types of approaches has become very tempting. Reading a range of the literature might be advisable as there is a wide range of choice, levels of rigour and directions one can take in this vast literature. Reading through Hastrup's (1995) *Passage to Anthropology*, Behar's (1997) *Anthropology that Breaks your Heart* or Scollon and Scollon (2007) on *Nexus Analysis* will quickly open your eyes as to the underlying range of debates and choices that characterize the issues ethnographers – to a greater or lesser extent – feel to be important when differentiating themselves *amongst themselves*.

This brings us to our second, practical point. Don't get hung up on the arcane infighting amongst ethnographers that probably would be much more interesting to study than letting it dissuade you from a goldmine of data that most researchers (not using ethnographic approaches) simply miss. Ethnography, as a general qualitative approach or orientation is characterized by divisive cleavages and, as Scollon and Scollon write, 'ethnographers seldom agree on anything'. For the methodological generalist, it is important to be aware of this, going in, in the sense this constitutes a well-known limitation of ethnography, as a general approach. As is the case with all qualitative methodologies, the paradigms in which many ethnographers operate are at sharp odds with each other, which leading ethnographers understand. This can introduce difficulties, for example with a methodological specialist located in a clearly delineated paradigm evaluating work carried out in 'anything other than that paradigm'. Our advice on this is clear. Pick one clear approach initially. Should this situation arise again, we would strongly advise a training session for the team which focuses on the fundamentals of solid qualitative work using practical texts like Miles & Huberman's 1994 methods text and stressing how this will be operationalized in terms of ethnographic

methods and analysis, especially underlining the importance of observational skills, whether direct observation, participant observation, and especially the role of field notes in this type of research. To be very clear, many early stage and early career researchers have a rather vague sense of what ethnography entails. If and when the opportunity arises to do an ethnographic study our most recent experience is that you will find others to collaborate with. *Simple willingness is not enough*. Our advice is to take enough time to ascertain that everyone is trained up and has a shared idea of the general approach, how it differs from the approach they usually use, the methods that will used, data how the team is going to analyse the data and – from the very beginning – introduce them to the highly iterative type of collaboration that leads to an ethnographically-grounded write-up. If team members seem reluctant to commit to this initial training and the idea of spending some time on expanding their skill set, consider this a solid indication they may not yet be ready for this type of study. This is especially the case were early stage/career scholars display interest. When considering the risks we detail in our methodology section it is very easy for scholars to get in over their heads.

Finally, we stress that higher education specialists in places where ethnographic approaches are not typically used should strongly consider this general orientation and methodological strategy to approach questions that are missed by many who have not bothered to reflect on very serious issues that play out in our immediate surroundings – *every day*, much less the consequences and broader implications of these unresolved situations. While several types of trendy and familiar approaches might be more palatable to colleagues and (especially) superiors concerning topic like transnational scholarly precariousness, our advice – having given this a try – is clear. In ethnography, for all of its limitations, you will find ways of tapping into data that others simply are not getting using 'conventional' and 'inside-the-box' approaches. In our study, a specific, pragmatic ethnographic approach gave us leverage to directly engage our topic in ways that have been perceived by others in our institute, university and wider networks as critical, yet constructive. This – in and of itself – is why we will not hesitate to continue to develop our skills with regard to its efficacy, as a general methodological orientation and continue to prepare for the next time a similar opportunity arises.

References

Abbas, A., Ashwin, P. & Trahar, S. (Convenors) 2013, Dec. Research Directions: Methodological Diversity in Higher Education Research Facilitated Discussion by SW Higher Education Network. Annual Conference of the Society for Research on Higher Education, Cardiff, Wales, 12 Dec. 2013.

Academy of Finland. 2014. Welcome to Ask and Apply 2013 Roadshow. Accessed on 29 September from: http://www.aka.fi/en-GB/A/Academy-of-Finland/Ask--Apply-20131/ and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwx-4Jo-xlY&list=UUI2iXNXU7dnr4p1RUGCwdFw&index=1

Adler, P. & Adler, P. 1998. Observational Techniques. In Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.) Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials. Thousand Oaks: Sage: 79-109.

Adjuncts and contingents together. 2014. Via Twitter: http://actogetherwa.org/

AdjunctNation 2014. Via Twitter: http://www.adjunctnation.com/

Ahola, S. &Author1, D. 2013. Higher Education research from a Finnish perspective – an introduction. In Ahola, S. &Author1, D. (Eds.) *Higher education research in Finland: Emerging structures and contemporary issues.* Jyväskylä, Finland: University of Jyväskylä Press: 11-26.

Alvesson, M. 2003. Methodology for close up studies – struggling with closeness and closure. *Higher Education* 46: 167–193.

Archer, M. 1995. Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Baldwin, R. & Blackburn, R. 1981. The Academic Career as a Developmental Process: Implications for Higher Education. *The Journal of Higher Education, 52 (6),* 598-614.

Beach, D. & Lunneblad, J. 2013. Ethnographic investigations of issues of race in Scandinavian education research. *Ethnography and Education, 6:1,* 29-43.

Becher, T.& Kogan, M. 1992. Process and Structure in Higher Education. London: Routledge.

Becher, T. & Trowler, P. 2001. Academic tribes and territories: intellectual enquiry and the culture of disciplines. (2nd Edition) Buckingham: Open University Press.

Beck, U. 1992. Risk Society Beck, U. 1992. Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity. London: Sage.

Beck, U. & Beck-Gernsheim, E. 2012. Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences. London: Sage

Behar, R. 1997. *Anthropology that Breaks your Heart.* London: Beacon Press

Bennett, M. 1993. Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. In R. Paige (Ed.) Education for the Intercultural Experience. Yarmouth: Intercultural Press, 21-72.

Berger, P. & Luckmann, T. 1966. The Social Construction of Reality. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.

Bird J. (1996), Black students in higher education: Rhetorics and realities. Open university press: Buckingham.

Blommaert, J. 2009. The role of language in determining identity. (Presentation). Language and identity: Immigrant's linguistic rights in authority processes. 19 Nov. 2009.

Bourdieu, P. 1988. Homo academicus. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. 2004. The Science of Science and Reflexivity. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bowden M. & Doughney J. 2010, Socio-economic status, cultural diversity and the aspirations of secondary students in the Western Suburbs of Melbourne, Australia. *Higher Education*, Volume 59 (1): 115-129.

Cantwell, B. & Kauppinen, I. (Eds.) 2014. Academic Capitalism in the Age of Globalization. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Cantwell, B., & Lee, J. 2010. Unseen workers in the academic factory: Perceptions of neoracism among international postdocs in the United States and the United Kingdom. *Harvard Educational Review* 80,4:490-516.

Carbaugh, D. 1996. Finnish and American Linguistic Patterns: A Cultural Comparison. In Samovar, : & Porter, R (Eds.) *Intercultural Communication: A Reader* (8th Ed.) Belmont, CA (USA): Wadsworth Publishing.

Castellanos J. & Jones L. (Eds.) 2003. The majority in the minority: Expanding the representation of Latina/o faculty, administrators and students in higher education. Stylus Publishing: Sterling, VA, USA.

Clarke, K. 1999. Breaking the bounds of bifurcation: The challenge of multiculturalism in Finnish vocational social care education. Tampere: Tampere University Publications.

Clifford, J. & Marcus, G. (Eds.) 1986. Writing Culture. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Creswell, J. 2002. Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Currie J. & Newson J. (Eds.) 1998. Universities and globalization: Critical perspectives. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Ellis, C. & Bochner, A. 2000. Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.) Handbook of qualitative research. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 733-768.

Emerson, R., Fretz, R. & Shaw, L. 1995. Writing Ethnographic Field Notes (2nd Ed.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Eriksson, T. (2010). *Being native – distance, closeness and doing auto/self-ethnography*. University of Gothenburg: Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts. https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/24689/1/gupea_2077_24689_1.pdf

Esping-Andersen, G. 1998. The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Fairweather, J. 2002. The Mythologies of Faculty Productivity. *Journal of Higher Education 73 (1)*, 26-48.

Forsander A. 2004. Social Capital in the Context of Immigration and Diversity: Economic Participation in the Nordic Welfare States. *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 5 (2), 207-227.

Foucault, M. 1979. Truth and Power: an interview with Michel Foucault. *Critique of Anthropology January 1979 vol. 4 no.* 13-14 131-137

Geertz, C. 1973. The Interpretation of Cultures. New York: Basic Books.

Habti, D. *forthcoming*. Research relationships in practice: Using Bourdieu's reflexivity on career experience of Arab highly skilled migrants in Finland.

Hastrup, K. 1995 Passage to Anthropology. London: Routledge

Harman, G. 2005. Steering Higher Education in an Entrepreneurial and Managerial Environment: Australian Experience Since 1987. Keynote address at the IX *kansallinen symposium* [(Finnish) National (higher education) symposium], 5-6 September, 2005. Jyväskylä, Finland

Henttonen, E. & LaPointe, K. 2015. *Työelämän toisinajattelijat. Vallataan tilaa mielekkäälle työlle*. (Workplace dissidents. A space for meaningful work). Helsinki: Gaudeamus.

Hoffman, D. *Forthcoming*. Thinking Through Transnational Scholarly Precariousness.

Hoffman, D. & Välimaa, J. (Eds.) *Re-Becoming Universities? Higher Education Institutions in Networked Knowledge Societies.* Dordrecht: Springer.

Hoffman, D., Nokkala, T. & Välimaa. *in press.* 'World Class Local Heroes': Emerging Competitive Horizons and Transnational Academic Capitalism in Finnish Higher Education – 2010-2012 . In Hoffman, D. & Välimaa, J. (Eds.) *Re-Becoming Universities? Higher Education Institutions in Networked Knowledge Societies.* Dordrecht: Springer.

Hoffman, D., Blasi, B., Ćulum, B. Dragšić, Ž., Ewen, A., Horta, H., Nokkala, T. & Rios-Aguilar, C. 2014. The methodological illumination of a blind spot: information and communication technology and international research team dynamics in a higher education research program. *Higher Education*. Volume 67, Issue 4 (2014), Page 473-495.

Hoffman, D. Rhoades, G. Lee, J. Shajahan, R. & Marginson, S. 2013, Nov. Domestic insights and comparative Constructics: From Clark's Triangle to New Heuristics. Symposium at the Association for the Study of Higher Education Conference, St. Louis, Mo., USA.

Hoffman, D. 2013. *Policy Analysis of 'Good Relations' Workshop* hosted by the Finnish Ministry of the Interior. Email communication to Liisa SM Männistö, 1 October, 2013.

Hoffman, D., Babila Sama, T., El-Massri, A., Korhonen, M., Raunio, M. 2013a. The Best Science, The Best Science in Finnish – and English – or The Best Finnish Scientists? *Recherches en Éducation* (Research in Education), N. 16, 48-61.

Hoffman, D., Blasi, B., Cools, C., Ćulum, B., Dragšić, Z., Ewen, A., Horta, H., Nokkala, T., Rios-Aguilar, C. Saarinen, T. 2013b, May. Hacking the Methodological Firewall: The Sociological Imagination, Self-Ethnography and International Comparative Higher Education Studies. Research Paper presented at Ethnographies of Higher Education Conference, Prague, Czech Republic.

Hoffman, D., Saarinen T., Cools, C. 2012, Nov. Smoke and Mirrors in 'The World's Best Place to Live': Freedom for *Who* to learn? Round-table Paper. Association for the Study of Higher Education Conference. Las Vegas, Nevada, USA.

Hoffman, D., El-Massri, A., Babila Sama, T., Korhonen, M. & Raunio, M. 2011. *Parasta tiedettä, parasta tiedettä suomeksi –ja englannikski – vai parhaat suomalaiset tieteentekijät?* [The best science, best science in Finnish or the best Finnish scientists?] In J. Ursin & J. Lasonen (Eds.), *Koulutus yhteiskunnan muutoksissa* [Education and Social Change in Finland.] Jyväskylä, Finland: FERA, p. 187-229.

Hoffman, D. 2007. The Career Potential of Migrant Scholars in Finnish Higher Education: Emerging Perspectives and Dynamics. Jyväskylä Studies in Education, Psychology and Social Research. No. 318. Jyväskylä University Press.

Horta H., Veloso F. M., & Grediaga R. 2010. Navel gazing: Academic inbreeding and scientific productivity. *Management Science, 56*(3), 1-16.

Howard-Hamilton M., Morelon-Quainoo C., Johnson S., Winkle-Wagner R. & Santiague L. 2009. Standing on the outside, looking in. Stylus Publishing: Sterling, VA, USA.

Husu, L. 2001. Sexism, Support and Survival in Academia. Academic Women and Hidden Discrimination in Finland. Helsinki: University of Helsinki.

Husu, L. 2000. Gender Discrimination in the Promised Land of Gender Equality. *Higher Education in Europe 25 (2)* 221-228.

Jaakkola, M. 2005. The Attitudes of Finns Towards Immigrants in 1987-2003. Labor Policy Studies 286. Finnish Ministry of Labour, Helsinki.

Johnson, J. 2002. In-Depth Interviewing. In J. Gubrium & J. Holstein (Eds.) Handbook of interview research: context & method. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 103-119.

Justice for Adjuncts. 2014. Via Twitter: https://twitter.com/adjunctjustice

Kahn S. & Pavlich D. 2001. Academic freedom and the inclusive university. UBC press: Vancouver.

Kallo J. 2009. OECD Education Policy: A Comparative and historical study focusing on the thematic reviews of tertiary education. Finnish Educational Research Association.

Kemmis S. 2006. Participatory action research and the public sphere. *Educational Action Research*, Vol. 14 (4): 459-476.

Kauppinen, I. 2012. Towards transnational academic capitalism. *Higher Education*, 64:543–556. DOI 10.1007/s10734-012-9511-x

Kivistö J. & Tirronen J. (2012), New elitism in universal higher education: The building process, policy and the idea of Aalto University. In S. Ahola and D. Author1 (Eds.) *Higher education research in Finland: Emerging structures and contemporary issues.* Jyväskylä, Finland: University of Jyväskylä Press, 69-88.

Kogan, M. 2002, September. National Characteristics and Policy Idiosyncrasies. Research paper. Annual conference of the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers. Vienna, 5-7.9.2002.

Koivukangas, O. 2003. Finland, Russia, and The European Union - The Challenges Of Migration Movements. Research Paper. AEMI Conference. Lisbon.

Kosmützky, A. & Nokkala, T. 2014. Challenges and trends in comparative higher education: An Editorial. *Higher Education. Volume 67, Issue 4*, P. 409-422.

Li, G. & Beckett, G. (Eds.) 2006. "Strangers" of the academy": Asian women scholars in higher education. Stylus press: Sterling, VA, USA.

Mamiseishvili, K. 2010. Foreign-born women faculty work roles and productivity at research universities in the United States. *Higher Education, 60*:139–156.

Marginson, S. 2006. Putting 'public' back into the public university. Thesis 11. 84, 44-59.

Merton, R. 1968. Social Theory and Social Structure. New York: Free Press.

Miles, M. & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis* (2nd Edition). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Mills, C. W. 1959. The Sociological Imagination. New York: Oxford University Press.

MLA Subconference. 2014. Homepage, via Twitter http://mlasubconference.org/

Morley, L. 2014, Aug. Lost Leaders: Women in the Global Academy. Keynote address. *Korkeakoultutkimusken XII kansallinen symposium* (Higher education XII national symposium). 19-20 Aug. 2014. Jyväskylä, Finland.

Nikunen M. (2012), Precarious work at the 'entrepreneurial university': Adaptation versus ' abandon ship'. In S. Ahola and D. Author1 (Eds.) *Higher education research in Finland: Emerging structures and contemporary issues.* Jyväskylä, Finland: University of Jyväskylä Press, 271-290.

New Faculty Majority. 2014. Via Twitter: http://www.newfacultymajority.info/nfm-mission-statement/

Marhall, G. 1994. Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology. New York: Oxford University Press.

Partanen, A. Dec. 2011. What Americans Keep Ignoring About Finland's School Success. Atlantic Monthly. Retrieved 29 April, 2012, from: http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/12/what-americans-keep-ignoring-about-finlands-school-success/250564/

Pillay, S. 2013. An exploratory study into work/family balance within the Australian higher education sector. *Higher education research and development, 32/2,* 228-243

Plummer, K. 2001. Documents of life. London: Sage.

Precarious Faculty 2014. Via Twitter: https://twitter.com/PrecariousFac

Primmer, G. 2014, Aug. Finnish Academia: Times are tough for foreigners and Finns alike! Viewpoint section, Helsinki Times, 14-20 August edition, p.2

Pusser, B., Kempner, K., Marginson, S. & Ordorika, M. (Eds.) 2012. Universities and the Public Sphere: Knowledge Creation and State Building in the Era of Globalization. New York: Routledge.

Pöyhönen, S. & Tarnanen, M. (2015). Integration policies and adult second language learning in Finland. In J. Simpson & A. Whiteside (eds.) Adult Language Education and Migration. Challenging Agendas in Policy and Practice. London: Routledge, 107–118.

Pöyhönen, S., Rynkänen, T., Tarnanen, M. & Hoffman, D. (2013). Venäjänkieliset IT-alan asiantuntijat työyhteisöissä – monikieliset käytänteet, identiteetit ja osallisuuden kokemukset integroitumisessa [Russian-speaking IT-specialists in work communities – multilingual practices, identities and experiences of participation.] In T. Keisanen, E. Kärkkäinen, M.

Rauniomaa, P. Siitonen & M. Siromaa (eds.)Osallistumisen multimodaaliset diskurssit. Multimodal discourses of participation. AFinLA yearbook 2013. Suomen soveltavan kielitieteen yhdistyksen julkaisuja n:o 71. Jyväskylä: Suomen soveltavan kielitieteen yhdistys AFinLA, pp. 77–102.

Pöyhönen, S., Hirsiaho, A., Hoffman, D., Rynkänen, T., Sahradyan, S. & Tarnanen, M. 2011. Interpretations of Integration: Shifting stakeholder perspectives to Finnish Integration policies? Research paper presented at Migrant labour: Contested integration, prospects for citizenship, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Radcliffe, L. 2004. Top Marks in Class. Newsweek. CXLIV: 37.

Rastas, A. 2009. Racism in the everyday life of Finnish children with transnational roots. Barn- Nordic Journal of Child Research 1/2009, 29-43.

Raunio M., Korhonen M. & Hoffman, D. (2010), *Kannattaako kansainvälistyä? Suomen yliopistot kansainvälisinä akateemisina ympäristöinä. Loppuraportti*. [Is internationalization worth it? Finnish universities as international working environments. Final report.] *Työraportteja 7/2010. Tieteen-, teknologian- ja innovaatiotutkimuksen yksikkö, Yhteiskuntatutkimuksen instituutti, Tampereen yliopisto.* (Science, Technology and Innovation Research Unit, Institute for Social Research, University of Tampere.)

Rhoades, G. & Slaughter, S. 2004. Academic Capitalism and the New Economy. Markets, State and Higher Education. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Robertson, S. 2014. World Class Higher Education (For Whom): Thoughts Towards an Alternative Mobilities Paradigm. Invited Presentation at the *Academic Mobility: Challenges of Internationalization Conference*, 27 June, 2014, Mainz, Germany.

Richardson, L. 1998. Writing: A Method of Inquiry. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.) *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 345-371.

Sachs, J. 2004. The World's Best Countries. Newsweek Magazine. CXLIV: 28-29.

Saukkonen, P. (2013): Combating xenophobia and intolerance through the promotion of good relations: framing the challenge. Transnational Workshop 1. 4th September 2013: Helsinki, Finland.

Scott, P. 2013, Dec. Raising the Profile of Research into Higher Education: Meeting the Leadership Challenge. Keynote address at the Annual Conference of the Society for Research on Higher Education. 13 December, 2014, Cardiff, Wales.

Shahjahan, R.A. & Kezar, A. 2013. Beyond the "national container": Addressing methodological nationalism in higher education research. *Educational Researcher, 42(1),* 20-29.

Slaughter, S. & Cantwell, B. 2012. Transatlantic moves to the market: the United States and the European Union. *Higher Education*, 63:583–606 DOI 10.1007/s10734-011-9460-9

Slaughter, S. & Leslie, L. 1997. Academic capitalism - Politics, policies and the entrepreneurial university. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Standing, G. 2011. The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Statistics Finland. 2014. Source/URL: http://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/index_en.html on 6 August, 2014.

Teichler, U. 1996. Research on Academic Mobility and International Cooperation in Higher Education: An Agenda for the Future. In P. Blumenthal, P. et al. (Eds.) In C. Blumenthal, A. Goodwin, P. Smith and U. Teichler (Eds.) Academic mobility in a changing world: regional and global trends. London: J. Kingsley Publishers, 338-358.

Tierney, W. 2005. Trust and Organizational Culture in Higher Education. Keynote address. Annual Conference of the Consortium of Higher Education Research. Jyväskylä, 1-3.9.2005.

Thompson G. & Loque A. (2005), Exposing the ''culture of arrogance'' in the academy: A blueprint for increasing black faculty satisfaction in higher education. Stylus press: Sterling, VA, USA.

Torres-Olave, B. 2013. STEM Employment in the New Economy. A Labor market Segmentation Approach. University of Arizona.

Tight, M. 2012. Researching Higher Education (2nd Edition). Berkshire: Open University Press.

Vabø, A. 2003. Barriers to mobility in research training in the Nordic countries. Oslo: Nordic Academy for Advanced Study.

Välijärvi, J. 2006, May. The PISA Miracle of Finland. Keynote address. Helia International May Days. Helsinki, 4-5 May 2006.

Välimaa, J., Papatsiba, V. & Hoffman, D. *in press,* Higher Education in Networked Knowledge Societies. In Hoffman, D. & Välimaa, J. (Eds.) *Re-Becoming Universities? Higher Education Institutions in Networked Knowledge Societies.* Dordrecht: Springer.

Välimaa, J. & Hoffman, D. 2007. The future of Finnish higher education challenged by global competitive horizons. In S. Marginson (Ed.) Prospects of Higher Education: Globalization, Market Competition, Public Goods and the Future of the University. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 185-200.

Välimaa, J. 2001a. A Historical Introduction to Finnish Higher Education. In J. Välimaa (Ed.) Finnish Higher Education in Transition: Perspectives on Massification and Globalisation. Jyväskylä: Institute for Educational Research, 13-53.

Wildavsky, A. B. 1987. Speaking truth to power: The art and craft of policy analysis. New Brunswick: Transaction Books.

Yin, R. 2003. Case Study Research: Design and Methods. Newbury Park: Sage.

YLE. 2014, July. Overseas academics claim discrimination in university recruitment. YLE News. 14 July. Internet edition. Accessed 14 August from: http://yle.fi/uutiset/overseas_academics_claim_discrimination_in_university_recruitment/7355139

Ylijoki, O. 2003. Entangled in academic capitalism? A case study on changing ideals and practices of university research. *Higher Education 45(3),* 307-335.

Biographical Data on Authors

Thomas Babila Sama, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Social Policy Institute, University of Helsinki, Finland. The focus of Dr. Sama's dissertation was a comparative study of NGOs in Finland and Sweden. Email contact: thomas.sama@helsinki.fi

Driss Habti, PhD, in Sociology, is a postdoctoral researcher at the Karelian Institute, University of Eastern Finland, Finland. Dr Habti's main research interests include international migration and ethnic relations, highly skilled mobility, ethnicity and cultural diversity, career research, and sociology of work. His recent publications involve special issues on international highly skilled migration, internationalization of Higher Education, and ethnicity and cultural diversity in Europe. He is member of the research network of *Borders, Mobilities and Cultural Encounters*, the *Nordic Migration Research* Association (NMR), and the *European Sociological Association* (ESA). Email contact: driss.habti@uef.fi

Carine Cools, PhD, born in Belgium, completed her doctoral degree in Speech/Intercultural Communication in 2011 in Finland. In her doctoral dissertation she approached intercultural couples' relationships in Finland from the relational-dialectics perspective. During her research project, funded by the Finnish Academy she visited USF as a Visiting Scholar during Fall 2012 to collaborate with Dr. Lasonen on the ongoing research and teaching on intercultural communication, which represents an important area in the changing global context for education and economy. Her main interest areas are adaptation/transition issues in the context of intercultural communication research and migration studies. She has published in English in international journals, and has presented her research in numerous international and national conferences. Dr Cools has been lecturing about Intercultural communication and research methods, in Finland and abroad (Australia, Belgium, Portugal) and has been supervising numerous students with their MA thesis. Email: carine.a.cools@gmail.com.

David M. Hoffman, PhD, is a Senior Researcher at the Finnish Institute for Educational Research at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Dr. Hoffman is the Team Leader of the Internationalization, Intersectionality, Mobility and Migration research group, is active in the Higher Education Studies Team as well as a co-founder of the Collaboration Development Network. Email contact: david.hoffman@jyu.fi

Sari Pöyhönen, PhD, is a Professor at the Centre for Applied Language Studies, University of Jyvaskyla, Finland. Her research focuses on language education policies, minorities and language rights, and notions on language and identity. Her recent publications deal with policies and practices in adult second language teaching, and discourses and narratives of linguistic rights, migration, integration and work. Email contact: sari.h.poyhonen@jyu.fi

MSc Taru Siekkinen is a project researcher and postgraduate student in the University of Jyväskylä, Finnish Institute for Educational research. Her dissertation is about academic careers. She has been working in several different projects focused on higher education. Her current projects are an assessment of the four-stage career model in Finnish universities and the study of the academic careers and recruitment in Finnish Universities. Email contact: taru.siekkinen@jyu.fi

Anatoly Stikhin received his English teacher qualifications in 1986 and his research-based degree (Licentiate of Philosophy) in linguistics from St. Petersburg, Russia in 1992. Anatoly Stikhin taught English and language-related courses at Petrozavodsk State University for 20 years, simultaneously holding various administrative positions in the institution. From 2013 till present he has been a doctoral student at Department of Teacher Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Email contact: anatoly.a.stikhin@jyu.fi

---

[i] In terms of academic work, the most important tension operating in our study is scholarly precariousness itself, in the sense that career stage (Baldwin & Blackburn 1981) does not map onto the field of permanent and temporary positions in Finnish higher education (Välimaa 2001; Hoffman 2007), nor trajectory (Bourdieu 1988). Because the relationship between ascriptive characteristics (Beck 1992), social constructions (Berger & Luckmann 1969) and academic work is not usually problematized in research on Finnish higher education, nor policy discussion, except as outlined in our critique (above), the tendency to claim, as Primmer (2014) does, *'it's the same for all academics'* is irrelevant at the level of abstraction needed to substantiate or refute such a claim. Complicating the situation of the authors more by taking into account the complex intersectionality of their ascriptive and achieved characteristics linked to Hoffman and Pöyhönen (permanently employed scholars), Cools, Siekkinen, Stikhin, Habti and Sama (precarious employment) only underlines *just how little the authors have in common* except for the occupational sector they work in and their interest in this type of topic. We stress this type of topic only comes into view, for us, in ways relevant to state-of-the-art scholarship because of the approach originally developed by the AOF team and further developed, in this self-ethnography. In total, the seven authors of this study come from six different countries, work across two universities, two faculties and two research institutes, four scholarly specializations and are spread out along the academic food chain from early-stage researcher, just beginning doctoral work to mid-career positions in four organizational units. It is our heterogeneity, with regard to the relationship between academic work, ascriptive characteristics and social constructions, along with our previous research (cited throughout this text), that ground our skepticism to claims not relevant to the complexity of the causes and consequences of transnational scholarly precariousness in general and the ways in which this manifests in Finnish higher education,in particular.