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Research Chapter

Australia Has Never Felt as Far Away as Now:

Australians In Finland And Social Exclusion During the COVID-19 Era

Abstract

Through critical theories of social exclusion and alienation, this chapter seeks to outline the difficulties that Australian citizens have faced on the subject of returning to their home country after Australia closed their borders in March 2020 as a reaction to the COVID-19 outbreak. I will analyse, discuss, and investigate different national reactions of the COVID-19 case. Using data collected from a focus group interview with five Australians residents in Finland, I employ phenomenology methods to analyse the data with reference to my research question: if Australians feel excluded due to the Australian border restrictions. This chapter argue that Australians, that were not able to return before the national border closure in Australia and cancellation of international flights, suffer from alienation from their homeland. Such alienation and exclusion can prevail and further distance and isolate Australian individuals overseas from their counterparts/family within Australia. The limited capacity of returning Australian citizens from overseas has excluded citizens from returning, and the expenses of flights and self-financed quarantine in Australia is leading to further difficulties for them to be able to return.

1. Introduction

I am a Finnish citizen; as a citizen I have rights, privileges, and responsibilities. One of these is the right to carry a passport. One of the privileges a passport gives is access across borders. During the era of the COVID-19 pandemic this access has become restricted. Many governments have decided to close borders and set up restrictions. My wife, an Australian citizen, is one of those individuals who was affected by these restrictions, as her flight was cancelled in March 2020 from Finland to Australia due to the pandemic. Thereafter capacity restrictions as well as compulsory hotel quarantine was set up by the Australian government

(Australian Government Department of Health, 2020), creating further obstacles in reaching one's home country. This piqued my interest in the subject, *do these restrictions create exclusion towards a nation's citizens?* Free movement has after all been a fundamental aspect in most Western societies, especially travelling from and back to the country of a person's citizenship.

The hypothesis is that Australians are excluded from their home country due to the border restrictions that were created after COVID-19. Therefore, because of this exclusion there is a possibility to become alienated towards their country of origin. Another argument towards exclusion is the role of media in creating a biased political and pro-restriction attitude within a society i.e., Australia.

This research will be based on an open interview with five Australians living in Finland, discussing how COVID-19 has affected their lives and free movement of returning to or visiting their home country.

In the following sections, I will provide theories of social exclusion and alienation, and examine arguments on how these theories affect citizenship. Thereafter I will provide background information on COVID-19 origin and National COVID-19 response models. I will then discuss my methodology before examining the empirical section of the interview and examining arguments of the media's impact towards exclusion. Finally, I will discuss whether national border restrictions during the era of COVID-19 have led to exclusion based on this research.

2. Social exclusion

Social exclusion represents a division between an included majority and an excluded minority (Levitas, 2005, 7). This is considered as the base argument when it comes to social exclusion, and can be used within most theoretical frameworks, i.e., poverty, gender, sexuality, age, and race. Social exclusion being a powerful concept, requires analytical clarity, due to its flexibility (Levitas, 2005, 178). Therefore, social exclusion can be included in most social theories or problems where a person has been excluded from a majority or having difficulties to achieve the same rights as the majority. When it comes to contemporary research within

social exclusion, there is an emphasis towards the "importance of intermediate institutions, not just between individual and state" (Levitas, 2005, 182). This chapter is heavily influenced by the difficulties that individuals encounter when outside the borders of their nation and are under a hegemony that preferably puts those within the borders first.

Giddens discusses in *Sociology* how "Social exclusion refers to ways in which individuals may become cut off from full involvement in the wider society." (2009, 498). This theoretical perspective can be applied on people that are outside of a nation's border and are not able to be part of the wider society within a nation's border. According to Giddens, important aspects of the discussion regarding social exclusion are the social forces which shape people's circumstances (2009, 498). Social forces can be fluid during a pandemic or other catastrophe, meaning that people's circumstances become shaped according to the social force's outcome.

In testimonial injustice someone can be "wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower." (Fricker, 2007, 20). To be wronged is partly one-sided, as the party that feels wronged is usually the excluded party, being part of a minority. Whereas the party that might have wronged someone possibly has decided to keep the majority safe. For many of the Australian "stranded" citizens their belief of injustice comes from them feeling wronged due to being stranded outside of Australia. The testimonial injustice in this case being that to the stranded citizens capacity as a knower*,* there is a feeling that the country has wronged them. "For Marx, alienation refers to feelings of indifference or hostility…" (Giddens, 2009, 892). The feeling of being wronged and having experienced injustice may lead towards indifference and hostility, which according to Marx can be referred to as alienation.

3. Alienation

"Alienation is the inability to establish a relation to other human beings, to things, to social institutions and thereby also – so the fundamental intuition of the theory of alienation – to oneself." (Jaeggi, 2014, 3). When you become alienated towards your own country, there can be a sense of powerlessness and lack of relation towards the nation's social institution. This naturally applies to the internal division between people outside the borders and people that are within the borders as well, leading to social exclusion and possibly alienation towards those inside the borders.

According to Jaeggi, critical theory in terms of alienation as a concept within social philosophy has its beginning in Rousseau's work "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality Among Men" (1755). Rousseau's work discusses how some become alienated from their own needs and how recognition and self-worth become dependent on other's opinions (Jaeggi, 2014, 7). Jaeggi continues by discussing the two main themes of alienation that Rousseau influenced, these being *authenticity* and *social freedom*. Authenticity is a modern ideal of an "agreement with oneself and one's own nature" (2014, 7). And social freedom where an unalienated form of socialization is created through a normative ideal, in the opposite of "the exclusively negative effects of socialization" of Rousseau's alienated character (Jaeggi, 2014, 7). "Alienation is a taken-for-granted worldview of our relationship to the world that has profound consequences for approaches to knowing (science) and acting (praxis) in the world." (Rowe et al., 2020). The practical appropriation of alienation theory is here considered within the framework of internal division, indifference, and the loss of relation to self and the world.

When a person suddenly becomes aware of their own life becoming alien to them, they can become indifferent to people that once meant something to them, or future projects and hope becomes pointless (Jaeggi, 2014, 43). Alienation could partly be a false consciousness, where it becomes difficult to distinguish between being and not-being part of community (Rowe et al., 2020). Government border closure could be argued to create a false consciousness of citizenship and what rights citizens have, as they have difficulties reaching their home country. Therefore, citizens may feel that they are not part of the country anymore.

3.1 Citizenship

According to Richard Bellamy, in *Citizenship: A Very Short Introduction*, theories of citizenship are categorized as normative theories and empirical theories. *Normative theories* "attempt to set out the rights and duties a citizen ideally ought to have", whereas *empirical theories* describe and explain how rights and duties fall into a citizens' possession (2008, 34). Even in a democratic society, certain rights can be withdrawn from citizens if the necessity arises. There can be some change accomplished through unity, although the opposite of the unity argument would be social co-operation, where citizens are expected to follow rules and norms (Byrne, 2005, 40). Rights being withdrawn from citizens outside borders could be

defined as exclusion and possibly alienation. One could also speculate that citizens could be excluded through restrictions that restrict freedom of movement in general, but my theory leans towards the inability for citizens to return to their home country. This is due to the pandemic which has influenced political discourse and national policies that has adverse effects on citizens of different nationalities.

"Membership lies at the heart of citizenship. To be a citizen is to belong to a given political community." (Bellamy, 2008, 53). Part of having a membership means that you will have access to the institute or community you are a member of. It is an exclusive access that in most situations mean you can return to your country without any hindrances (Bellamy, 2008, 53).

4. Origins and speculation of COVID-19

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) COVID-19 began in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019 where the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission reported the first cases of the novel coronavirus (WHO, 2020). There have been many speculations about the timeline and start of COVID-19, but I will follow the WHO's timeline as it is a one of the leading organisations in countering global epidemics.

China shared the genetic sequence for the respiratory virus before any cases had been confirmed outside of China. By January 13th, 2020, there was a case recorded in Thailand (WHO, 2020). At the end of January there was evidence of human-to-human transmission, and 82 cases had been reported from 18 other countries other than China (WHO, 2020). On the 11th of March 2020, "WHO made the assessment that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic." (WHO, 2020). By March 17, 2021, there have been approx. 121,000,000 cases, and approx. 2,680,000 deaths in 221 countries (worldometer, 2020).

5. National COVID-19 response model

Most countries have based their COVID-19 models on the recommendations of different health institutes, such as the Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare of Finland

(THL, 2020), and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2020). The use of different models in response to measures in "flattening the curve" (slowing down) or eliminating COVID-19 is based on research from earlier pandemics, as well as constant new data (Chang et al., 2020). Models are fluid and responses are different depending on the COVID-19 situation. Due to technology, tracing and intervention all of this is easier than it was during the early 20th century Spanish Flu pandemic. Now it is possible to follow up on pandemic dynamics, age-dependant attack rates, reproductive numbers, age and social dependant transmission rates, household clusters and other epidemiological parameters (Chang et al., 2020). From these different parameters, nations have created different models as counter measures to slow down the spread of COVID-19.

"Border closure is unlikely to be able to prevent importation, and can have huge economic and personal costs." (Boyd et. al., 2017). This argument has been trending due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and different restriction models that countries have created to prevent the pandemic from spreading. Although there are negative effects for border closures, Boyd et al. also states that there have been positive results when discussing border closures, especially for smaller island nations. This is due to the effective prevention of the spread of pandemic influenza, leading to the healthcare system not being over-encumbered by influenza patients. Therefore, a nation being able to save in costs and preventing possible economic stress (Boyd et al., 2017).

Sections 5.1 and 5.2 below give a short insight into the national COVID-19 prevention models of Australia and Finland. Section 5.3 is a table based on the prevention towards COVID-19 in Finland, Australia, and Sweden. I have introduced Sweden in this table as their prevention model in the beginning of the pandemic, was the opposite of Australia's, as they did not restrict the citizens' rights of free movement within the country, or even leaving the country as this right is mandated in the Swedish Constitution of 1974 (The Constitution of Sweden, 2016, 31). The Swedish model has been problematic as it has strained the Swedish healthcare system where many hospitals have been over-encumbered by COVID-19 patients.

5.1. The Australian model

As the virus started spreading to other countries, many governments began creating plans to reduce the spread of the virus. In some cases, this was done through border restrictions. Australia being one of these countries set the the Biosecurity Act 2015 into motion.

> "On 18 March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 outbreak in Australia, the Governor-General declared that a human biosecurity emergency exists. The declaration gives the Minister for Health expansive powers to issue directions and set requirements in order to combat the outbreak. This is the first time these powers under the *Biosecurity Act* have been used." (Parliament of Australia, 2020; Biosecurity Act, 2015).

The implementation of this act led to an overseas travel ban that was considered as a biosecurity emergency requirement. Australia was not the only country globally that created new restrictions when it comes to travelling, but it has been one of very few countries that has made it hard for their own citizens, who are overseas, to return, move back or visit their home country. The mentality towards quarantining and border closure, is not a new vision in Australia. As an island nation it has had the necessary tools to quarantine itself and stay 'immune' towards the 'diseased' world. "The Quarantine Act was later merged to form the Immigration Restriction Act, with quarantine influencing immigration policy." (Moloney, K., Moloney, S., 2020). Australia has the possibility to close its borders to remain safe from the diseased outside world.

5.2. The Finnish Model

The Finnish model of COVID-19 restrictions has been much closer to the Swedish model. There have been stricter rules for restaurant and business opening times, as well as international travelling. The quarantine model has been the same as the global one where two weeks has been recommended for quarantining at home, but there has not been a need for self-funded mandatory hotel quarantine like in Australia. The Finnish institute for health and welfare created a traffic light model which Finland has been following when it comes to travelling (2020). In this model green means "The risk of infection is not significantly greater than in Finland", red is the opposite of green where infection is greater than in Finland, and

Grey "Countries subject to EU external border restriction" where non-essential travelling should be avoided (Finnish institute for health and welfare, 2020). Travelling to certain countries was and will be restricted during the pandemic even in Finland, but in Australia it is prohibited to leave the country unless granted an exemption by the Australian Border Force (covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au, 2021).

5.3. Table for the national models

	Social Distancing	Quarantine	Restrictions / Shutdown of public places	Borders. Internal and external
Finnish COVID-19 Response	1-2 meters distance to others. Follow good hand, coughing and sneezing hygiene. Wearing face mask if safe distance cannot be kept up (23.11.2020).	Any symptoms get tested. Self-quarantine is voluntary, can be shortened by testing. Official-quarantine period is usually 10 days. Traffic light method is used for quarantine recommendation when travelling to Finland (23.11.2020).	Based on regions. Recommended to work and study from home. Elementary and high school continue normally. No more than 20-person private events. Certain public spaces close earlier (23.11.2020).	Finnish citizens and family can return. Boarder guard decides from which country you can travel to Finland. Everyone has the right to leave Finland, other countries restrictions need to be considered (23.11.2020).
Australian COVID-19 Response	Good hygiene. Distance yourself 1,5 meters from others. Isolating oneself and following limits for gatherings. Own choice if wearing mask (23.11.2020).	14 days quarantine if you have been in contact with someone with COVID-19. 14 days self-financed quarantine at a hotel if flying from overseas (23.11.2020).	Based on regions. Domestic travel restrictions. Regional restrictions are set in place where cases have increased (23.11.2020).	External and some internal borders are still closed. There are exemptions where i.e., ACT can travel to NSW. Flights from Australia are allowed under exemption. Flights to Australia are for Australian citizens, there is a capacity per state for how many can fly in

				from outside of Australia per week (23.11.2020).
Swedish COVID-19 Response	Hand hygiene. Distance should be an arm's length. Shops and restaurants might require flexibility. No recommendation for wearing face masks in public (23.11.2020).	7 days after falling ill. You should get tested in case of mild symptoms. If feeling unwell you should always stay home. No quarantine recommendation for travelling to Sweden (23.11.2020).	Based on regions. Maximum of 8 participants is the norm, not including sport and cultural events. Avoiding large gatherings. No shutdown of public places. (23.11.2020).	Recommendation against non-essential travel to countries outside EU/EAA/Schengen. Temporary entry ban to EU via Sweden. Swedish citizens can return (23.11.2020).

Different countries have dealt with this pandemic in different ways (see e.g., THL.fi, folkhalsomyndigheten.se, government.se, health.gov.au) The Australian strategy could be considered the strictest when it comes to border restrictions etc., but Sweden and Finland have also increased restrictions as the COVID-19 situation is fluid and rapidly changing. Finland has not yet (25.01.2021) imposed mandatory hotel quarantine for arriving passengers.

6. Methodology

Qualitative research is concerned with subjective meanings, i.e., understanding human experience. In interviews one tries to access content within a person's mind through empathetic skills (Silverman, 2020, 3). Experiences and statements are supported by reasonable arguments and data, which suggest plausible conclusions (Silverman, 2020, 5). This qualitative research is based on phenomenology entailing systematic collection and qualitative data analysis of empirical materials and the interview on exclusion during the COVID-19 era. Phenomenology is an empirical research method used in investigating and describing a phenomenon (Larsson & Holmström, 2009, 59; Groenewald, 2004, 5). In phenomenology there is not just one style. "Therefore, it is difficult to claim one single definition of phenomenology." (Qutoshi, 2018, 216). A key argument in phenomenology is that experience involves i.e., perception, thought and emotion, and how these involve

intentionality as the individual in question focuses on a specific thing or thought (Groenewald, 2004; Qutoshi, 2018).

The data for this research are from two primary sources. (1) A focus group interview, which is a qualitative approach in gaining plausible and in-depth understanding of an issue or issues (Nyumba et al., 2018). This method is used when there is a need to obtain data from a group of individuals, that have been purposely selected (Nyumba, 2018). The focus group interview with five Australian citizens residing in Finland in December 2020 via Zoom. (2) Secondary information gathered from newspaper articles, documentation, government guidelines and acts, academic research, and social media to assist in creating descriptive data for this research.

I created a post with information about the interview in a Facebook group called *Aussies in Finland* and eight people showed interest in participating. I then contacted these people via email and two men, and three women were chosen randomly. This was due to (1) all the interested participants being white Australians, therefore, none were chosen on racial grounds. (2) It was desirable to have an equal split between normative genders within the interested participants. One of the female participants had lived for a longer period in Finland and therefore she was a good candidate (13 years), as she had possibly become used to the social structure in Finland. The other participants were within a similar age bracket and had lived in Finland for a shorter to medium period (1-8 years).

The research participants will be referred to as *__A__*, *__B__*, *__C__*, *__D__* and *__E__*.

- *__A__* is an Australian citizen who has lived in Finland since 2019. *__A__* is married to a Finnish citizen and was pregnant during the interview.
- *__B__* is an Australian citizen who has lived in Finland since 2014. *__B__* has permanent residency in Finland due to work.
- *__C__* has lived in Finland since 2019 and is currently studying. *__C__* has dual citizenship as his mother is an Australian born Finn.
- *__D__* is an Australian citizen who has lived in Finland since 2012 and is married to a Finnish citizen.
- *__E__* has lived in Finland since 2007. *__E__* has multiple citizenships of which two are Australian and Finnish.

All participants, except **_D_**, have not been back home to Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic. **_D_** was in Australia in March 2020 when COVID-19 became a pandemic and had to "race back to Finland" (**_D_**). Most of the participants had planned to visit family and others in Australia in 2020, but due to the capacity of flights arriving to Australia and expensive compulsory hotel quarantine, this was not possible.

The first part of the interview process was to eliminate which participants were eligible for the interview, therefore Australian citizens residing in Finland were the focus without any specific character trait. The interview questions were categorized by each theme that are part of this research. The first theme was *COVID-19*, the second theme was *Restrictions and Social Exclusion through Media* and the third theme was *Citizenship and Alienation*. All the participants signed a consent form. In the data collection phase, the interview was recorded through three different methods, by Zoom recording, voice recording and camera recording to help with future transcribing. After the recorded interview, the material was transcribed. Then the data analysis was started, which was completed according to the material from the transcription and other empirical data that has been personally archived.

7. The Effect of COVID-19

COVID-19 has affected everyone in the globe differently. For the research participants these effects range from financial, social and health. The subsequent paragraphs show how the participants in this study are affected by COVID-19.

7.1. Financially

During a pandemic that effects the entire country, unemployment rates would possibly rise, especially if the pandemic goes on for a longer period. In the Finnish *Statista Research Department* article, they state that "roughly 24.4 thousand [24,400] people have become unemployed and 39.2 [39,200] thousand people temporarily laid off mainly because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Finland." (2021). Therefore, as the unemployment has risen, people have less financial capital to support themselves. A higher unemployment rate

has been identified by scholars of Social Exclusion as a critical factor leading to social exclusion (Giddens, 2009; Pohlan, 2019). Unemployment is especially difficult for those that have worked in a low-income position, as they have likely not been able to save up or expected to be laid-off. There is also less new employment available, as the whole country is being affected by the pandemic, especially in the lower-productivity sector (Farchy & Immervoll, 2020, 12). One of my research participants says (*A*):

> *I was struggling to find work… I mean Covid has not helped that situation in any way, I have used the time now to do my degree… I have managed to do almost a whole two-year degree in eight months… However, I am pregnant at the moment. (**A**).*

A observes that finding work during COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult. She has used her free time to study towards a degree. Difficulties finding work means less/no income to the family. Being pregnant also makes it even more difficult for *A* to find work as women suffer often from discriminatory practices at work or during job interviews because of their childbearing and care responsibilities (see Giddens, 2009). Unemployment, being pregnant and being an immigrant makes *A*'s chances for employment very difficult. Therefore, Levitas (2005) identify immigrant women as people with high chances of becoming poor – hence socially excluded.

In addition, the issue of employment is also discussed by *B* as follows:

> *All of our performances [opera] have been cancelled… I can't really complain other than losing a bit of pay, which I have survived quite fine. (**B**).*

Dance performances and other entertainment show were greatly hit by COVID-19. *B* laments the cancellation of their performances and how it has affected her. This has led to her losing some pay, which would affect her finances now and, in the future, adding to the chances of moving towards poverty (see Giddens, 2009).

These lack or reduction in income opportunities (see *A* and *B* above) one can argue that the cost of living and possibilities of travelling, especially travelling back to Australia, has become more difficult. Thus, this can add to the social distance.

In addition, two of the participants discuss the financial aspect of the hotel quarantine:

> *I would have tried to get to Australia for Christmas this year. If not for the hotel, the compulsory pay your own way held at hotel quarantine. I also cannot afford that kind of money. (**E**).*

> *The Australians in Spain who were stuck, literally, could not get out and then when they try and get back in there after paying exorbitant fees for the flights and the hotel quarantine (**C**).*

E and **C** observe how the compulsory hotel quarantine that is self-funded is adding to the difficulty of travelling to Australia. Financially **E** cannot afford the hotel quarantine expenses. The higher flight expenses are another part which adds to the hotel quarantine expenses. There is a requirement of a higher financial capita for each returning citizen. Excluding those that are not financially able to meet certain requirements and therefore leading to a contemporary form of exploitation (see Byrne, 2005). Finances which add to the distance towards the possibility to travel to Australia, also add to the social distance.

7.2. Socially

Before COVID-19 social distancing depended on social norms. In Finland, Australia and Sweden hugging and shaking hands was something most people did whenever they met an acquaintance before COVID-19. Now social distancing has become a global term due to the pandemic (Sorensen et al., 2021), as hugs have become elbow bumps, and handshakes have become fist bumps. There are signs in shops and outside, recommending keeping a 1–2-meter distance to others. There is also a stronger emphasis on hand and coughing/sneezing hygiene and wearing a mask (See the table on pp. 8-9). Social distancing during COVID-19 emphasises keeping a physical distance to others (Sorensen et al., 2021). Distance is now more prominent, as it is difficult to socially meet up with friends and family that live close by. Therefore, increasing the distance towards a person's social network that exists abroad/outside of borders. **D** observes the physical distance and mental distance to Australia:

> *Going home has not been possible. I think that is sort of mentally been the hardest part… one of the hard parts about Covid and living abroad is that, although Australia is really far away. It has never actually felt that far away until now. (**D**)*

D laments the fact that he cannot go back to Australia during COVID-19 and describes it as the most difficult effect of COVID-19 mentally for him. This inability to return home has

made the distance between Finland and Australia feel even further mentally. The country specific restrictions have occurred through national policies, due to the pandemic (see the table on pp. 8-9), this has led to the mental distance growing towards your home country as it is harder to travel there. Therefore, the distance has become even wider, and this influences people's wellbeing as establishing your relation towards your fellow citizens becomes harder (see Jaeggi, 2014). The distance between Finland and Australia is vast, and COVID-19 has mentally increased that distance farther. Social distancing has become a norm in Finland in everyday life.

In addition, two of the participants observe social distancing in everyday life:

> *However, I am pregnant at the moment. So, that has changed things with all mother groups and everything being online and things like that. (**A**)*

> *I find I am speaking more to my friends back in Melbourne, than then to my classmates [Metropolia University] here…, it is difficult to make friends (**C**).*

Due to COVID-19 there are restrictions for larger group gatherings in Finland (see the table on pp. 8-9). **A** observes that during her pregnancy the social support which was before COVID-19 participated in proximity with other mothers, has now changed as the participation is online. For **C** social distancing has affected his ability to socialize with his University peers, therefore he is more in contact with his friends in Melbourne than those at the Metropolia University in Helsinki. Social distancing affects an individual's possibility for full involvement in the wider society, Giddens (2009) refers partly this to as Social Exclusion.

In addition, **A** discusses the social distance due to the restrictions during the COVID-19 era:

> *My parents had a trip planned here in August this year, which was unable to be done. And I had a trip planned there this Christmas which was not able to happen. (**A**).*

Flights have been greatly reduced globally due to COVID-19. **A** laments how the restrictions have affected the possibility to travel, as her parents flight to Finland in August 2020 and her flight to Australia for Christmas 2020 never took place. Due to the Australian overseas travel ban, it is difficult to be granted an exemption to travel out from Australia (See Australian Model). The incoming passenger capacity model that Australia uses, has decreased the chances of flying to Australia (See the table on pp. 8-9). The social forces that have taken

place during COVID-19 in the form of border closures and restrictions, have shaped people's circumstances (see Giddens, 2009). According to Fricker (2007) the wronged party is usually the excluded party. In Australia, the majority still believes the restrictions are necessary to keep them safe, therefore citizens outside of Australia that have been wronged have no voice in the matter of national policies.

7.3. The effect of the Finnish and Australian response models

EU have an agreement of open travel between member countries (European Commission, 2021), so that for instance the ferries between Finland and Sweden or Finland and Estonia have been working during most periods of the COVID-19 era. Australia is not under this pressure, as it does not belong to a union such as EU. One of the participants observe Australia's COVID-19 situation and the restrictions:

> *The situation is actually really good in Australia and they are an island. They are far away from everything else. So, they have the possibility to put these restrictions in place (__A__)*

__A__ observes how positive the COVID-19 situation is in Australia, as it is an island which is far away from other countries. Therefore, it has had the possibility to implement the restrictions. There has also been positive results, especially, with smaller island nations in preventing the spread of influenza (see Boyd, 2017). The healthcare system is not over-encumbered by influenza patients, which was the case in i.e., Sweden. There can be another negative effect though, as closing borders can lead to economic and personal costs (see Boyd, 2017).

One of the participants says the following about the Australian hotel quarantine:

> *The hotel quarantine does make sense, but there is no other alternative and I do not think that is really good. (__B__).*

There are other countries that have implemented a hotel quarantine into their response to keep COVID-19 from spreading. __B__ observes that the hotel quarantine seems sensible, but that it is not sustainable to have no other alternatives. Even though the hotel quarantine has proved to be efficient in controlling the spread of COVID-19, the Australian government has not provided any other solutions, yet, to their COVID-19 model. In the beginning the model was

shaped to flattening the curve (Australian Goverment Department of Health, 2020). Australia, as said, has done very well in tracing down any possible cases and therefore, they have managed to keep COVID-19 from spreading to a minimal level.

A, *B* and *D* discuss the Australian COVID-19 model in comparison to the Finnish model:

> *I feel like we do really need to begin living with this and Australia's methods are not sustainable. So, it feels like it cannot keep going on forever. So, Finland feels a lot more sustainable. (A)*
>
> *I feel like the way that Finland's doing things is sustainable in the longer run. (B)*
>
> *If you do look at back, in my opinion, looking at it from a bigger picture that Finland has done amazingly well, and I have really appreciated it, but I know that a lot of people disagree. (D).*

A, *B* and *D* observe that the Australian COVID-19 model is not sustainable in the long run, whereas the Finnish model seems more sustainable now. There is a positive effect to mandatory testing which should be relevant even here in Finland, instead of voluntary (2020). Australia has mandatory COVID-19 testing for returning passengers, as it makes it easier to trace the disease and intervene if needed (Chang et al., 2020). This does not necessarily mean that COVID-19 can be fully eliminated, even though Australia has been able to keep COVID-19 almost non-existent most of the time (Coatsworth, 2020; Groch, 2020). Self-quarantine is voluntary in Finland, which can be shortened by testing and the official quarantine period is usually 10 days (THL, 2020). The Finnish model has been fluid, i.e., when COVID-19 cases increased the government decided to lockdown the region of Uusimaa in April 2020 and there will be nationwide lockdown in March 2021 (Finnish Government). This has only taken place once, for a short period in Finland. Otherwise, the restrictions have been quite relaxed, and freedom of movement has not changed. Unnecessary travelling should be avoided, which is the same in most countries.

7.4. Losing basic rights

Freedom of movement has been discussed during COVID-19. Sweden's national response model received positive feedback as it did not restrict the citizens' rights of free movement within the country, or even leaving the country as this is stated in the Swedish Constitution of

1974 (see The Constitution of Sweden, 2016). Also, in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights,* it is stated in article 13 "Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and return to his country." (1948). **C** reflects on the different countries lockdowns in the beginning of the pandemic.

> *I think there was a woman or maybe it was a couple [Australian Citizens] in Spain in the beginning, they had been trying to get back [Australia] since. That is right, the story was they tried to leave the country before borders closed, but then Spain had the lockdown really early and then by the time the lockdown finished they could not get back to Australia. (**C**).*

C observes how Australian citizens, in Spain missed their opportunity to return to Australia before Australia closed their borders. This was due to different countries having lockdowns during different time periods; therefore, it has been difficult for the citizens to coordinate their flights back to their home country. Lockdowns took place in many different countries when COVID-19 was categorized as a pandemic and when COVID-19 started spreading uncontrollably (WHO, 2020). This sounds perhaps as an extreme example, but for many this would have been mentally a very challenging event. There were no global guidelines per se for how the countries should create restrictions and bring back returning citizens. Membership [citizenship], loses its meaning as different countries become incoherent with regard to their global agreements (Bellamy, 2008).

One of the research participants observes that:

> *Those people who want to get home now maybe did not even think that they needed to get home until two weeks ago, maybe they just lost their job because the country they are working in, got into something massive spike in cases or whatever reasonable (**D**).*

D argues how the people that are in dire need to return to Australia now, might not have known how their situation would be before the lockdowns and when the pandemic started. Which is what the Australian government expected the citizens to do, before stricter restrictions (Martin & Murphy, 2020). As a member of an institution [a country], you usually always have the right to return to that country or have access to it (Bellamy, 2008). It is usually an exclusive right as well, meaning that those that are denied direct access, become excluded (Bellamy, 2008; Giddens, 2009). The restrictions have made these rights become

fluid, as there is no longer a direct access to a country, i.e., flights have become limited and in Australia there is a capacity limit as well.

In addition, *A* discussed the following restrictions as well:

> *I can enter the country [Australia], absolutely I can get the permission. I can find a magical flight and I can do the quarantine at my own expense, but you have a life here and I have my husband who cannot enter the country without a visa. (A).*

A laments how she can enter Australia, but her husband cannot enter as he needs a visa for it. There is an excluding factor for some of the participants to return to Australia, as even if they do find a flight, their spouses or children cannot enter the country without a visa and exemption, which is granted only for special cases (Australian Border Force, 2021). The Australian Border Forces are those who will grant an exemption for leaving the country.

In addition, the issue of citizenship is discussed further by *E*:

> *There are people who are desperately trying to go home, and citizenship may feel different for them, than it does for me at the moment. (E).*

E observes that people who are desperately trying to go back to their home countries, citizenship may feel different to them, as it does for her. For those that are desperately trying to go home citizenship may feel very different at the time when they are stranded, compared to those who are at a comfortable position in their residing countries. Citizens ought to have certain rights (Bellamy, 2008), but there are cases where these rights need to be changed for the common good. During COVID-19 countries have had to put those within a country first, due to keeping the majority safe, towards the incoming residents which could be considered the minority.

7.5. Media portrayal

Media tends to be biased or possibly even involved in party politics (Eide, 2010, 71). Media in Australia is heavily influenced on news of COVID-19, and how well the government has kept Australia safe. For many Australians that are stranded overseas (Rothwell, 2020; Amnesty International, 2020) it has been particularly difficult for them as it has been disheartening to follow the media that is very pro-government. *B* observes the following:

> *I think yeah within the country they are trying to really push this view that they are keeping the people within Australia safe. And their majority rules, you know, there is more people inside of Australia than Australians outside of Australia. (**B**).*

B argues that the media is pushing the viewpoint of keeping people safe in Australia, and how the Australians within the country are right in comparison to those outside of Australia. Media's portrayal has been leaning towards the direction of portraying anyone outside Australia as a risk for COVID-19 and that it has been their own choice not to return earlier. This takes the discussion back to the people that might not had known of their future situation would be beforehand, and financial situation that effects their possibility to pay for all the fees.

A observes the following:

> *She [**A**'s mother] has so much sympathy towards my specific situation and that she cannot believe that she cannot get out of the country and that me and my husband cannot come into the country and it is just horrific. Then two minutes later in the same conversation, she will talk about how there is everyone else. It seems entering the country is just travellers that have had so much time to get home and they are disregarding Australia and the rules, and they are just bringing Covid home (**A**).*

A observes how her mother sympathises with her situation of not being able to travel back to Australia and that she cannot travel to Finland. Yet soon after **A**'s mother's perspective changes as she does not sympathise with other Australians being abroad that are trying to return. As these Australians should have returned earlier and now, they are only bringing COVID-19 back to Australia. This dual perspective of having sympathy towards your own kin for not being able to return, yet at the same time not being able to sympathise with other Australians seems problematic. There is an indifference towards those that are not related or close friends (Giddens, 2009). This indifference can be harrowing, as Levitas (2005) remarks; there is a small minority that includes and majority that excludes. Therefore, people end up as pawns between social forces (Giddens, 2009).

In addition, **A** observes the influences that affect her mother's perception as following:

> *I know that she [**A**'s mother] is not getting that idea from herself. I think she is definitely getting that from the media that we are all just out here travelling, and we should have been home already by now (**A**).*

_A_ laments that her mother would not be getting the idea herself, but that the media has affected her perception of returning Australians. Prime Minister Scott Morrison stated the following: "Australians living overseas had had many opportunities to return to Australia: "If they're choosing to do so now, they've obviously delayed that decision for a period." (Taylor & Mills, 2020). There is no discussion from the Australians perspective that are abroad, as they may not have known of their situation earlier and they might financially not be able to return. The media in Australia has become partly a government "public health authoritarianism" in reporting of COVID-19 and is partly under a "political control" narrative (Sun, 2021). Therefore, it can be claimed that the media and government officials are influencing people's perception of COVID-19 and those that may risk their safety.

8. Conclusion and discussion

In this chapter, I discussed the social effects of some Australian citizens in Finland during the COVID-19 pandemic. As COVID-19 is still an ongoing pandemic the results for this study are fluid as are the different nation's restrictions during this era. There have not been many studies in relation to social exclusion and COVID-19 in terms of citizens that are abroad. This study has relied on empirical data, which examines the multidimensional consequences of excluding returning citizens.

Through assessing media and government declarations and combining this with the transcription from the focused group-interview, I studied the causal impact of the COVID-19 restrictions and its excluding effects on Australian citizens in Finland. I found that mentally these restrictions have created a further distance for the Australians in Finland to Australia. There is also a correlation towards minor negative effects in social integration and social participation for Australians in Finland due to COVID-19. Results suggests that, aside from financial and social constraints due to COVID-19, there have been factors of exclusion towards Australian citizens living in Finland due to the border closures in Australia. The results also show that the exclusion has been perceived differently on individual levels, and not to the extent of the Australians feeling alienated towards their own country. Although for the Australians that I interviewed the situation is different compared to other desperate Australian citizens trying to return to Australia, as they have either lived in Finland for a

longer period or have a family in Finland. Therefore, for them there has not been an urgent reason to move back to Australia.

Countries that have strict border closures have experienced some backlash as citizens have been prevented from visiting their i.e., dying family members in a different country. This is the personal cost of limitations on international travel. The other part is the economic strain that a country must go through due to border closures. Therefore, there cannot yet be finalized results of how the border closures have affected all the citizens that have not yet been able to return to their home country. Although Australia is far away from Finland, the restrictions established by the Australian government, has made the participants feel that the distance is even farther.

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