

## THE AGEING BODY AS A BORDERING SITE:

### *Narrowing definitions of dependency for elderly family reunification in Finland*

#### Abstract

This article explores how the concept of dependency is used when scrutinising residence permit applicants of the elderly who fall into the category of "other family members" for family reunion. Through an analysis of interviews with immigration officers, as well as Finnish and European Union (EU) legal documents, the article shows that contestations of the concept of dependency become part of bordering practices. Bordering thus enters the everyday lives of transnational families with elderly family members in the form of investigating health conditions and the availability of care facilities. The ageing body of the elderly becomes a site of bordering. In opposition to the state individualistic system of a Nordic welfare state that aims at independency from the family, immigration regulations actually stress family dependencies. Only if immigration authorities perceive the applicant's dependency on the sponsor to be high enough, the applicant can become part of the Finnish welfare system.

#### Keywords

Bordering • Dependency • Grandparents • Family reunification • Elderly

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## Introduction

As cross-border mobility increases, so does the number of elderly parents or grandparents left behind when their children migrate. When multigenerational families attempt to bridge national borders, bordering practices enter their everyday lives. Ultimately, the ability of transnational families to join a family member abroad is dependent on immigration law and its implementation. Borders cut through the lives of transnational families, and familial ties are shaped by struggles over belonging and the threat of separation and deportation. One can argue that the family ties of migrants have become sites of *bordering* (Isin 2013), a process describing borders as products of sociopolitical processes. Rather than being understood as pre-existing entities, borders are seen as being produced and upheld, and they become complex social institutions (Mezzadra & Neilsen 2013; Scott 2011; Van Houtum & Van Naerssen 2002). Embedded in these institutions is a web of legal regulations that govern the way in which immigration officers evaluate migrant family life. It is these legal regulations and their implementation that this article is concerned with. What criteria does the immigration regime use to evaluate the cases of elderly migrants who wish to join their children abroad? Through the case of Finland, I show that when it comes to elderly family members, the ambivalent concept of dependency is a central criterion in determining whether elderly people are granted residence permits. I furthermore argue that in cases of family reunification involving the elderly, the

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bodies of elderly family members become bordering sites. Their health status and their ability to get by on their own become criteria according to which family reunion is granted. I show that the way the dependency requirement is defined in Finnish legislation makes it nearly impossible to meet.<sup>1</sup>

This article builds on interview data from Finland as well as an analysis of the Finnish Aliens Act, its implementation guidelines and the European Commission's guidance for the application of Directive 2003/86/EC to show how immigration policies and the officers implementing them define and use the concept of dependency. In general, immigration policies aim at limiting family migration, which governments tend to see as unproductive and a burden to public expenses (Askola 2016; Grillo 2008). There is a growing body of scholarship on the tightening regulation of family migration (Block 2016; de Hart 2007; Eggebø 2010; Fingerroos, Tapaninen & Tiilikainen 2016; Pellander 2015a; Wray 2011). This paper contributes to this scholarship by adding perspectives on ageing as well as transnational parenting and grandparenting: if family reunification is becoming increasingly difficult, how and under what conditions can elderly family members join their children in Finland? The article's findings are supported by the legal analysis of Askola (2016), who argues that the family life of elderly parents is evaluated in a narrow and technical manner, as it does not see parents as part of the family of their adult children, and that the dependency requirement is almost impossible to meet.

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Scholars of transnational ageing make a distinction between several separate, yet interconnected, strands of research (Horn & Scheppe 2015; Walsh & Näre 2016). The first two strands are related to migration and retirement: this literature is concerned with retired labour migrants (Baykara-Krumme 2013; Warnes & Williams 2006), as well as scholarship on retirement migration (Ackers & Dwyer 2004; King, Warnes & Williams 2000). Another growing field of research on migration and the elderly relates to the globalisation of care. Here, the logic is opposite to the one I am investigating: it is not the person in need of care who migrates, but rather the person providing care (Gavanas 2013; Lutz & Palenga-Möllnbeck 2012; Parreñas 2001; Wrede & Näre 2013).

A strand of scholarship more closely linked to the focus of this paper, namely research on grandparenting practices across national borders, has explored how care and emotional relations play out transnationally (Baldassar, Wilding & Baldock 2007; Ryan *et al.* 2009; Tiainen-Quadir 2016; Zhou 2013).

An important group for investigation is the elderly people left behind by migrating adult children. A study of older people in rural Albania (King & Vullnetari 2008) describes the difficult choices faced by the elderly parents of children who have migrated. Their options are to stay behind and try to manage there; to emigrate and follow their children; or, to travel between two countries, spending extended periods both at home and in their children's country of residence (Vullnetari & King 2008: 160). The last two options are closely tied to the policies of their children's country of residence. In many cases, elderly Albanians face difficulties getting even a visitor visa to see their family abroad, with the result that many are unable to visit and assist their children on occasions as major as the birth of a child (Vullnetari & King 2008).

As the aforementioned study illustrates, it is frequently difficult for an individual with adult children living abroad to get a resident permit to join them, especially if the parent comes from a non-European Union (EU) country and wants to join children living in Europe. The level of difficulty depends, however, on national and international legislation, as well as on the citizenship and legal status of both the adult child and the elderly parent. Furthermore, class can play a crucial role: especially when living on different continents, travelling back and forth on tourist visas and leading a translocal life might be an option for those with the resources to do so, while those with less financial means are often unable to regularly visit their families if they are not allowed to stay on a more permanent basis.

It is somewhat easier for adult EU citizens to bring parents into their country of residence than it is for nationals of that country, meaning that an EU national living in another EU country tends to have greater family reunification rights than the nationals of that country. Even in countries with rather inclusive family reunification policies, only very few "other family members", i.e. family members other than the sponsor's child, spouse, or cohabiting partner, or parent if a sponsor is younger than 18 years of age, are able to get residence permits (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2017). The present article is primarily concerned with the family reunification of non-EU nationals, as these are the applicants subject to the strict criterion of total dependency.

In what follows, I first present my data and methods and then provide some theoretical insights into the concept of dependency and its analytical use. I also demonstrate how dependency relates to family reunification. I then proceed to analyse how dependency is defined and determined in European and Finnish legislation and the difficulty of proving dependency, followed by an analysis of how

dependency and family reunification for the elderly are linked to the welfare state. The final analytical section explores questions of care and the body.

## Data and methods

The main data of this study consist of eight semi-structured interviews, conducted between March 2012 and June 2013, with employees of the Finnish governmental agencies primarily responsible for immigration: the Finnish Immigration Service (FIS) and the Finnish Police. I conducted four individual interviews with employees of the FIS; two were currently employed at FIS, and two had already retired. I also interviewed five police officers, three individually and two jointly in a group interview. Each interview lasted between 1 and 2 hours. While the interviews date back to 2012-2013, the legislation affecting the family reunification of "other family members" has not significantly changed, and the findings of this article remain relevant. I conducted the interviews at a time when migration issues were already being publicly discussed but had not yet become as disputed a topic as they have since become. Since the peak in asylum applications in 2015, the FIS has faced significant public criticism for their asylum and family reunification decisions (Kangas 2017; Kuittinen 2018). I may therefore have benefited from conducting my interviews earlier, at a time in which it may have been easier to gain access to the interviewees, as well as easier for them to speak more openly.

Besides interviews, the article draws on national and EU legislative documents, such as the Finnish Aliens Act (*Ulkomaalaislaki* 30.4.2004/301), the Implementation Guidelines on the Aliens Act used by FIS and the Police as well as the European Commission's guidance for the application of Directive 2003/86/EC. Both the interviews and the legal documents were analysed through content analysis, focussing especially on the way in which topics such as grandparents, the elderly and dependency were discussed.

## Theorising dependency and care: their implications for family reunification

I understand dependency to be not only a relation between individuals but also a concept that can be approached theoretically. In welfare state literature, both dependency and its counterpart independence play a vital role. The social democratic welfare state, in particular, is said to offer workers greater independence from employers and the capitalist market through processes of de-commodification (Esping-Andersen 1990). The feminist critique of this view demands that different tools be used for analysing the dependencies of women in welfare states (Lewis 1992; Orloff 1993; Sainsbury 1999).

Dependency in psychology and geriatric scholarship is divided among structured dependency, physical dependency, learned helplessness/dependency and interdependency. Baltes (1996) argues that dependency is multidimensional, multifunctional and multicausal. The multifunctionality of dependency refers to societies' acceptance of certain dependencies, such as the dependency of children on their parents, as important for personal development. The dependency of children on their parents is acknowledged as a basis for family reunification, yet this accepted form of dependency ends in most countries at the age of 18: children older than 18 years of age can no longer reunite with their parents abroad, and this threshold can be even earlier if the child gets married.

The multicausality of dependency captures the fact that social, psychological, economic and cultural conditions have an influence on dependency (Baltes 1996: 9–10). In particular, social, economic and cultural conditions are at work when state bureaucrats evaluate the family reunification rights of the elderly. These social, economic and cultural conditions have naturally changed over time. Fraser and Gordon (1994), in their genealogy of dependency in the American welfare state, show how, in the past, dependency was the norm and did not carry negative connotations. Dependency in that sense referred to subordination and, in the social context in which it was applied, nearly everyone was subordinate to someone else; there was no stigma related to the concept. All household members who were not the (male) head of the household were dependents. It is only with industrialisation that dependency became a personal trait carrying clearly negative and highly gendered and racialised implications (Fraser & Gordon 1994).

Baltes (1996: 10) speaks of the cultural determination of dependency. Certain groups, such as the elderly, unemployed or women, tend to be called dependent more easily than others; this is the result of a culturally produced understanding.

Having examined policies on family reunification from the perspective of dependency, I have arrived at three different types of migrant dependencies that are either explicitly or implicitly inherent in policies on family reunification; I call these *processes of dependency*. These three processes of dependency are dependency on the sponsor caused by the state, dependency on the sponsor prevented by the state and dependency on the sponsor required by the state. In this article, I focus in particular on the interplay and frictions between the second and third processes of dependency, but I first briefly describe all three processes because they all relate to family reunification policies.

Dependency on the sponsor is a condition inherent in immigration policies and exacerbated by states and their immigration policies (Anderson 1993; Eggebø 2010; Walsum & Spijkerboer 2007). Figure 1 illustrates the process at work here: the state grants a residence permit to the migrant on the basis of family ties (thick blue arrow), which then makes the migrant dependent on the sponsor (thin blue arrow). Family migrants are both legally and economically dependent on their relationship to the sponsor (and as a result of these dependencies, are often also emotionally and psychologically dependent). In the case of marriage migrants and cohabiting partners, it is the spouses' or partners' relationship that legally qualifies the migrant for a residence permit. Ending the relationship can thus result in the dependent migrant losing his or her basis for residency, which is particularly problematic in cases of violence and abuse (Anderson 1993; Burman 2012; Narayan 1997; Pellander 2015b). Legal dependency is also tied to economic dependency, particularly in cases where a subsistence or income requirement forces the sponsor to provide for the incoming migrant.

The second dependency process that relates to family reunification is dependency that is prevented by the state. Figure 2 illustrates this process. If a migrant is reliant on public assistance such as unemployment or other social benefits, he or she is (economically) dependent on the state, indicated by the first thin blue arrow. This then leads to the state not granting a residence permit. Thus, the incoming migrant has to prove independence from public welfare provisions in order to be able to get a residence permit.

The third dependency process at play when states regulate family reunification is migrant dependency on the sponsor as a requirement for getting a residence permit (Figure 3). An example of this type is an underage child's dependency on his or her parents. In most

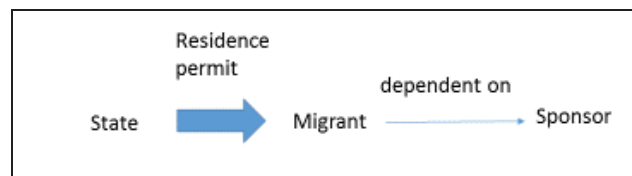


Figure 1. Dependency Type I: migrant dependency caused by the state.

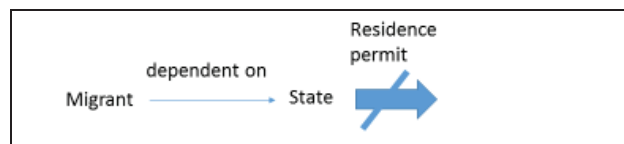


Figure 2. Dependency Type II: migrant dependency prevented by the state.

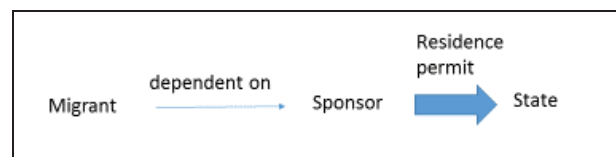


Figure 3. Dependency Type III: migrant dependency required by the state.

countries, a dependent child must be younger than 18 years of age, while under EU law for EU citizens, this age limit is 21 years. Proof of dependency can be biological ties as verified by DNA or other proof of legal guardianship. For the elderly parents of adult migrant residents who are the focus of this article, the required dependency is more cumbersome to prove, as discussed in the next subchapters. The applicants must prove that the family member residing abroad is totally dependent on the family member in Finland and that this dependency relationship is the basis for seeking the residence permit (Ulkomaalaislaki 30.4.2004/301).

I argue that dependency is a crucial concept in the analysis of family reunification and the welfare state. Dependency acts also as an analytical category, such as in dependency type 1 (dependency created by the state), but also as a concept in common usage, such as in the text of the Aliens Act or in parliamentary and media debates (dependency types 2 and 3, dependency prevented by the state and dependency required by the state). Dependency carries both negative and positive implications: it is both something to be avoided at any cost and something required by law. In what follows, I explore how dependency is operationalised in Finnish and EU legislation and by the authorities implementing the law.

Another central concept for my analysis is that of care. The significance of care to the topic of elderly family reunification was not obvious to me at the time I conducted my interviews. I was primarily concerned with the way in which state officials discuss family reunification and implement policies and thus expected to discuss rather technical issues. Research on care and transnational family ties has largely concentrated on families and family practices, not on the way states interfere with or shape these practices (Baldassar

2007; Baldassar, Wilding & Baldock 2007; Bryceson & Vuorela 2002; de Bruine *et al.* 2013; Vullnetari & King 2008). Transnational family ties and the regulation of those ties have long been studied as separate issues. Thus, care was not a topic that I set out to analyse; rather, my understanding of its importance grew out of my findings.

Hoppania and Vaittinen (2015) explain how the logic of care disrupts processes of commodification: "It is a logic that recognises the needs of the material body as unpredictable, unlimited and, hence, impossible to fully manage within any given "household", indeed in any economic order." (Hoppania & Vaittinen 2015: 72) Their discussion of a "household full of bodies" (Hoppania & Vaittinen 2015) resonates with the question of whether elderly people can join their families in Finland. Here, it is contested whether the bodies of the elderly people can and should be part of the "household" and whether they qualify for inclusion in the Finnish system that would grant them elderly care. The ailing body in general is generating the need for care (Hoppania *et al.* 2016). Weighing the physical needs and dependencies of the elderly against the financial costs to the welfare system makes the question of family reunion for the elderly an example of the political economy of care (see also Hoppania & Vaittinen 2015; Hoppania *et al.* 2016).

## Elderly migrants and contested dependency

In the state's assessment of elderly migrants' qualifications for family reunification, the migrant's dependency on the sponsor plays a similar role as the requirement that marriage migrants demonstrate that their relationship is "real". When assessing relationships, immigration bureaucrats are not interested in whether a person is happy or unhappy in their union, as they do not measure emotions. Nevertheless, immigration legislation has created criteria in order to prove that the motivation for marriage is not to gain entry into the country, and these criteria are often built on the ideals of love marriages.

As in the case of love and family life in marriages, dependency lacks meaning in itself and only becomes apparent through discursive definitions and technical requirements. According to Finnish immigration law, the elderly parent has to prove "total dependency" on the relative living in Finland, making dependency a central element in the assessment of eligibility for a resident permit. In this section, I explore how the requirement that an applicant be dependent on a Finnish family member is used as a tool to restrict the entry of elderly family migrants.

The European Commission's guidance for the application of Directive 2003/86/EC on the right to family reunification problematises the issue of dependency and states that the interpretation of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) should serve as guidance to Member States (European Commission 2015). However, dependency is not defined very clearly: it is first defined as receiving "legal, financial, emotional or material support" from the sponsor, and it is later stated that dependency is determined by the need for "material support" to meet the applicant's "essential needs". To further complicate the matter, "essential" is undefined.

The implementation guidelines of the FIS have a separate section dealing with the requirement that family members outside the sponsor's immediate family be not merely dependent, but rather "totally dependent" (*täysi riippuvuus*) on the sponsor. The concept of total dependency as laid out in the guidelines is closely linked to temporality, as the immigration office argues that total dependency cannot develop over time. While many would consider it natural that

dependency in old age develops slowly as a person gets older, this is not qualifying in the eyes of the authorities, as it would apply to too many elderly people, many of whom gradually become less-and-less capable of taking care of themselves. The immigration service's guidelines state that in order for the dependency to qualify for family reunification, it needs to set in suddenly. "The ongoing, gradual weakening of health due to ageing is not, however, such a relevant change in circumstances to make it unreasonable to expect that the other family member will continue to live in his or her country of origin." (FIS 2011)

Thus, it does not seem to be the state of health of the presumably dependent family member that is under scrutiny so much as whether the dependency has come about gradually over time. It is therefore relevant when and at what pace dependency occurs – an example of the way in which time plays a central role in the assessment of family ties (on temporality in family reunification, refer also Pellander 2015a).

Another FIS criterion is that no care facilities exist in the applicants' country of origin: if care facilities do exist, even very sick parents will not be granted a residence permit. Information about the existence and quality of care facilities abroad is provided by the Country Information Service (*Maatietopalvelu*) of the FIS. One of my interviews with an immigration officer reveals how the implementation guidelines on dependency are interpreted. The officer stated that if a child has been living in Finland and an elderly parent abroad, they do not form a nuclear family unit. If the parent is in an institution and "has been living under these similar conditions and has been able to live in their home country, then that person is not dependent. She/he has been able to live there alone." (Interviewee 4)

Summarising the definitions given by the EU, by the FIS guidelines and by its staff members, total dependency for the sake of family reunification with an elderly family member seems to mean that a) the person residing in Finland needs to meet that family member's "essential" needs, b) the dependency cannot grow over time but needs to be sudden and c) elderly family members cannot live without the family member who resides in Finland. Meeting all these criteria seems almost impossible, and it becomes quite apparent that in practice, the dependency requirement is a way of making sure that family reunification through this scheme can only be used in some very rare and exceptional cases. In her analysis of the *Senchishak v. Finland* case from the European Court of Human Rights, Askola (2016) argues that the concept of complete dependency "is constructed as both abnormal and extreme. As *Senchishak* demonstrates, entry is possible only for the tiny minority who are on the verge of dying or completely unable to cope on their own."

The fact that immigration of the elderly is so heavily restricted makes it clear that elderly migration is an unwanted form of migration. Baldassar (2007) states that governments restrict parent migration because of the assumption that elderly people will be a burden to the welfare state. She criticises this view for overlooking the fact that the elderly may be not only receiving care but also giving care to others, such as their children and grandchildren (Baldassar 2007: 278). Claims that migrants put a burden on the public economy is a very common trope in immigration debates, even when discussing the migration of those of working age, who can contribute to society as part of the labour force. For family reunification of the elderly, the situation is exacerbated, as they will most likely not be working. Yet, as many scholars show (Baldassar 2007; Deneva 2012; Erel 2012; Treas, 2008), elderly parents often attempt to move in order to give, not receive, care. Yet, even a grandparent who wants to move in

order to give care has difficulties convincing the authorities, as the example of a Chinese grandfather in the following section illustrates.

## Dependency of the elderly: the welfare state

According to immigration officers, the main reason for Finland's strict provisions for family reunion seems to be the generosity of the residence-based entitlements of the Finnish welfare state. One retired officer of the FIS stated that "[In Finland,] you automatically receive all the social benefits, whether you want it or not, even if you are a foreigner" (Interviewee 2). Foreigners do not receive all Finnish social benefits, and their benefits are tied to their legal status. Yet, this comment shows that the granting of residency rights also confers a certain degree of entitlement to welfare state services, which is a central element of the Finnish and Nordic welfare state systems.

A police officer explained to me that the Finnish healthcare system takes care of "everyone". She compared parent migration from abroad to parent migration within Finland and commented that, even within Finland, it can be difficult to move an elderly parent to the municipality where his or her children live and to access services there. The officer argued that it should not be any easier to move a parent from abroad (Interviewee 5a).

The statements of the interviewed bureaucrats must be understood within the institutional and historical framework of the Nordic welfare state. The history of the Nordic welfare state has been a history of shedding dependencies within the family (Trägårdh 1997). The individual is the unit that is entitled to benefits and taken care of by the state, and features such as the individual taxation of married partners, children's subjective right to day care and financial allowances for students regardless of parental income are all intended to strengthen the individual. This state individualism (Trägårdh 1997) is the perspective from which most Finnish bureaucrats are accustomed to looking at families and family life. Within the state individualistic system, however, immigration regulations require bureaucrats to consider families from the opposite perspective. Instead of strengthening the individual so that he or she can be independent from the family, immigration regulations actually stress dependencies within the family. The result is that strong family dependencies may allow an elderly person to get a residence permit and become entitled to the provisions of the welfare state—which usually aims at dismantling these dependencies.

The regulations requiring that the incoming elderly person be totally dependent on the family member in Finland already selects for people who need assistance, and it is quite likely that even if their children look after them, they would also need professional help. Here, we see a bargaining of dependencies: one dependency makes it possible to enter into another. If the dependency on the sponsor living in Finland is high enough, it is then acceptable to also become part of (and, in some cases, maybe even dependent on) the Finnish welfare system. If a Russian elderly woman can prove that it is not possible for her to live in Russia without the support of her daughter living in Finland, she can get a residence permit. As a resident, she is then entitled to various welfare state services and provisions. But as statistics from FIS show, very few cases of dependent family members outside the immediate family qualify for family reunion. In 2016, FIS issued 175 negative and 44 positive decisions; in 2015, 298 decisions were negative and 50 positive (FIS 2016, 2017).

In 2015, the Finnish media reported widely on the case of a Chinese man who moved to Finland to care for his grandchildren. The man was planning to live in Finland on a worker's permit, saying

that he would care for his grandchildren as an employee of his son's family. He was expelled from Finland and banned from entering the Schengen Area for 2 years because his "employer," his own family, was not able to give an accurate account of his working hours, and the FIS did not believe he was actually going to be employed (Kerkele 2015).

From the perspective of dependency, this case shows the ambivalence of the dependencies at work. The Chinese man was not (yet) dependent on his family in Finland but, on the contrary, was planning to help his family here. His care work would probably have reduced the family's need for public childcare and other assistance. Yet, care work in the family was not seen as a "real" occupation that would have entitled him a residence permit. The officials argued that he was attempting to circumvent immigration regulations by claiming to work for his son and daughter-in-law.

Based on public reaction to the case, a Chinese grandfather applying for a work permit seems to be generally considered an acceptable burden on the welfare state. Online debates sparked by an article on the website of the national daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* included racialised discussion of the expenses incurred by the welfare state due to migration. Commentators depicted the Chinese as hard-working people who more deserve to live in Finland than other migrants. As I show elsewhere, the way in which elderly people's family reunion is publicly debated is highly dependent on the way the applicant is positioned intersectionally in regard to race, religion, class and age (Horsti & Pellander 2014).

When the retired female employee of the FIS recalled family reunion cases she had handled involving the elderly, interestingly, she also mentioned a Chinese grandparent, to whom she did decide to grant a residence permit: "Well I also remember, I gave one Chin- Chinese [laughs] grandmother after long [stresses the word] consideration... But that story somehow seemed so trustworthy that..." (Interviewee 2). Here, it becomes clear that while there are objective immigration criteria that are either fulfilled or not fulfilled, the decision to issue a residence permit also rides on how believable the migrant's narrative is in the eyes of immigration officers. If the person and their narrative are seen as trustworthy, the criteria are apparently evaluated less strictly.

In general, Interviewee 2 found the accounts of applicant families questionable, casting doubt over the families' claims that no care is available in the elderly parent's country of residence. "Of course the daughter or son that's here says there's nobody over there to take care of their parents, and that things there don't work and that it's part of their culture that they care for their parents." (Interviewee 2) This resonates with findings from other scholars in Finland who argue that immigration control creates an atmosphere of constant doubt, which applicants for family reunion must navigate (Fingerroos, Tapaninen & Tiilikainen 2016).

The entanglements of the welfare state and the dependencies of the elderly are taking place at a time when the Finnish welfare state is enacting various policies to actively encourage families to take on additional care responsibilities for their elderly family members (see also Anttonen 2009; Askola 2016; Häikiö, Anttonen & van Aerschoot 2011). However, these policies do not extend to transnational family settings.

## The body and assumptions of care

In the case of elderly grandparents, the question of care is tied to the question of dependency. Both of these questions, in turn, are linked to

the body of the elderly person. When producing proof of dependency, the bodies of elderly family members become material sites of examination (Irni 2010). Bodily functions that deteriorate slowly due to ageing do not allow an elderly person to get a residence permit to live with her or his children in Finland. Thus, it is not the slowly ageing dependent body that gets access, but rather the body that is suddenly left without care, the body that cannot uphold bodily functions without the assistance of others (George 1991). For the elderly in particular, it can be arbitrary and difficult to make a distinction between health impairments that have grown slowly over time and those that have worsened suddenly. Local healthcare professionals and their health assessments of the presumably dependent elderly thus play a vital gatekeeper role in immigration. In this way, the biopolitics of borders (Bendixsen 2018) affects the sick bodies of ageing migrants abroad, making their physical condition a marker of potential inclusion into the Finnish welfare state.

While the dependency requirement in immigration legislation makes the body in need of care a site of bordering practices, access to care in the country of residence from which the elderly person wants to move to Finland is also relevant. Thus, it is not only an assessment of the functions of the body in need of care that is significant but also the amount of care that a certain country can provide. While it seems feasible to assess whether a particular country provides care and assistance for the elderly, the quality and amount of care also merit consideration. How many times a day should a sick and elderly person be seen by healthcare personnel? What level and standard of care available abroad is low enough to allow a sick or elderly person to receive a Finnish residence permit on the basis of family ties?

Immigration officials tend to see elderly people in terms of providing or receiving care, which can be problematic when an elderly person moves to Finland on the basis of marriage. As I show elsewhere, Russian women who were married to Finnish men but shared apartments with their adult children in Finland had their living arrangements used against them in court and by immigration officers (Leinonen & Pellander 2014). The officers and the Helsinki Administrative Court argued that these migrants did not share a family life with their Finnish spouses but rather wanted to be with their children and grandchildren. This family configuration is a new category of the so-called "marriages of convenience" that are targeted by immigration officials. Immigration officers and courts interpret these marriages as a method of circumventing the rather strict requirements for bringing ageing parents into the country. For younger couples, the lack of a shared address is merely interpreted as an absence of shared everyday life, while in the case of elderly couples, living apart leads to suspicion of care-giving or -receiving in a context other than the marriage, making the marriage suspicious and potentially fraudulent.

Elderly people seeking residence permits are not treated equally but rather are affected by bordering mechanisms differently depending on the ways in which they are situated intersectionally (Yuval-Davis 2011). In the majority of cases I have had access to, elderly family members lived with their children due to economic concerns, and the couple was arguing that they could not afford to live on their own. Class, therefore, intersects strongly with age. An elderly couple who cannot afford to live by themselves would live with their children. In the case of Jorma from Finland and Svetlana from Russia (names changed), for instance, which was brought to the Administrative Court in Helsinki, the couple shared the same address with Svetlana's children in Finland. Due to this living arrangement, the authorities doubted the authenticity of the elderly couple's marriage, arguing that Svetlana had used the marriage as a way to live closer to her daughter and granddaughter (Leinonen & Pellander 2014).

The relevance of other family members in Finland for the decisions made by the Immigration Service was also acknowledged by one of my interviewees, who stated that cases in which other family members already live in Finland are examined with a more critical eye and screened especially carefully (Interviewee 7). While in general, the ability of the elderly to move to Finland depends on family members living in Finland, elderly who migrate due to marriage are an exception. In these cases, the existence of other family members influences immigration officials' decisions negatively (see also Leinonen & Pellander 2014).

## Conclusion

In this article, I have shown how definitions and contestations of the concept of dependency become part of the bordering practices that affect the lives of transnational families in Finland with elderly family members living abroad.

Familial attachment as a justification for any type of family reunification is evaluated by very concrete and physical criteria. In the case of elderly parents, this means proving that a sudden sickness has created a total dependency on the sponsor in Finland. According to immigration officers, the main motivation for this requirement is to prevent elderly migrants from becoming a burden on the welfare state. The context within which immigration officers operate is therefore highly relevant. In a Nordic welfare state and a system of state individualism, the understanding that family members have a responsibility to care for each other is not very prominent, and communicating this kind of dependency to an immigration officer can be difficult. Ultimately, the immigration officer makes a decision not only regarding the applicant's dependency on the family member in Finland but also on the question of whether the applicant should be entitled to welfare state provisions. The evaluation of the everyday life of family members therefore becomes a bordering process aimed at protecting welfare state expenditures. As Askola (2016) shows, the challenge of migration in old age tends to be seen as particular concerns in countries such as Finland that have built an extensive social welfare system, while the demographic challenges of ageing populations is of course shared also by countries that provide less extensive welfare provisions.

I set out three different types of dependencies at play when immigration officials consider elderly family reunification. The immigration of elderly parents is regulated by a combination of the state's attempt to prevent the applicant's dependency on the welfare state with the state's requirement of dependency on a family member. In order to limit public expenditure, the requirement of dependency on the sponsor is set so high that it is difficult for anyone to meet it.

In the case of elderly parents, the question of care is tied to the question of dependency, both of which are linked to the body of the elderly person, which becomes a bordering site. It is not the slowly ageing dependent body that qualifies for residence permits, but the body that is suddenly in need of care and cannot uphold bodily functions without the assistance of others.

When elderly family members apply for family reunification, immigration officers exercise power over transnational family relations by probing intimate details about migrant bodies. Exercising power over transnational family relations is a form of population control (see Foucault 2003: 252–253) that intrudes into the private sphere. Even the biological functions of the sick, elderly body can become subject to immigration regulations and other bordering processes.

All families who apply for family reunion are affected by immigration control in one way or another, as they all need to disclose personal information about their familial ties to the bureaucrats, who act as gatekeepers and decide which types of family life are accepted and which are not. The sick body, the elderly body and the poor body are treated very differently, depending on how they fit into the normative framework set up by immigration authorities. Being sick and elderly are the preconditions for being eligible for family reunion in the first place, while poverty increases the risk of separation if family members cannot afford to travel between countries on tourist visas to see each other. In addition to health status and income, administrative distinctions concerning the right to live with elderly family members based on the citizenship of the sponsor also exist: for EU citizens, reuniting with an ageing parent is easier, while for foreign residents, it is not possible at all.

Even after having received citizenship, naturalised citizens with family members abroad remain subject to bordering practices. Though their own residence status is secure, they remain subject to administrative bordering practices (see Könönen 2018) when it comes to living with and caring for their elderly parents. The administrative practices in legislation may be in conflict with the understandings of the bureaucrats on the ground, who are tasked with implementing these policies. The Nordic welfare state is shaped by state individualism and aims at supporting its individual members in order to help them become more independent from their families. Yet, as this article shows, bordering processes targeted at elderly

migrants stress on and require dependencies within the family, in direct opposition to the usual norm. Here, immigration regulations turn the ageing body in need of care into a site of bordering practices, practices that are entangled in the structures and normative understandings of the borders of the welfare state.

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## Notes

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