



Labour Migration Above the Arctic Circle  
*Implications of necessity and temporality*

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## **Abstract**

2004 marked the largest expansion of the European Union to date. The eastern European countries that joined caused a wave of migration to western European countries.

Contemporary intra-European legal labour migration has a much more temporary nature compared to its predecessor. Migrants are quick to find opportunities and remain flexible enough to grasp them. Fish factories in northern Norway are one of the places contemporary migrants work seasonally for a relatively short period of time. The one great catalyzer for migration is necessity. Necessity works its way through all facets of migration and creates a huge impact in the dynamics of migrants lives, as well as how industries operate that work primarily using migrant labour. This thesis aims for a deeper understanding of contemporary migration, both as a process of which its characteristics can be approached and explained rationally, and as a force that produces reactionary behavior to shortcomings in specific migratory circumstances. The thesis demonstrate that dynamics between employer and employee can be easily redefined in distorted power relationships, and how temporality, necessity and other factors contribute to a difficult sense of grounding, or belonging, for migrants in relation to place and social entities.

## **Acknowledgements.**

The first encounter I had with labour migrants in northern Norway was with two Polish brothers. I had just arrived in the village that was to be my home for years to come and in a peculiar conversation in broken German the brothers convinced me that I had just missed a Russian submarine floating in the fjord from which soldiers were shooting with AK-47's. Of course there was no submarine, but the brothers had my interest. What on earth were they doing in that tiny village? I quickly realized that I was not the most unlikely person to end up in the north. Like the brothers, many foreigners had come before me, and many came after me. The stories, motivations and endurance of those people moved me, they were part of a reality I had not previously seen before, and became the inspiration for finding the subject for this thesis. I am grateful to those who initially shared their stories, and even more so to those who answered my questions and kept me company in the dark winter months of 2019. I have the deepest respect for them. Thanks also to my tutor Kees, whose comments were vital for the entire writing process. And finally, a word of gratitude to Kemmi, Pal, Kjell & Heidi, Bengt, Arne, Monika and all the others who have helped me along in Norway over the years.



Here starts the cycle of an industry, which influences thousands of migrants lives.      Photographer: Jonathan

## **Chapter 1: Introduction.**

The north of Norway is a place of ambiguity in different ways. First there is its beauty. From the northern lights in the winter to the midnight sun in summer and all the different colors of the landscape that change as the seasons turn. It is a harsh beauty. The land is barren, remote and continuously battered by the elements. Still, small pockets of civilization have managed to nourish themselves in a vast area of virtually untouched nature for thousands of years. It is hard not to be impressed by its silent power. The North nowadays, is also a place for opportunities. The Barents sea is blessed with one of the richest fishing grounds of the world, oil is found abundantly and the tourist industry is booming. Many go north to try and cash into the opportunities of one of the industries. But whatever opportunities there are, they are hard fought and benefitting from them has its consequences.

This thesis is about the people that make the migratory journey from Eastern Europe to northern Norway, and the experiences they have during their journey. They are people with



touching stories, doing the dirtiest and hardest jobs that nobody else wants to do. Their migratory paths to northern Norway are part of a trend that signifies contemporary legal labour migration within the European Union. This type of migration does not just exist towards northern Norway, many other western European countries also see an influx of eastern European labour migrants. The difference with previous trends of migration is that migrants from eastern Europe are not expected to settle in the countries they work in (Black, 2010). The way of life of these migrants, who go back and forth from their country of origin to the countries they work in, fit right into what Bauman calls the age of 'liquid modernity'. He sums liquid modernity up by saying it is "the growing conviction that change is the only permanence, and uncertainty the only certainty" (Bauman 2013; foreword). Temporality, uncertainty and unpredictability are often influencing factors in the daily lives of labour migrants. Engbersen (2015) applied the term liquid migration especially to the case of intra-European migration". He uses the term liquid migration as "one way of conceptualizing the particularities of legally almost unconstrained intra-European migration, which is characterized by: temporariness, labour migration, legal residential status, unpredictability, individualization and a 'migrant habitus' of open options and intentional unpredictability" (Engbersen 2015, 7–8).

Theoretically inherent to liquid migration are scholarly attempts to find academic explanations that explain why, how, where and for how long people migrate. It is a useful pursuit that brings the debate a little further than just describing its symptoms, and the symptoms of the age that we live in. Migration systems theory and by extension transnational theory are the latest theories that sociologists have created in an effort to understand contemporary migration. Migration systems theory recognizes that there is no single cause for migration, no singular migration experience and does not diminish the migrant's agency. Transnational theory is almost an extension of migration systems theory, taking into account the technical beneficiaries of globalization. With it, the theory argues, 'transnational communities' are created more easily and mobility increases, adding to the flexibility of migrants (Castles & Miller 2003:26).

Being able to explain why people migrate within the greater context and circumstances of our time might be valuable information for policy makers and economical studies, but those two things say nothing about the migratory experience itself and its effect on people. This is part of the reason why the world migration report calls out to researchers who need to: "take more notice of migrants' agency, understanding how people contemplate

migration vis-à-vis policy categories and place less emphasis on the policy categories that are central to regulated systems” (WMR, 2018:189).

The main reason for initially migrating from eastern Europe to northern Norway always has to do with monetary gains, but the story is much more complex than that, from the side of the migrants, as well as from the side of the industries they work in. Ramamurthy (2003) calls international labour migrants “the unsung heroes of globalization” and there is truth to that in two ways. Firstly, migrants are in their own way pioneers of exploring the possibilities of life on a personal level, even if they follow migratory paths laid open by others, by going to places they might have never heard about doing a job they have never done before. And second, migrants tend to be ‘unsung’, invisible even, due to the low profile of their work. The positions that migrants fill are not Instagram sexy. However, in some sectors in Norway, including the fish industry, migrants are crucial in filling the vacant positions and actually doing the work. Without the migrants, industries would have a major challenge in practically running their businesses. The special relation between migrants and the industries they work in is worth exploring.

The main research question of this research is: *How do migrants from eastern Europe navigate livelihoods and belonging in small communities in northern Norway?*

This thesis is an attempt to put the migrant’s stories, challenges and experiences to the forefront of the discussion surrounding inter-European migration. Looking at migration from a migrant’s perspective, is perhaps one of the only ways to fully understand this type of migration and its effects on the parts of society it touches. On the way I will look at the main theoretical concepts which are inherently important to migration. One of them is livelihood structures which comprises of the relationship between human beings and its environment (Ingold 2000). Livelihood structures vary from person to person in migratory settings, but it is possible to discover patterns in it’s different components that are of influence to migrants lives. I call those components of livelihood strategies ‘livelihood conditions’. One of those livelihood conditions is migrant’s coping with social relations and belonging. In general terms, belonging means to feel associated with a group or something bigger than oneself (Wodak 2008). Belonging can be a reassurance of one’s identity, but as I shall demonstrate, the migratory paths people take comprises of a set of extraordinary circumstances which have consequences for how belonging is experienced for both short and long term migrants.

In order to operationalize the research question I had to break the research question, and its underlying concepts down into smaller researchable subjects that influence the main research question. I looked at the micro, macro and meso factors that cause people to migrate in order to understand the why in the migration debate. I looked at power relations between migrants and those who employ them to understand how rights, or the absence thereof, are negotiated. I looked at the social connections that migrants maintain with the home country, with one another, and with members from the host country in order to research the concept of belonging. And lastly, I have looked at the choices migrants make in response to shocks in areas of social, economic, financial and human capital that influence different components of migrants livelihoods.

Right off the bat I want to say that it is not my intention at all to portray the group of people in this research as victims. The migrants with whom I've worked and lived, not only during the duration of the research, but in all the five years that I have been in contact with them, have never self-identified as victims. To help with painting an accurate picture of people's lives without assuming things, being ethnocentric, or using purely my own circumstances to measure others by, I follow the Weber and Durkheim tradition of working with agency and social science. Weber had the idea that: "social science should be an interpretive study of the meanings of human action and the choices behind them"(Rapport 2014: 3). Durkheimian thought added to that: "what was crucial for an appreciation of human action were the conditions under which, and means by which, it took place; also the norms in terms of which choices between acts were guided. Over and against action, therefore, were certain structures which implied constraint, even coercion, and which existed and endured over and above the actions of particular individuals, lending to individuals' acts a certain social and cultural regularity. What social science should study, therefore, was how such formal structures were created and how precisely they determined individual behavior" (Rapport 2014: 3).

I will try to accurately portray the migrants social, emotional and economical positioning from which migrants act, and how they act. I do not suppose that I can unveil all the precise reasons behind people's actions though. I am not a mind reader and interpreting acts for another can be tricky business, especially in anthropology, where the researcher is its own measuring instrument. Absolute truth is a delusion. Therefore I have tried to stay as close to empiric evidence as possible, and let interpretation of data be accompanied by argument. By looking at the different facets of migrants lives from an emic perspective, with

data collected through qualitative research, I hope it is possible to portray a story that justifies the complexities of migrants lives.

This thesis is structured as follows: in chapter three I will look at the meta conditions that cause people to leave their home countries and choose migratory paths. Then I distinguish the four different paths that migrants use to find work in northern Norway and explore their characteristics. Furthermore, I examine how contemporary intra-European labour migration can be characterized and conceptualized, and is different in nature than other migration era's.

In chapter four I will examine the power relations workers face in migratory settings and the ways that employers are able to exploit workers, and why workers put up with it. Through hierarchy systems I move towards how labour migration in the presence of previously mentioned meta conditions can lead to institutionalized commodification of people that has become an industry by itself.

In chapter five I conceptualize sustainable livelihood strategies and examine its different components to see how migrants cope with shocks and stress. I show how migrants navigate the maze of temporality and uncertainty by making temporality an ally, rather than an adversary. Then, I look at various livelihood conditions in which migrants try to overcome shortcomings of resources. They are power relations, food, time & place, social connections and money. Throughout analyzing these topics I examine the macro and micro factors that influence belonging, and recap on the power of necessity in the life of labour migrants.



Magerøya island.

Source: Kartverket.

## Chapter 2: Context, research population and methodology.

In the three months of research, I have worked and lived in a small fishing village on the island of Magerøya which is located in the very North of Norway. The village, which shall remain nameless, is one of five still inhabited places on the island of Magerøya. The village is remote and does not have much to offer in services or shops. Most supplies must be bought in Honningsvåg, the largest of the inhabited places on the island and the northernmost settlement in Norway ever to get city rights. There is a little bit of everything here such as shops, restaurants, a mechanic, supermarkets and a school but the closest shopping mall, proper hospital and airport with decent connections is about 200 kilometers away. All together the whole island counts around 3500 people. The two main industries on the island are tourism and fishing. Every year two hundred and fifty thousand tourists want to see the

northernmost point of Europe, the North Cape. Most of the tourists come during the short summer when the weather is at its best and the sun never sets. The weather never reaches tropical temperatures, as can be expected so high above the Arctic Circle, but summer does count a few warm days. Winter is the complete opposite. Roads are made of ice and frequent storms pass over the area. It is not uncommon for the roads to close for days on end, sometimes causing the isolated villages to run out of food, and local fisherman to brave the elements and get supplies for the whole village by boat.

Fisherman mainly catch two species of animals. Cod and King Crab. Those are the most valuable species. There are other fish to be caught such as Coalfish, Haddock and Halibut but with a lesser price per kilo or more effort than cod, most fisherman leave those fish alone. The cod season is by far the most labour intensive season in the Norwegian fishing world. Both for the fisherman on sea, and the people working in fish factories on land. The season lasts from around January until April, when the cod swim up the coast to mate and spawn. Every village on the island has its own fish factory and caters to a specific audience of fishing boats. Depending on the size of the boat, the method of fishing and luck, fisherman's daily catches range from a couple of hundred kilos upwards to twenty thousand kilos. Although the fisherman are extremely busy in this time, due to the size of their boats and the placement of machinery it is rare to find boats that fish with more than two or three people on board. In fact, most fisherman on smaller boats fish alone. The real manpower in the fish industry can be found in the fish factories.

NAV, the government organization that deals with employment, unemployment, benefits and job seeking boasts a word of caution for those wanting to work in the industry: "The work can sometimes be tough and monotonous. For some periods you may find yourself doing a lot of overtime and having to turn up for work at unsociable hours." (NAV, 2015 p3). This doesn't deter thousands of migrants coming north and work in the fish industry though. The fish industry is the second largest industry of Norway, after the oil industry. To indicate the massive scale of the fish industry I will produce some numbers before moving on to the people working in it. Norway is the 9th largest in the world when it comes to capturing fish. In 2018, a staggering 416.994.000 kg of cod was caught, and compared to the years before that, that is a low number (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2019). It is impossible to find an exact number of people working in the industry and difficult to get an accurate count on how many active fish factories there really are but one thing is for sure, the Norwegian coastline is littered with fish factories, sometimes there are multiple fish factories in one settlement. I

cannot speak for one hundred percent of the fish factories but the vast majority of them rely on labour from outside of Norway. During my years in Norway I have worked in two fish factories. One on Mageroya under multiple owners during three seasons, and one in the Lofoten area for one season. I have also delivered fish and been inside five other fish factories. The situation in all seven of them was generally the same, and I have not heard of fish factories operating differently elsewhere. The bosses and foremen are usually Norwegian, whereas the main body of the workforce itself, are people from eastern European countries.

The main research population for this research are the people working in in the fish factory on the island of Mageroya between February and April of 2019. From here on I will refer to this fish factory as ‘fish factory A’. The people here have provided me with day to day observations and conversations around the topic of migration. The workers here were of mixed nationalities, but all of them from eastern Europe.

When it comes to general data about conditions in fish factories, living quarters, different paths towards the north or certain events that are of significance, I will also refer to my time working in the fish factory in the Lofoten area, which I will name fish factory B, and refer to in text as ‘notes, Lofoten fish factory’. During the time I worked there, I did not apply the role of the researcher, although I did write down the most important events that happened there at the time in a diary. I did not have informed consent as a researcher at the time of collecting the data. However, using the data gives me the opportunity to compare living and working conditions between fish factories and is of major importance to describing the migratory experience. I have generalized the data to such an extent that the events themselves still carry their significance, but are in no possible way burdening on the people involved, and are in no way traceable to the people involved.

The main focus for this thesis will be on labour migration in the fish industry, but I will also include other people on the island of Mageroya with a migratory background who sometimes do not have a relation with the fish industry at all, but have walked similar migratory paths that have proven extremely insightful. Especially those who managed to migrate permanently. I have also interviewed a number of other people who are important figures in a migrants route north. For example, the boss of a fish factory, other employers who employ migrants, villagers and other bystanders.

In the last five years, I have worked in the fish industry both on sea and on land. During those five years the village in which this research is conducted has become a second home. Having previous experience in the fishing world has given me both an advantage as well as a disadvantage for this research. The positive side of having previous experience in my research field and location is that I already had a large network of connections both in and outside the migratory context. Gaining access to my research population, for which the only serious way is to work alongside of them in the fish factory would have been very hard to accomplish had I not have previous contacts and experience. Also, knowing exactly what to expect from my surroundings helped. I knew what the circumstances in the fish factory would be, and the work itself came as no surprise to me either. The general issues surrounding migration were also known to me, which is mostly why I chose the subject, and that too helped me in my role as a researcher, not having to ask the ‘stupid’ questions.

I am personally invested in the village, and want to go back there in years to come. When I took the role of the researcher it did not per se complicated previous relationships, but I do have to be careful in the decisions that I make during the writing process. I will be careful not to disclose sensitive information that can be traced back to the participants themselves in any harmful way. Places are anonymized, mostly for the sake of the boss of the fish factory in which work conditions have exploitative tendencies. I am not a activist, collaborative or militant anthropologist (Scheper-Hughes,1995), (Lassiter, 2005). I choose to avoid a direct confrontation with the status quo despite the fact that there is obvious room for improvement for the working and living conditions for some of the labour migrants I will write about. Does my personal investment in my research location and topic mean I am compromised? No, I do not think so, the main line of argument surrounding migration issues stays intact despite sometimes careful consideration in what to disclose about people’s personal narratives.

During the course of this research I had a number of roles at once. I was a researcher, a coworker, a friend and a fellow inhabitant of the village. My main research participants were the migrants in the village, with whom I’ve had no prior relationship. Getting access to the research group was made relatively easy by form of emersion trough working in the fish factory. Essentially, I am a migrant myself as well, and by working and living next to my participants there was hardly any bridge to cross in getting to know them, and receiving answers to questions I doubt people would answer had I not been able to build a significant amount of rapport trough working and living together first.



Data collection happened through various ways, but two stand out. When working in a fish factory, there is plenty of room for banter (when the boss is not looking), and small talk. During those hours many different forms of conversation can pass by. People knew that I was researching migration, but mostly gave the impression that they did not care about what it was exactly that I did. Mostly we just talked, from cracking jokes to serious topics and everything in between. Sometimes I would deliberately ask research related question, but often the conversation just went its natural course. In any case, when people are in motion, including myself, it seems to become easier to talk. During the breaks of work I would briefly summarize whatever had been said on my phone and work it out later in greater detail on the computer. Quotes recorded through this method might sometimes not be one hundred percent accurate word by word since I had to memorize the words, but the implication of the words, and the context in which they have been said surely are.

The second source of data collection was in and around the migrants place of residence, in which I also lived. Where the fish factory was great for having informal conversations, the residence was the perfect place to observe and participate. Mostly to see what people are doing in their off time, how migrants organize their lives in a place where they know almost no locals, and have little emotional connection to. These moments were easier to jot down as they happened. Throughout the process, I suspect I was more seen as a coworker and a friend, than as a researcher. That's also how I saw my research participants. Mutual respect through work helped a great deal in establishing those friendships.

While the main research population was the workers of the fish factory, I also sought out people outside of it. In those cases, I made a list of topics that I wanted to discuss with that particular individual rather than readymade questions in an attempt to discover parts of a particular subject I had not thought about before. When possible, I recorded these conversations. All in all, my previous experience in the fish industry, as well as already having connections in the research location helped me greatly with trying to understand migration in all of its facets.



Sunset in February on the island of Mageroya

Photographer: Nathan Holscher

### **Chapter 3: Migration in progress.**

In May 2004 ten countries joined the European Union. Of those ten, eight were expected to cause an influx of migrants into other member states. Those eight countries are called the A8 countries. They are Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia and Slovenia. All of these countries were in time to join the free internal market of goods and people but most member states introduced an introduction period. It was only Ireland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and non EU Norway that opened up their labour markets to the A8 countries from day one. Initially, member states underestimated the number of migrants coming to their countries. The first member states to open up their borders began to receive large numbers of people from the A8 countries. Most of the migrants were coming from Poland, but also from the Baltic states and Slovakia. As other member states began to open up their labour market to the A8 countries, they too began to receive large numbers of migrants from the previously mentioned countries (Black 2010).

The type of migration from Eastern European countries is very different in nature compared to its predecessors. This type of migration is no longer just a one way street that leads to settlement in new places. The new kind of migration is much more fluid and circular. It is less determinant, and more temporal. People cross borders back and forth much more easily. In some cases permanent settlement still occurs but mostly people relocate temporarily to places where work is available. Scholars have come up with different names to describe this kind of migration. Grzymala (2005) has researched (illegal) Poles in Belgium and describes their situation as one of 'lasting temporariness'. Okolski (2001) also did research on undocumented migrants, and calls the new type of migration 'incomplete migration', indicating temporality and a break from classical settler migration. Wallace (2002) does not even want to call such types of movement back and forth across borders migration at all, he prefers to call it 'mobility'.

The term that covers the various aspects of contemporary legal intra-European labour migration best is perhaps Engbersen's (2013) notion of 'liquid migration', inspired by Bauman's work on liquid modernity. Liquid implying temporality, mobility and a high reception for change. Engbersen mentions that liquid migration is very much part, and the result, of Europe's contemporary history: "Liquid migration is a typical phenomenon of post-accession migration. It takes place in an institutional constellation in which national borders - at least within the EU - have lost their significance. Liquid migration is strongly labour motivated - like the guest worker migration in the 1960's and 1970's - but nowadays workers have more opportunities to come and return as they choose" (Engbersen 2013; p31). This phase of European migration, or liquid migration, does not come without a hiccup, despite the European Union's best efforts. People migrating from eastern Europe are often subject to the good faith of the employer in terms of labour standards, wages and living conditions, if migrants get employed at all.

Woolfson (2007) also concludes that migrants sometimes have to deal with extreme conditions compared to the native population: "EU enlargement has simultaneously provided something of a magnet for workers from the East, and presented trade unions in western Europe with a challenge that is now potentially threatening existing labour standards. Often this threat is described as 'social dumping', as workers from the new member states are substituted for existing labour at a half, or even one third of the rate paid to their western counterparts" (Woolfson 2007; 200). The fact that the opportunity to work abroad is legal for citizens from A8 countries and sometimes becomes a better alternative than staying and working at 'home' does not mean that migration is always completely in line with migrants

hopes and dreams. Migration from Eastern Europe to other, wealthier countries, is often a negotiation between two evils, in which necessity plays a leading role.

*While enjoying a half an hour break while working in fish factory A, all the smokers are gathered outside on the snowy steps and little platform towards the entrance, while keeping the door open to act as a windbreaker. We are discussing the level of corruption and poverty in the countries we are all from. Dominik, being from Albania claimed he won since “Albania is the king of corruption”. According to Dominik the leaders of Albania allegedly do anything they can to line their pockets, but the ordinary people as well. It's just the way it goes he says. As a kid he earned a little money for putting nails on the road close to a car mechanic shop in the hopes of attracting business. The rest of the guys have similar stories about precarity and what the situation is like in their countries. Then Dominik turns his attention to me and asked: But why are you here? “Holland is a good country?!” (Field Notes 02-2019)*

In one sentence, Dominik had revealed the thought process, and the basic given assumptions behind migration from Eastern Europe to wealthier places. Dominik had made a distinction between good and bad countries and thought of his own country as lesser. Dominik had also revealed the economical motivation he thought was the only motivation possible for being there. And he had shown that if not a necessity, there should be no reason to come to Northern Norway and work in fish factories at all. So what exactly are the necessities that bring people North?

### **Why do migrants migrate?**

The short and simple answer to this question is money. With a GDP that is around four times lower compared to Norway, the Baltic states and other countries in the region are not as prosperous. Wages reflect the difference. When asked what kind of salary migrants would receive if they would go home and work there, most answers range between five hundred and eight hundred euros per month. With some respondents quoting monthly wages as low as three hundred euros. The challenges people with small wages face are substantial, especially when migrants have to provide an income not only for themselves, but for their family as well. According to Ivan, prices in Lithuania started to rise when the Euro came. He says it's possible to live with a Lithuanian wage, but that options are limited when you do. If you want to drive a car, rent a decent apartment, send your kids to sports, drink a beer, go to

the movies, then you need more than what he could make in Lithuania. Ivan provides the main income for his family by working in Norway, but his wife and kids are in Lithuania. He goes to see them a couple of times per year during holidays but not often, and stays in contact mainly through calls and skype. This scenario is not unusual at all. Many people stay at least nine months per year away from their family while working to maintain them, and see their kids grow up on a computer screen. In the housing units of fish factory B, video calling to the wife and kids was standard practice after dinner time for the men that had families. The living room would be filled with children's noises, except that the children themselves were 2000 km away. When there is family involved it is usually the men who go out to work. Gitas was also working to provide for his family.

*While cutting fish in the fish factory I asked Gitas about his kids and how long he did not see them. The answer was about nine months a year, or even more, he usually went back only in the holidays and in the periods in the year when work is quiet in the fish industry. But don't they miss you, I asked? Of course, was his short answer. But money?, I asked, implying the cause of his stay in Norway. But money!, Gitas confirmed, not saying anything more. (Field Notes 04-2019)*

A young woman who already spend a couple of years in Norway, working at different places in the fish industry confessed to me that she doesn't know anymore how people can survive in Lithuania on Lithuanian wages. If she can help it, she never wants to go and live there again. Life is too difficult there she says. She doesn't know where she would be able to find a job that pays well enough to sustain herself on a level that she is used to now. Money is hard to come by in Eastern Europe, everyone working in the fish factories attests to that, and Norway offers the promise of attractive opportunities for migrants. When Milena, and Irena worked in fish factory A, they were not given much hours, yet they were relatively happy with being away from home regardless. Irena had previously worked in a shop in Lithuania and earned only three hundred Euros a month for her troubles in a full time job. In Norway, despite not receiving much hours, she would make three hundred Euros in only two working days. Milena had taken an education in economics and marketing. She was doing relatively well in Lithuania and received a higher than average salary in a job that was related to her studies. Still, the promise of easier money abroad was one of the reasons she quit.

If the promise of easy money for non-schooled work abroad seems so easy to obtain, some people lose the incentive to enjoy an education at all. When Edvinas worked in the fish

factory, it was his second time working abroad, and at the time of writing he is planning his third trip abroad. This time to the vegetable fields of Denmark. He is in his early twenties, and studying does not strike him as a useful thing to pursue in life at all. He is of the opinion that studying only costs money and time, without having any benefits. Edvinas was sure that he could make more money abroad in unschooled jobs, then in Lithuania in schooled jobs. He made a conscious decision of pursuing the unschooled jobs abroad, but was not completely content with his choice either, since it was a choice between two evils. “I feel betrayed by my country”, he said. He felt betrayed because he had to do “shit” work to make a living, unable to reach that point had he stayed in Lithuania, no matter the education. If he was to earn a decent salary, Edvinas saw no other option than to go abroad.

Many people find themselves with similar choices to make, although the degree of necessity varies. Andras had run out of money in Latvia, and was looking for a job online. He didn't care where or what as long as it paid well. Andras didn't even consider working in his own country. “It's shit” he said, quickly summarizing his options in Latvia. Andras was given a job offer in the Netherlands in the flower industry but with a wage of ten Euros an hour before tax he did not do it, he thought it was not enough. Andras does not have a family and only has himself to maintain, he had enough financial room to wait for better options. He send many applications all over Scandinavia. When he got a call from the fish factory he already forgot that he applied there, but two days later he was on a plane towards the North, not knowing a thing about where he was going, or the job he was about to do. The promise of a certain wage and work to be done was enough for Andras to go. Dominik is in a similar situation. He also does not have a family to think about. Dominik is from Albania, but fled to Greece as a teenager was living and working there for a long time. In Greece he used get paid every week on Fridays but after the weekend he often didn't have enough money to buy cigarettes on Monday. He got tired of living without money and possibilities, so he looked for options elsewhere. Now he seasonally goes to Norway to work and comes back to Greece to enjoy a lifestyle that gives him more options.

Sometimes families move together in an effort to escape precarity, yet it does not always work out. A Polish family moved into the village of which the mother worked in the fish factory. Unfortunately, because she was not a very fast worker and the last one to join the workforce she got called for work last. She threatened the boss at the time to go to the police if they didn't give her more work, but with only a zero hour contract the threats did not accomplish anything. The situation got worse for them as the house they were living in got sold. They continued to live in the house as squatters until one day the whole family

disappeared and was never seen again. Precarity and a lack of resources have real consequences for people's lives and the tactics people will use to survive. As the lack of social and financial resources grows, the more radical and desperate tactics of survival become. A Moldovan man had showed up in the village looking for work. Unable to find a job, he stayed regardless and squatted the basement of a house. The owner let him stay in the basement but did not allow him up in the house. Some days, villagers brought the man food, on others, he was seen making a small fire in the garden to grill a fish that he had caught. Nobody in the village wanted to be associated with him, and the stranger stayed a stranger, until one day he left and disappeared.

#### **Four ways in which migrants find work.**

In all the previous scenarios there is an element of necessity. People who go abroad for work do so because they are of the opinion that moving will give them better opportunities as opposed to remaining at home. The combination of circumstances that are alike in most situations do not always produce the same strategy for a solution. Some of the migrants are prepared to take big risks in pursuing their goal. Others choose safer options and minimize risk. I have distinguished four different paths that migrants use to find work and migrate to the north. Each path has its own characteristics, pro's and con's.

##### *The first path: internet*

The first method migrants use to find work in Norway is through the internet. It is a well-used strategy that has a number of great advantages. The internet allows people without other already existing social networks to look up, and find work from home. Using internet for finding work is a relatively low risk strategy and many applications can be send at once to maximize success. Andras for example, send out so many applications that he forgot he send one to the fish factory. One day he got a call from the boss and despite having a job in Sweden lined up, he booked a plane to northern Norway and two days later he was there. Job positions both in the fish and in the tourism industry are often filled through internet applications so that the company's know for certain that they have enough staff for the season. The downside for applicants is that it is hard for applicants to know exactly what the circumstances of the work and life around it will be once the employee gets there. The work itself is one thing, but for most jobs in Norway that specifically target foreign people, the employer provides housing to employees. Thereby a large proportion of the life of the employee is in the realm of the employer's influence.

The job application only tells so much though. It does not say what the living arrangements are, what you can expect from your colleagues, the amount of work, the general vibe and the facilities around. When applicants are hired all of the above is often not clear which can cause for people to have either different expectations than reality, or difficulties of adjusting to the new situation in general. For example, when Andras came to the fish factory, the season was already in full swing for some time. The first couple of weeks there was plenty of work for Andras. He had never worked in a fish factory before, but he got the hang of it very quickly and for a while things were good. Every day that the weather permitted, boats went out ensuring up to fourteen hour work days. There was so much work that some of the workers welcomed the bad weather that allowed the workers to rest for a while despite the fact that work was the one thing that brought everyone there. Things changed when boats started to be finished with their yearly quota of cod, which this year was not much to begin with. That automatically meant that there were fewer hours to be worked and too much people for the job. On some days, the foreman knew that there would not be enough work for everyone, so he split the workforce into two teams and made a rotation system that dictated who was going to work on what day. Meanwhile the fish factory tried to attract more business by offering fisherman special nets for free with which Rognkjeks can be caught, a type of fish used only for their eggs, under the precondition that fisherman would deliver to that factory. Management tried to get fisherman to deliver crabs to the factory as well, and also other, bigger boats to deliver bigger catches of haddock and coalfish. Haddock and coalfish bring only half the money that cod does but in big quantities it can still be worthwhile.

Despite their efforts, nothing can replace the busy days of the cod season and soon work slowed down to about two days a week and sometimes a full week went by without any work. Absence of work had a distinct negative effect on the general mood in the living quarters. The end of the fishing season was bound to come, but nobody but me had warned Andras, or any of the other workers, about the ups and downs of the fishing industry. The slowing down of work came as a surprise to Andras. He was under the impression that since he was hired until September, that there would actually be work to be done. Not once did the boss come to Andras, or to any of us to explain the situation. Andras his general situation did not allow him to leave. All his eggs were in one basket, making it worse. For Dominik, the struggle to cope in Norway came from another angle. On the internet it had all looked fine, and Dominik was quite happy with the wages that he got. The work itself didn't bother him either, it was the cold and the lack of life that got him. He knew he was going to a small



village where it was cold without many people, but it is one thing to rationally know something, and quite another to feel and experience it. Coming from a sunny beach life in Greece where tourists come to party every day of the week he found it hard to keep himself occupied in Norway, especially on the empty days where there is no work and outside life just does not really happen.

### *The second path: job agencies*

The second strategy that migrants use to find work is the least complex one, but also the one with the highest degree of temporality embedded in them. It is finding work through job agencies. Fish factory B hired workers almost exclusively through an agreement with job agencies. From the migrant's point of view, there is only one great benefit for to use this method of finding work and that is accessibility. An aspiring migrant does not need any form of network, or command of any language other than his own. All the roads of finding better paid work are paved by the agreement between the agency and the workplace. The only thing a person has to do is walk into an agency and ask for work. Migrants are not made wiser than is necessary and the terms and conditions migrants receive are not bad at first glance. A little flyer is given to migrants stating in bullet points what it is exactly that they will receive. The deal comes with 'free' housing, 'free' transport from the home country to the place of work, and a flat rate wage of seven and a half Euros per hour.

Seven and a half Euros an hour is per definition more than any of the people who make use of this route, would earn at home. In that respect, the agreement still looks like a win-win situation, until we look at what a Norwegian person doing the same job would be earning. The minimum wage in the fish industry right now is around nineteen Euros per hour, but most migrants working in Norway through job agencies will never even know that basic fact. The employer is certainly not going to tell them. Free housing and free transportation to and from the job location is not really free at all.

Job agencies are perhaps the most visible representation of an industry that has changed its face in the years since 2004 at the time of the European Union enlargement. Eastern European countries citizens are now able to legally work in other member states. Couple that with the fact that there is an enormous gap in wealth between the East and the West and all job agencies had to do was to make a bridge between those countries. International job agencies represent capitalizing on inequality, and in the Eastern European case, became an industry of its own. In northern Norway, it is impossible to find a fish

factory that does not work with a variety of workers from eastern Europe and international job agencies are the clearest example of institutionalized migration patterns.

Finding work through international job agencies is the easiest, but also the most impersonal way to find work. In the recruitment process there is literally zero contact between the employer and the employee. The boss of the factory does not want to keep the employees for a long time or invest in them, he is not looking to establish a relationship with them at all. Employees represent workstations filled, a necessity for the fish factory to function. Once there is no need for the employees anymore the boss sends them home again without ever even gotten to know their names. The boss explained that he would get offers from different job agencies in different countries all the time, offering different deals and packages, all of them eager to make a deal, all of them eager to make a little money. The wellbeing of the workers is definitely not the main priority for the job agencies that send employees abroad.

#### *The third path: going alone*

The third way that some very brave migrants use to find work abroad is to simply just leave and go to where they think is best. To leave without having a network to support you, without a job lined up and have no concrete idea of where you will end up takes either courage or desperation, or maybe a little bit of both. It is a high risk venture that can easily go wrong. The success or failure depends on the chance meetings on the street while looking for work through talking to people, trying to build a useful network. Agata is one of the people who went to northern Norway through this route and managed to build a life there for herself but it was not easy. She and two friends went north on almost no budget at all and by the time they reached the island of Mageroya they were out of money for fuel and food, and were sleeping in their car. They had heard there was work in the North but had a hard time finding it. They went around the harbors asking for work where they met a fisherman. He felt pity for them and their situation so he gave them a job that normally he would just do himself. The job was to go through the fishing nets and take the destroyed nets out and tie the good nets back together. She got paid per net. Of that experience she said: “I will never forget that person, he was the first person to really help us”(Field Notes 03-2019). After that she managed to build a small network of her own and found a job in a fish factory and later on in a restaurant. She is still in the area after many years and has no plans of going back to Lithuania aside from during holidays. She is the only person on the island of Mageroya (as far as I know) that has successfully walked this route. To come north with an empty wallet,

knowing nothing and nobody at all, because of rumors about employment, and going towards having a job, a residence, a life and stability is a hard and admirable thing to achieve.

#### *The fourth path: networks*

The fourth strategy people use to go North is the usage of networks. Networks can in some cases prove to be the best method for finding quality work. Going abroad for work is a popular undertaking in the Baltic states and other Eastern European countries. It's not rare for people to know friends, family members or other acquaintances who have gone before them. Having a reliable source of information on the ground can mean all the difference. A person that you can trust will be able to tell you exactly what the circumstances are of not only work, but living in the area in general. Information like that is valuable for newly arriving people who will less likely be surprised by what they find. But it goes both ways. In a neighboring village, there is a fish factory which gets its employees primarily through the usage of networks of the already existing workforce. If an employee is vouching for a friend or family member, than the factory can almost be sure that that person will know what the job entails, and the current employee thinks he or she is up for the task. More likely than not, both the fish factory and the new employee will not be disappointed with the situation.

*A young man from Lithuania was packing fish and during the process explained that he got into the fish industry through utilizing his social network. His brother was working in a fish factory dealing primarily with king crab, and that fish factory needed people, one day he got the call from his brother asking if he would like to go there. He did so knowing what he would get himself into, in terms of work, pay, living arrangements, climate, facilities, etc. To him, there was nothing special about the way that he found work. People utilize networks all the time, but for migrants who do not have any network, finding them is extremely valuable. (Field Notes 02-2019)*

The young man then learned everything there is to know about dealing with king crab. He has now lived in Norway for many years, only to go back to Lithuania for holidays a couple of times a year. "This is my life now", he said about permanently living and working in Norway. A young woman that was working in the same factory managed to get both of her parents a job as well. There are many examples like these. The difficulty about networks is that it is very possible that someone has connections in the form of people that he or she knows that work abroad, but they might not always be in a position to provide anything

substantial for that person. In other words, for people to be able to mobilize their network for employment possibilities they need a very specific set of circumstances. The person that is already working somewhere needs to have a good enough relation with the other to be willing to vouch for them, and the person already employed needs to be in the position where he or she is allowed or invited to recruit other people.

The value of having reliable networks that can be mobilized became clear in Fish factory B. The majority of the workers there were employed through job agencies and were paid subpar wages. I on the other hand, was hired on a contract directly between the fish factory and myself. That meant that for the same work, I earned around three times as much compared to my Lithuanian colleagues. Initially, my Lithuanian colleagues just accepted the situation as it was, but with the difference in place did not trust me as one of their own. After working there for some time that changed and through work I became friends with some of my colleagues. After friendship and comradeship was established, an older man together with a younger man whom I've both befriended approached me after a long day of work at an hour where they knew the boss was not around anymore, and would not be looking at the camera's either. The younger guy translated for the older one, but both of them had the same question. How did I manage to become hired directly by the factory, and could I arrange the same for them? I had become part of their network and they were trying to mobilize it, exploring opportunities that could potentially bring them better paid work, since they had no previous existing network ties that could be utilized.

In theory it might seem easy for people to extend their network once they are 'there' but this is a misconception. There are too many barriers to cross before network building can happen successfully. The first barrier is one of contact. Fish factory B was situated in a decent sized town (for the North) but for migrants to come into contact with the native population, or the even smaller group of people that might have the opportunity to provide work for them a lot needs to happen. The reality is that all the workers of the several fish factories all live in shared housing, where one can find mutual support, but not useful networks. Outside of that there are just not that many places to go. There is the fish factory, the supermarkets and sometimes the local bar and 'club'. Add to that the darkness and cold of the time of the year that cause for life to happen mostly inside and what results is a scenario in which there are two, or more, almost completely separate worlds in one small town. The social fabric of the world of seasonal migrants almost never mingles with others.

Sadly for the two men who approached me to see if I could be of use to them in the form of arranging better paid work for them, I could not be mean anything for them. Their

question was beyond any of my powers. The only reason why the boss of the factory had hired me was network related, the boss was a friend of a friend and was doing me a favor by hiring me, but did so reluctantly. I represented more paperwork and more hassle, but with giving me a job I felt the power of networks first hand. The two men looking for opportunities accepted the fact that I could not directly help them, but instead asked for advice, and even that was hard to supply. Where does one start to build networks, or find work that is of a non-exploitive nature? A preexisting network for a job seeking migrant can really be a saving grace. The two men who approached me knew the value of networks. The deliberation of the moment, and them picking the right time to discuss their questions when there was no one else around attest to that.

### **Concluding remarks on migration**

Since the expansion of the European Union in 2004 two things happened. Citizens from A8 countries started to seriously explore migratory possibilities since for the first time they were allowed to, and inside the A8 countries options for well-paid employment are far and few in between. The push factor of inter European migration in low skilled jobs is one of necessity. Simultaneously industries responded by working with labour migrants from Eastern Europe. In that process the pull factor of migration in northern Norway intensified to the point where industries such as fishery and tourism now fully rely on the influx of foreign workers, and in the case of the fish industry, primarily Eastern Europeans. Now, fifteen years down the road, migrating as a career path is completely accepted. There are no respondents who do not know at least one friend or family member who have chosen to work in another country at one time or another. The supply and demand of workers and work opened up distinctive paths between eastern Europe and northern Norway that people use to migrate. Some methods, like finding work through internet or job agencies are more institutionalized than others, like finding a job through simply arriving on the scene or utilizing networks. However, all methods have a backbone of necessity, and are based on the idea that migrants might find the means to make a better life, or at least the tools to make ends meet.



Oilskins in the dressing room of a fish factory

Photographer: Nathan Holscher

#### **Chapter 4: Conditions of the migratory experience.**

As I have established in chapter three, there are generally four different routes that migrants use to migrate. All four different routes have one thing in common although not all in the same way. That thing is a higher than normal dependability on others. When migrating for work, especially in seasonal work, a migrant will generally be more dependent on others than he or she would be when working in the home country. Unless the network a migrant has is extremely good, and has in it the capacity to not only provide work, but also a safety net when work falls through. A migrant is very likely to face a distinctive set of power relations when looking for, or working a job abroad. The power relations that migrant faces are often of a nature in which the migrant is subordinate and has limited power in changing, especially if the migrant has no other options than stay where he is in a particular situation.

Foucault argues that exercises of power can be found in any type of interaction but that it takes two parties who rely on one another in some form, to truly have a power relationship: “a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which

are indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that “the other” (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results and possible interventions may open up (Foucault 1982; 220)”. When people migrate to northern Norway, migrants typically go to one specific place of work. That place of work not only sets the boundaries of what a migrant’s life will be like during working hours in terms of what is acceptable and what not, but also outside of it by offering a place of residence. This is not necessarily a bad thing. If the work is not too heavy, the pay reasonable and the residence comfortable than there is not much to complain. Still, the fact remains that a lot of what dictates the boundaries of a migrants life are one’s that are not of the migrants choosing and that every new place migrants go to is like rolling the dice in that respect.

In the words of Foucault: “certain actions may structure the field of other possible action (Foucault 1982; 222)”. In the case where a migrant is trying to find his own way to new opportunities he or she is most exposed to the whims of circumstances. The woman who just showed up in the harbor asking people for work did not have much bargaining material. People did not really need her, yet there she was. Because of her circumstances she is likely to accept any work, and perhaps also any treatment.

The same goes for the people in the fish factory who were sent there through job agencies. They had to accept the questionable circumstances, or go home. There were no other options. I doubt any of them took the job serious, or would care one bit if the factory collapsed after they would be gone. Working there meant simply to comply with the given set of boundaries for as long as the migrants priorities, consisting mostly of earning money, were achieved by staying, but not a second longer. And even if that goal is met, there is only so much questionable treatment a person is willing to accept. Working abroad is a constant evaluation between priorities. Every work place, blue or white collar work alike, is a possible place where power is negotiated, where compromises are constantly made. If the compromise is reasonable than everyone should theoretically be content. The issue in migratory settings is threefold. Migrants usually lack useful networks that they can employ to find other or better work in the region, it is mostly impossible to negotiate existing power relations and migrants are pushed by the necessity to earn money. This combination results in a shift in the idea of what set of power relations are still reasonable to accept. In other words, migrants in low skilled labour positions are more likely to accept negative treatment in comparison to others.

Fish factories differ a lot from one another in terms of standards of labour, pressure, living quarters, general atmosphere and so on. To some extent, the way a fish factory employs its workers determines how workers are treated. When workers are migrating north facilitated by job agencies, the worst conditions can be expected based on the power dynamics through this route. From a business perspective, this route is by far the most efficient one. People are not hired directly by the factory. The boss can let people off and receive more people at a moment's notice without any paperwork hassle, or people demanding rights from the factory. Once in the breakroom of fish factory B, the boss spoke about the hiring process as he was about to make a phone call to the job agency. He was going to "order" some workers from Lithuania. The word "order" being used for people seems impersonal and diminishing, but from the point of view of the boss it was purely business. At an average day, one hundred thousand kilos of fish passed the factory and the boss needed to employ a small army to make sure the job would get done. People came and went as they made other plans, or got fired for not working hard enough. Hiring workers by only making one phone call is many times easier than finding people through other ways, setting up meetings with them, handing out contracts yourself, having to answer questions regarding that contract, and making sure all the workers paperwork necessary for working in Norway is in order. The job agency takes all that work, stress and liability away.

Hiring workers through making one phone call was only the first step into a non-personal work environment with a sharp sense of hierarchy. Fish factory B employed only four Norwegian people including the boss. None of the Norwegians were working on the production line where all the Lithuanian people worked. One Norwegian was in charge of dealing with fisherman and offloading, another was driving a forklift, and yet another dealt with overseeing the production line and its workers. After every two hours there was a scheduled break. The breaks changed in duration from fifteen to thirty minutes. On the instant it is time for a break, all the crew from the production line rush to the "shower". There would be a line of people dressed in orange waiting to clean their oilskins to get the worst of the fish guts and blood off before stepping into the changing room. Often people helped each other, one person holding the shower head and the person being washed turning around to get a proper wash everywhere. After cleaning we all rushed to relax, have a smoke and a cup of coffee, but not in the same places. A clear division existed in where people physically went for breaks. The Norwegians, me, one German man, the wife of the boss and two Lithuanian people all went to one room. The rest of the Lithuanian people (at this time there were no



other nationalities) went to enjoy their breaks in another room. Thus reinforcing the impersonal boundary and hierarchy between management and workers.

Interestingly enough, the break room where the Norwegians were spending their breaks each day was actually the factories mechanic workshop with a couple of dirty plastic chairs and a table thrown in, whereas the Lithuanian workers had their break in a beautifully equipped and furnished lounge upstairs. Still, the workshop was a special place. If a Lithuanian worker dared to go in, he had to have a good reason to do so. Sometimes there was a good reason, and someone would come in and ask for something, but it was clear from all sides that this person was not welcome to stay. Needless to say, inside the fish factory there was almost zero contact between the regular workers and the boss. The two Lithuanian workers who joined the Norwegians at break times had worked in the factory for a number of years and were the only two Lithuanians directly employed by the factory. They were also the communication gateway between the boss and the workers. The two senior workers also kept track of people who according to them did not work hard enough. Without pardon they were sent home, and replaced with freshly “ordered” people.

### **Privileges & circumstances**

During break times in fish factory B, I was considered ‘Norwegian’ and could sit in the mechanical shop. That ‘luxury’ was the result of the fact that the boss was a friend of a friend. The boss treated me in a different way than the Lithuanian workers, and gave me several privileges in which the basic hierarchy, and exploitative atmosphere in the migratory setting comes to light.

On walking distance from the fish factory there were several buildings where workers lived. The building in which I lived was not much more than one long hallway with rooms on opposite sides, a large kitchen with a couch and a long table, and two showers further up the hallway. The rooms were of different size, some had four beds, others only two. In the busiest times there were about 12 to 15 people living in the house at one time. The boss of the factory had given me a room for myself, and I was the only one there with that privilege. Others lived without privacy for months, as is standard practice in most residency arrangements for fish factory workers.

Another privilege I enjoyed came in the form of wages. I was hired directly by the factory, that meant that I was given the standard fish factory pay as dictated by the industry, which at the time was 174 NOK which is about 17,9 Euros an hour. I also enjoyed overtime benefits. Those are: 100% extra on Sundays, 50% on Saturday before 12:00, 100% on

Saturday after 12, 50% on weekdays between 15:30 and 21:00, and finally, 100% on weekdays after 21:00. Considering that on most days work would only start in the afternoon and last until well in the night, sometimes going home the morning, overtime was really what spikes up the salary. In this rhythm it is possible to make a thousand euros a week after tax, although I should add that it is common to have bad weather for seven to ten days each month. On those days there is no boats going out, meaning no work and no money for the workers.

By comparison, the Lithuanian workers who came to Norway through job agencies received a flat rate of 7,5 euros an hour after tax, no matter what time or on what day they were working. At the end of the month, The Lithuanian workers usually received less than half of what my paycheck looked like, despite working the same hours, doing the same jobs. To be precise, part of the deal for the Lithuanian workers was that they did not have to pay for housing, or for travel expenses for coming there and going back home, the job agency paid for that. I had to pay for both myself, but still, the Lithuanian workers got the short end of the stick.

Then there were other tiny things in which privileges were felt. For example, when the Lithuanians asked, they were not allowed to take fish home for dinner. That seemed a little odd considering that there was always large amounts of damaged fish that would be thrown away, on which there was usually one good side left. However, being friends with the boss, the German worker was allowed to take fish, so every night after work he filleted all the damaged fish if there was good meat on it left. The real irony here is that the German guy had no freezer at his residency, so slowly but surely, the freezer in the house where I was living got filled up with filleted fish under the watchful eyes of the rest of the house who were not allowed to take anything home. Still, no one protested. It was just another day of distorted power relationships that were accepted since complaining was futile.

The highly impersonal and exploitive circumstances in this fish factory show more than just uncomfortable jobs. It is an example of how industries capitalize on migration flows that are based on necessity. From a business point of view, it is a perfect strategy. Receive workers through calling only one number, create a self-regulating atmosphere in which people have to work hard or get send home and make sure there is an almost impenetrable division between the labour force and management so no one comes asking questions or defies the status quo. To understand how effective the system regulates itself, let's take a look at a particular working day of Romas.

*During the whole season, Romas was working in the same place, he was gutting the fish in a line with several other gutters. Above them were the cutters whose only job it is to make an incision from the gills to the excrement hole of the fish, and throw the fish in a hole after which they slide down to the gutters. The gutters only job is to take out the guts of the fish by two movements for each hand. The first movement is to grab the fish with the left hand by its curved bone on its flank and pointing the belly towards you. Then the right hand goes inside the belly of the fish forming a hook and that hand then rips out the top part of the guts that is the liver and the stomach. The third movement is the same hand repeating the hook motion at the bottom end of the fish, removing the intestines. The last movement is again the left hand, dumping the fish into a hole, and the guts into another. From there the fish slides into a bath for a much needed rinse. Romas was doing this job sometimes twelve hours a day or more, the record was sixteen. Having good gloves is crucial during this work. Workers typically wear two kinds of gloves. First a thin inside glove for additional warmth and on top of that a larger rubber glove with extra grip on the fingers and palm of the hand. One afternoon when working next to him, Romas showed me his gloves, they were full of holes. Leakages appear naturally after some time, but his were proper holes, through which you could see his inner gloves. That means that all the fish slime, shit, and pieces of guts could freely enter his gloves, soak his hands in a gooey slimy and cold mess, and make Romas's day a lot harder and extremely uncomfortable. Freezing hands covered in fish guts is not how anyone wants to spend their day. Still, Romas did not dare to go to either the Norwegian boss or the Lithuanian foreman and ask for new gloves for fear of sticking his head out of the water too much. Since I had less to fear from the boss since he was a mutual friend, I was able to get a pair of new gloves for Romas shortly after. (notes, Lofoten fish factory).*

Whatever it was that Romas was afraid of, it was stronger than working for days in extreme discomfort. That shows the success of the hierarchy in the fish factory, and the 'abide or else' feeling the factory was oozing out through every method available, from hiring the workers in an impersonal way to having breaks in separate rooms and ensuring layers of middlemen between the workers and management while underpaying workers. Why would anyone accept this treatment?

## **Institutionalized commodification of people.**

The system at large keeps working because of simple economics. The GDP per capita of Lithuania is four times less than Norway's GDP per capita (World Bank, 2017). One worker assured me that if he would work in Lithuania at that moment, not having a significant education, he would earn maybe 500 euros per month. And for that he assured me that he would have to work extremely hard. No wonder then that people look for other options. The workers in the factory knew they were not paid fairly, but at the end of the month the money was still more than double of what they would earn back in Lithuania. Without other options available at the time, and in many cases a family to feed, what are people going to do? The push and pull factors align perfectly, and so companies use those facts to their advantage. When interviewing the boss of fish factory B this winter, who hired his workers through job agencies and asking about the circumstances of his workers he said:

*“This is life, some is born lucky with a lot of opportunities and some is not. I care only about two things, that they (the employees) can work hard and that they are cheap” (Interview, 07-03-2019).*

People are treated as anonymous commodities ready to be bought and put into service. Appadurai (1986: 6) defines commodities as: “things with a particular type of social potential, that are distinguishable from “products,” “objects,” “goods,” “artifacts,” and other sorts of things — but only in certain respects and from a certain point of view.” He argues that things (in the broad sense of the word) have a social life, in the sense that things can move in and out of the state of commodity. Appadurai does not include people as ‘things’ but his theory on the social life of things works just as well on people in the case of the fish factory. From the point of view of the fish factory, its workers are in a way ‘things’. ‘Things’ that need to fill empty work spaces so that the work might get done. The relevancy of people in the factory from the point of view of the factory is only measured by efficiency and output. The worker is irrelevant to the factory before he or she got there and will be irrelevant again after he or she leaves, but during the time there he or she might be a useful commodity. Sharp (2000) agrees that commodification is not excluded to the human body. The prime example commodification of people is slavery, or legalized forms of slavery such as child labour and domestic service (in some parts of the world). She argues that labour processes have the ability to put the human body into a state of objectification: “Commodification insists upon objectification in some form, transforming persons and their bodies from a human category

into objects of economic desire. ...the fragmentation of the body, and the subjectification of colonized subjects all potentially dehumanize individuals and categories of persons in the name of profit (Sharp 2000, p293).

In short, what happened over time is that people found their way to the North (as they did to other places at the same time), and started to work there. Those first migrants who operated without any network are what Lindstrom (2010) calls, 'pioneer' migrants. She makes a distinction between those pioneer migrants and followers, who can often benefit from the experiences and the paths laid open by the ones who have gone before them. Those people who migrate nowadays, might not have useful networks that can help them find jobs, and in that way still be pioneer migrants. However, migrants nearly always know at least someone in their friends and family circle who has migrated as well, but what's more important, the concept of migrating itself is normalized in society. In that sense, all migrants who migrate now are following the path laid open by others. Industries work the same way. They also have formed well-trodden paths in response to the influx of migrants. Each business has its own hiring process and not all businesses exploit people like the example in the fish factory B, but hiring migrants to do low skilled work has become the norm in many places, not the exception.

### **Final thoughts on migration in relation with circumstances of power and inequality.**

The fact that migration can, despite sometimes obvious exploitation, have a positive impact on people's lives in forms of capital gain or experience seems to be almost a byproduct, not an intentional integrated part of the system. This strikes a chord in the modernist dream, the idea that globalization and the closing gap in time and space will always point towards progress. Tsing (2000) explains this point: "Modernization frameworks brought together scholars, policy makers, politicians, and social activists in a common program for social betterment. It offered the hope of moving beyond the colonial segregation of Europeans and natives to a world in which every nation could aspire to the highest standards of livelihood and culture" (Tsing 2000, 328). Unsurprisingly, things are not that optimistic in real life. The 2018 world inequality rapport acknowledges that. There has been a systematic rise in inequality across the world since the eighties, and the report predicts the same trend for the foreseeable future (Alvaredo et al 2017).

Inequality makes perfect sense in the world of legal inter European labour migration. After all, would someone from Lithuania go and work in a fish factory, or a Polish girl as a cleaner in a hotel, if back home they could do the same thing for the same money or better?

Highly unlikely. The main reason why the system of labour migration works so well, and has done so for many years, is the combination between necessity and inequality all from within the European Union. It would be fair to say that a lot of businesses in Northern Norway rely on the necessity of others to find better paid work, and inequality between member states. Why would industries that rely on migrants want to change that? In whose interest would that be? Certainly not of the employers. There is not much room in this equation for the hopeful promise of modernity or globalization, not when migrants represent cheaper labour, or people willing to do jobs no natives will do. Eriksen also questions the idea of direction in the globalization dream that is undeniably part of the EU's motives of interconnectedness and mobility that promotes migration: 'Globalization is not a unidirectional process. It has no end and no intrinsic purpose, and it is neither uncontested, unambiguous nor ubiquitous. If we want to see the whole picture, it must include both benefactors and victims, both the globalizers and those who are merely globalized, both those who are caught up in the whirlwind of global processes and those who are excluded" (Eriksen 2007, 9). Migrants cannot be generalized into one spot in this spectrum. In fact, migrants can simultaneously be victim and benefactor at the same time. Both globalized and globalizers. What becomes clear is that this group of people is an easy target for those who commodify migrants by thinking of them as cheap units of labour necessary for production, with methods that have become well established paths and institutionalized on international levels.

In the next chapter I go beyond the meta conditions that migrants are facing while abroad. I aim to look at the most important livelihood conditions that play important parts in migrants lives who face various challenges which are met with different solutions compared to non-migratory circumstances.



Looking at a beached dead whale to pass idle time.

Photographer: Ugne

## **Chapter 5: Micro reactions on macro conditions.**

### **Livelihood conditions in the age of liquid migration.**

Considering the variety of tactics, personal preferences, and life goals that are embedded in migratory paths it is impossible to describe one livelihood strategy that applies to all. However, it is possible to break down the various components, or livelihood conditions that are of influence to livelihoods in the migratory context, thereby looking into how migrants adapt themselves to overcome struggles that consequently help shape their lives. What emerges are trends in which migrants show how they use social, economic, financial, human and natural capital that is available to them to their advantage. In turn, that reveals much about how migration is actually experienced by migrants.

Before going into the various livelihood conditions that migrants face, three things are worth remembering. First, since the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 it became legal for people from Eastern Europe to work in Norway. The push and pull factors align. Simply said: migrants are looking for better paid work, Norway has that to offer. For many, that simple fact is enough reason to seek employment abroad. Second, migration is institutionalized to the point that the fish industry, but others as well, now rely on workers

from outside of Norway but often only need the majority of the workers seasonal. In one given place of work, migrants can often not work year round, adding to the 'liquid' and temporal nature of migration. Third, necessity of earning (and saving) money, difficulties in network building, language barriers, and cultural and geographical differences are added circumstances that help shape individual livelihood strategies and coping mechanisms.

Livelihoods are generally the relation between the physical and social environment of human beings that interact on different levels in order to sustain and reproduce human and social life. Those different levels of interaction can be from physical personal circumstances to the way society at large is shaped. In other words, livelihood strategies do not develop in a vacuum. As Krantz (2001) argues: "it is insufficient just to analyze the different aspects of livelihood resources and strategies as separate elements. One must also analyze the institutional processes and organizational structures that link these various elements together" (Krantz 2001:8). So, livelihood strategies, or parts thereof, are influenced by outside factors. That does not mean that people are powerless in their decisions, on the contrary. Although sometimes stuck in a temporal situation, many migrants try to shape their life trajectories in such a way that they are, or might become, sustainable over time.

Scoones (1998) has developed the concept of sustainable livelihood strategies. He used the concept in researching livelihood strategies in rural settings but the definition can very well be applied to livelihood strategies in migratory settings as well. Scoones describes sustainable livelihood strategies as: "A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets." (Scoones 1998:5).

During the time a migrant is working abroad, he or she is likely to encounter a variety of stresses and shocks that could potentially influence the sustainability of the migrants livelihood. Those stresses and shocks come from various facets of the migratory experience which come in recognizable patterns and can be categorized through different livelihood conditions. I have distinguished the five main livelihood conditions which play a part of migrants lives during the migratory experience which are: , power relations, food, time & place, social connections and money. I will go through the livelihood conditions one by one, explain how they are a challenge and which ways migrants find to cope with them.

## **Livelihood conditions.**

### *Power relations*



As explained in the last chapter, there is a power relation between the employer and the employee underlining in every migratory experience. They differ from employer to employer but are of significance as a livelihood condition since the employers influence reaches further than just the work floor. The employer has influence on most facets of a migrants life while he or she is abroad. How exactly the power relation is formed is also to the employer's discretion, not of the employee. And so, with the employer having that much power, extraordinary circumstances can appear in which rational reactions to situations are distorted by the power relationship.

*For example, in fish factory B, there were two people in the house drinking homemade beer. At one point voices were shouting from where they were drinking. Upon investigating the origin of the noises, it turned out that one of the men was bleeding from his arm in the kitchen. A steady flow of blood came dripping off his fingertips. Having a first aid kit, I managed to stop the bleeding with a number of bandages. It was obvious that this man needed a doctor and some stitches though. The man said it was an accident but under no circumstances did he want to go and see a doctor, despite offering to go with him, looking up all the information, and him slowly bleeding through the bandages. Later it became clear that the incident was not an accident, it was a knife attack from one drunk man to another, and the victim stated that he was afraid that if he would go to the doctor he would lose his job if the story came out. After that night, the incident was not talked about anymore and the two men appeared to be friends again the next day. (Field Notes 03-2019)*

Fear of possible consequences stopped the wounded man from getting medical help, or in other words: the unspoken power relations between the fish factory as an institution, and the wounded man as it's temporal subject caused for an alternative reaction to a normally quite rational process. Power relations in the migratory sphere have the power to distort rationality and normality in a higher degree compared to power relations in non-migratory spheres as a result of the fact that a migrant is temporally a subject to the discretion of the fish factory.

Usually, reactions to power relations are not as strong as in the situation above. However, the fact remains that it is almost always the employer who sets the boundaries on power relations. Only in rare occasions do employees manage to reform the power relations that are in place, as happened in fish factory A by way of collaborative action. Fish factory A had just been taken over by a new owner when I arrived there this year. For the last two years

the factory had operated with a purely Lithuanian workforce, aside from the Norwegians with a permanent contract. Other locals who did not have a permanent contract, but did work in the fish factory were simply not hired anymore. The Lithuanians received the legal minimum wage, but no overtime payment. The Norwegians on a permanent contract who worked in the fish factory, by contrast, did receive overtime payment. Eventually the Lithuanian workers found out about the pay gap between them and the Norwegians and demanded from the employer to pay them the legal amount, overtime included. It resulted in a court case that is still undecided at the time of writing. During these two years the factory had operated at a loss, and the factory was sold again in the beginning of 2019 to a new investor. That meant new management and once again the dice would be rolled to see what the situation would be for the new workers. The Norwegian foreman sympathized with the workers all along and did something to prevent the same, or worse situation from happening all over again. During the transition period it was unclear who would be leading the operation and what management would look like. Sometimes the boss came for a few days and left again. In reality, everyone looked at the Norwegian foreman as the leader.

The foreman is a member of the NNN, the 'Norsk Nearings og Nytelsesmiddelarbeiderforbund', or the 'Norwegian Food and Allied Workers Union'. The union stands for a fair treatment of workers and tries to achieve that through a variety of ways. The foreman had set up a meeting with representatives of the NNN with the workers of the factory. The goal was to educate everyone about the rights that workers have in the food industry while working in Norway, and possibly for workers to actually join the union. Once there is a certain percentage of the workforce that has joined the union, by law the employer has to join the union as well. Once that happens it becomes harder for the employer to exploit workers. It never came that far though. The representatives from the union could not make it to the village due to closed roads caused by bad weather, so instead the next best thing happened. The foreman arranged little information books about the union, and the rights workers have while working in Norway. He placed them in the canteen on a table in an orderly fashion. The leaflets came in Russian, Lithuanian, Norwegian and English, so everyone would understand. Not only was this an act of information spreading towards the workers, it was also a statement towards the employer. They knew now that the workers knew what their rights are. In the end, the investor that bought the fish factory came to the village and during a meeting with the workers he ensured everyone that he was like minded on the subject of pay and overtime. Whether or not the foreman's actions had anything to do with the opinion of the investor no one can say for sure. It is likely that the good will of the

investor did not need the foreman's efforts for the workers, but it surely did not do any harm in the process either. It definitely raised awareness under the workers.

In this rare case, collective action by migrants and the foreman has resulted to a change in the power relation between employer and employee in the favor of the latter. Usually it's the employers who decide what the power relation is going to look like. Even in this case, the investor could have resisted much more than it did. It is only by his 'grace' that the workers came out favorable. Although the workers gained their rights to paid overtime, the process showed that power negotiations between migrants and employer are by default written by the employer and only by exception challenged.

### *Food*

The two main expenses for migrants abroad are without a doubt food and alcohol, there is little else to spend money on. Food and alcohol are both an inevitable livelihood condition over which there is plenty of commotion. In fish factory B, workers received relatively low wages and therefore some of the workers invented clever ways to cut costs and maximize savings. Even though people did not have much expenses while working and living in fish factory B, any measure that can save money was gladly taken and people found ways to cut the cost of both food and alcohol.

Food wise, especially fresh vegetables, fruits and meat is almost unaffordable in relation to an hourly wage of seven and a half euros an hour. But even if the wage is higher, since food costs are one of the main expenses, they are also the main source of possible savings. For some migrants it is standard practice to eat only the cheapest food available, not paying much attention to taste or health. Those who came to northern Norway by car always load up the car with as much food as possible in order to avoid Norwegian supermarkets as much as possible. When a person is particularly daring, he or she also brings a good number of vodka bottles through Norwegian customs, who have set a limit of one liter of strong alcohol per person coming into the country.

When migrants run out of food that they brought from home, or did not come by car, and still want to save money on food, other measures have to be taken. Sometimes that results in rather unorthodox methods that people who do not find themselves in the same larger circumstances might frown upon. The answer for this particular problem was dumpster diving. There were three supermarkets in the little town and after closing time two or three people would either walk with backpacks, or go by car around the back of all three supermarkets and jump in the rubbish container. It sounds worse than it was. Conveniently,

the staff of the supermarket would consequently put almost everything that was expired in plastic bags, generally filled with matching content. Most likely for their own convenience, not for ours. But instead of standing around in loose items it was possible to pry a little hole in the bag, examine its contents and decide if it was worth taking. Everything that can be expired or damaged in a supermarket was there. Yoghurts, meat, copious amounts of bread, vegetables, kilos of fruits, oatmeal, cakes and even the occasional beer. Nobody was worried about the expiring date since the outside temperature was always well below freezing point. Back home all the products were laid out on the table to see what the score of the day was. The things that could not be used were thrown away in a metal container outside our building. It became a hobby as well, and since word spread around to the workers of other factories tactics had to be changed to going earlier so the good stuff would still be there. Many mouths were fed on what the supermarket threw away. When everything was sorted at home, some would start cooking with whatever was available, especially if there was a lot of meat, and make a feast.

Not only was this a thing to do to save money, everyone involved had a lot of fun doing it as well. Dumpster Diving formed a bond between people and through the the entire process of finding, sorting, cooking and eating the food, the process subconsciously expressed a kind of autonomy over ourselves that had a substantial positive social impact. The solution for cutting cost on alcohol was solved in an equally creative way by one of the people living in the same house. He had brought readymade kits with him with which it is possible to make a kind of beer in ten liter jugs. A certain temperature is required for optimizing the process to turn sugar into alcohol. It needs to be relatively warm, so the solution was to place the microbrewery inside the shower area, the warmest place of the house.

The two examples that I just gave are on the more extreme side of what people will do to save money by cutting in expenses. Not everyone saw these opportunities as options for themselves, but the majority of migrants are most definitely proactive about limiting their food spending. If possible most migrants, including myself would rather take fish from the fish factory than buy meat from the shop. The other more common strategy that is less exciting to picture than the two examples above, was simply saving by not spending. Labour migrants in northern Norway do not eat the richest meals. It needs no further explanation, other than that these people know the value of money by way of not having too much of it, and when prices are high, they spend selectively.

### *Time & place*

The living and working standards for the workers in fish factory A under the new ownership turned out to be exceptionally good for fish factory standards. The investor had not only bought the fish factory, he also bought the vacant hotel in the village to house the workers in. The hotel offered living standards far exceeding any other accommodation for seasonal workers that I have ever seen or heard of. Every worker had their own room with shower and toilet inside. There was a large dining area, a lounge with a pool table, and a fully equipped kitchen everybody could use. Better still, the fish factory charged no rent for any of its employees that lived there. At work the social environment was very relaxed as well, In this fish factory, which is a rather small one, there were no separate break rooms or a fear to ask questions. The boss was hardly ever around and the daily tasks were done under the supervision of the Norwegian foreman, whose influence was never actually needed since everyone naturally had positioned him or herself on one or multiple workstations during the day. People worked hard, but never because they had the feeling that they would be send home if they didn't, and there was plenty of time to have a conversation in between.

Fish factory A hired its people through different channels. Some people got to the factory trough other factories that the investor was connected with. Others were hired through job advertisements on the internet, and yet others found work through networks by being connected with one of the already existing employees. No one in this fish factory was hired through job agencies and everyone had contracts directly with the employer. Some respondents who were temporally 'borrowed' from other fish factories and scheduled to go back admitted that they had never seen conditions so good in both work environment and living arrangements, and showed hesitation in leaving.

Despite the exceptionally good circumstances in work environment and living arrangements in fish factory A, one crucial thing was missing. That thing was work itself. The cod season lasts from January until April, but already slows down at the end of March. The transition means going from twelve hour days about five days in the week, to approximately six hour days twice a week. Some people leave, but not everyone has the ability to do so. For those who stay, that means filling five days a week with keeping yourself occupied, on top of the already existing pressure of coming to terms with, and finding coping mechanisms for working abroad in the first place. Lazarus (1984) describes coping as: 'the constantly changing cognitive & behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person.' (p. 141). Coping mechanisms in a migratory situation come in many forms, depending on the

specific situation at hand. In fish factory A, coping mechanisms mostly revolved around staying in touch with home, dealing with time and the fact that idle time does not bring money in the pocket.

Keeping yourself occupied is easier said than done in a small village in the North when the temperature rarely goes above freezing point and the wind never stops blowing. The will to spend much time outside diminishes as time progresses, except during the very few sunny days. Much idle time was spent indoors doing nothing in particular. Mutual support through hanging out and random conversation helped to some extent.

*During one afternoon of not doing anything in particular Andras complained about having nothing to do saying, "It's like animal life. We eat, sleep, eat and sleep. In this place I can only think about today and tomorrow, if I think beyond that I go crazy, really. After two days of no work your brain is so damaged, everything is the same". Meanwhile Dominik was complaining about lying in bed so much that his back started to hurt, and wanted to get away from there. (Field Notes, 04-2019)*

With the amount of downtime that everyone had there was nothing to be done that would dissolve all of that at once, but the little things counted. The workers watched many movies together, got hooked on Game of Thrones as the last season was airing, smoked plenty of cigarettes, made food for one another, and every now and again went to town for shopping or at two rare occasions, for some beers. Dominik was spending many hours calling with relatives and friends through Skype and so did others. The pool table in the lobby saw more use than it probably had seen in years, and little get together with drinks happened frequently. The difficulty of finding satisfying solutions for dealing with the livelihood condition of time, for the workers of fish factory A lied in the fact that no action would ever replace the original goal for migrating itself, which is simply to work and earn money. Therefore a lasting uneasiness prevailed in the general mood.

Coping mechanisms in fish factory B were of a different nature. Here workers faced more difficult circumstances, and lived in worse conditions, but at least had plenty of work. The general solutions that the workers used for coming to terms with the social and emotional boundaries of staying abroad for longer times were the same. Everyday people maintained social connections with home through skype, especially the ones who had children. Like I mentioned before, it was normal to see a row of four or five men along the living room table playing games with their kids who were two thousand kilometers away. People also came

together to eat, work out and drink, again always with the other workers, never with anyone who was not working in one of the fish factories.

Facing the livelihood conditions of time and place is not restricted only for seasonal migrants. Those who attempt to settle indefinitely also face several layers of challenges in this respect, even after years of initially migrating although the challenges and the way those challenges are navigated are different.

*Marinka is one of the people who initially came as a seasonal migrant worker following her husband who worked in a fish factory. That was ten years ago. The first three years they went back and forth to Poland as the seasons changed, Every year they went from job to job and mentally that was very challenging. “You feel shitty, she said. It is not a life actually, because you don't know what there will be tomorrow, or what there will be in half a year, and if you have kids you want to have stability”. They then decided to buy a house and stay in the North indefinitely but the next two years after buying the house turned out for Marinka to be the toughest years. Many times she wanted to leave it all and go back as she didn't speak English very well, spoke no Norwegian at all, and had nothing to do. The language barrier was hard, she couldn't understand anybody and it made her feel stupid despite having a master's degree in Poland. She felt another barrier in her work itself, stating that she felt like she had to prove herself ten times over compared to her Norwegian colleagues. As time went by she managed to create a network of people around her and then for the first time she thought that she could stay in the North for a long time. Some of her former colleagues eventually helped her open up her own little shop. With the network she had built, friends that she had made, and having her own little shop she felt the power coming back to her. “It goes both ways, she said. I try to satisfy them and they give me so much love. And you know, we need this love, this satisfaction. This appreciation is everything, to charge your batteries. Then you're becoming a better person”. (Field Notes 03-2019)*

Despite wanting to assimilate into Norwegian life Marinka also tries actively to keep contact with the other Polish families living on the island. If she had met her friends back in Poland, she might not have become friends with them but she felt like that is perhaps one of the strengths about the North, You need each other, and with other Polish people she can relate

on another level than she can with Norwegian people. Still, what the future holds she cannot say. Ideally she would like to go back to Poland one day. She misses the birthdays, the events, the food and the people. She and her husband even bought a plot of land to maybe one day build a house on, but with kids the timing has to be right, you can't just take them away from everything that they know she says, so for now they remain in the North.

The story of Marinka shows the difficulties a migrant is facing to find a place into a new environment despite their best intentions. Especially the beginning is hard, but completely (re)starting a life is a continuous challenge. Some migrants are looking for long term options but don't have the network and opportunities to successfully make it, others do manage to stay long term but do not attempt to assimilate at all, and yet others deliberately do not attempt to stay long term and manage to turn temporality into an asset instead of a hindrance. Navigating the livelihood condition of space and time remains challenging for all migrants, especially since migrants are often less autonomous due to the power relations they face while they work, often temporary, in previously unknown places. Therefore specific methods of dealing with time and space are highly reactionary to the circumstances of a migrant's surroundings.

### *Social connections and belonging*

Another livelihood condition that challenge migrants for the duration of their stay abroad are social connection and belonging. Those two concept are experienced and dealt with in an entire different way that in a 'home' situation. The concepts become part of active solutions which are consciously and unconsciously carried out in order for migrants to cope abroad as best they can. For a large proportion, the way that migrants adapt themselves in respect with social connections and belonging is again, a reactionary one.

For example: if temporality characterizes employment possibilities, while useful networks are hard to come by, then the only sensible thing to do is to maintain the country of origin as the social, cultural and emotional base, while being highly flexible, and thereby independent to shocks and stresses in employment, constantly exploring opportunities abroad, and not being tied down to one particular place. That is part of the reason why integration and assimilation only happens on a limited scale, unless the migrant is dedicated in staying abroad for a longer time. Emotionally, there is hardly any benefit in investing time and effort in integrating into the local social fabric, which is dictated by completely different meta conditions compared to the country of origin, coupled with the fact that a migrant will only stay for a limited time. The only two groups of people that truly understand migrants are



other migrants and possibly a close network of friends, family and acquaintances. That does not mean that friendships and acquaintances between migrants and local people cannot occur, it can and it does, but on a limited scale and usually only when there is frequent contact between the two groups through work or other activities. In fact, not maintaining any social or emotional relationship with the work place or people there, can sometimes work in a migrants advantage.

*In fish factory B, when one man in his middle twenties got sent home for what looked like unjust reasons I became upset for him. What would he do now? Where was he going to get another job? Maybe he could stay anyway? He did not seem to mind at all, not about being sent home, not about the unjust situation, not about finding work. He had zero emotional attachments, and his plan for the future was to spend the rest of the winter in Iceland and work as a mailman since according to him nobody wants to do that job and it pays well. (Field Notes 04-2019)*

Admittedly, there was not much for him to be attached to in the fish factory, with its exploitative tendencies, but it is a good example of how adjusting to temporality by being highly flexible and emotionally and socially uncommitted to places of temporal residence and employment, are clever ways to cope with the livelihood condition of social relations and belonging. In fact, maintaining one's flexibility in uncertain circumstances can add to the sustainability factor of a livelihood strategy in the sense that it can withstand shocks as big as being fired and send home from one day to the next. In this particular scenario, it is not hard to imagine that this man did not develop a sense of belonging to his environment, but belonging is a concept that is hard to grasp. It is not black and white, have or have not, a struggle recognized by Delanty:

*At a superficial level we can say belonging connotes being at 'home', but exactly where do such feelings come from, and how are they codified in 'everyday' social practice? Who has power to define who can belong, and what are the conditions? Belongings, attachments and lived experiences can be highly contingent and thus, seem to be very difficult to grasp in any 'concrete' social-scientific analysis... (2008; 41)*

In the case of eastern European labour migrants in Norway, the answer to whether or not migrants build any sense of belonging can be partially answered by looking at the various obstructions in place. As Hall (2017) suggests, the borders migrants have to cross before being successfully able to build a grounded life in a new country do not disappear after crossing the nation state border. During this thesis I have shown that borders permeate the everyday lives of migrants in the forms of, cultural, social, language, and employment barriers.

Some migrants show no interest in crossing these borders at all, even if they had been easy to cross. For others, every one of those additional barriers can be a cause of difficulty in breaking the cycle of temporality, which causes some migrants to not even attempt it. In fact, as shown earlier, a popular strategy to deal with the livelihood condition of social relations and belonging amongst migrants is to deliberately not cross any of the additional borders that can lead to attachment or some sense of belonging to people and places as a method of self-preservation and maintaining control over a high level of flexibility, which can be an asset in precarious circumstances. A sense of belonging then, or ‘being at home’ for migrants in northern Norway can only be achieved in cases where some form of permanence is achievable for the foreseeable future, on the basis that a person is committed to the cause. But even if the preconditions for relative success are met, there are no guarantees as to whether or not a person is able to, or in the end wants to, commit him or herself fully to the north of Norway, thereby creating a sense of belonging that is strong enough to stand time and heritage that is beyond the point of merely revealingly using the North for its opportunities.

For example: Marinka, who started as a seasonal worker, is now living in Norway permanently while raising children and running her own small company. Reaching this stage was not an easy journey and while things are good right now, she does one day want to move back to Poland, back to her heritage. Jana’s journey is similar, she has been working off and on in Norway for over ten years, and also started her own company. The company is doing well and allows her to spend half a year in Norway, and the other half in Poland. An option she gladly takes. If she could she would leave Norway all behind in a heartbeat saying:

*“I have never felt connected, it is impossible to feel connected with this nation”*  
(WhatsApp conversation, 06-2019)

Raymondas also managed to go from seasonal work to permanent self-employment. He started in a fish factory putting bait on hooks for a method of fishing that is called ‘long line’

fishing, arguably one of the most tedious and boring jobs there is to do in the fishing world. From there he managed to work himself up to the point where he owned his own house and fishing boat, a feat not many can accomplish and one that takes years of dedication. His wife sometimes fished with him, but in the end they chose to go back to Lithuania and raise their kids there rather than in Norway.

One thing that needs to be remembered once again, is that the vast majority of the people who take the journey and dive into the deep end, do so because there is a varying level of necessity underlining the plunge, not because Norway is such a pretty country. The need to be in Norway is mostly financially, not emotionally motivated. Still, belonging is not an impossible emotion to have for migrants in Norway. Here Tomas comes to mind:

*Tomas from Poland has managed to carve a life for himself in the North. He became a fisherman a number of years ago and owns a small boat with which he is able to seriously compete with the bigger guys. Being in Norway was not always easy for him, especially during the time that he had trouble with his boat. But when asked where home for him was he did not hesitate and said "here". He says that he does not have much in Poland anymore to go back to. No place to stay either, the last time he went back for a month he was glad he could return to the north again. He feels grounded in the north and is trying to live a 'normal' life. He takes care to join in the village life to some extent. He learned Norwegian and as the newcomer, tries to be respectful to the other fisherman and people in the village and sees his future here. (Field notes 04-2019)*

Tomas's way of coping with social relations and belonging is embedded in permanence and fixated on staying in Norway. Emotionally and socially his attachment partly shifted from Poland to Norway as well. Aside from determination and personality one thing that helped this process is the fact that fishing on your own boat can be a lifetime employment option adding to a livelihood strategy that is sustainable and based on permanence. However, despite the high numbers of labour migrants coming to northern Norway, belonging remains a realm reserved mostly for the native population.

Belonging to a space, real or imagined, is an important cornerstone of identity and collective identity. In intra-European legal labour migration the emphasis on migration first and foremost lies in financial motivations. When temporal labour migrants move abroad, a sense of belonging that has roots in the emotional and the social do not automatically appear

on the spot. As Wodak argues: "...belonging can be considered a process whereby an individual in some way feels some sense of association with a group, and as such represents a way to explain the relationship between a personalized identity and a collective one. In a purely conceptual way belonging is about the relationship between personal identity and a collective identity – there is something about one's personal belonging that is comparable to one's perception of the aims, constitution or values of a given collective" (2008; 44). In a temporal migratory setting, there is simply no incentive for people to work on a shared sense of association with a group, and not much time for it to develop naturally either. At the same time, belonging is a two way process, one that is constructed by the migrant himself, but also by the other. That other can be other individuals, groups of people, but also institutions to which a migrant might or might not gain access. As I have explained earlier, there is very little contact, and more importantly, no need for contact between the social worlds of labour migrants and those of natives. Therefore belonging, however difficult the concept may be to define, is a rare sentiment for temporal labour migrants in reference to northern Norway.

That does not mean that all social relations are actively dismissed. As I've shown earlier in this chapter, workers spend much time together, also outside of working hours. Since workers both work and live together, contact between them is frequent and all migrants share a similar sentiment for being in that particular time and space, and so small communities of likeminded labour migrants form naturally. The communities of migrant workers that form in places of temporal work are close to what Maffesoli calls neo-tribes. Neo tribes are characterized by group forming based on "fluidity, periodic assembles and dispersals". Neo tribes are not just about the individual, they are about the persona, the communal drive which according to Maffesoli (1996) is driven by emotion. "the circulation of affects and passions constitutes an efficient cement for social structuring" (Maffesoli 1996; 69). Sticking together with those who have similar life trajectories in terms of migrating and reasons for migrating, happens automatically and is a natural solution to challenges posed by the livelihood conditions of social relations and belonging that migrants face on a daily basis such as being away from home and loved ones for months at a time. These connections serve the purpose of mutual support. But again, with conditions as temporally as they are, connections made during migratory phases have served their purpose once people go their own way again, adding to the chance that they will not last. I am not stating that as something negative. It is merely a rational turn of events that unfolds in migrants conscious or subconscious behavior as work and life goes on from place to place.

### *Money.*

The pinnacle of livelihood conditions is money. Specifically, the necessity to obtain it. That simple fact permeates throughout this thesis. From the different ways that people use to find work, to the distorted power relations they endure and the other livelihood conditions that pose challenges for which migrants find specific solutions. For migrants, in obtaining money lies the root of much hardship and endurance. Still, the alternative seems to be worse, otherwise migrants would not migrate. The necessity that is intrinsic to labour migration is the true villain in this story, and the cause of possible exploitation. The inability to obtain money in the home country is met with industries who thrive on those who seek employment.

Money has many different associations for people. It represents feeding your family, feeding yourself, climbing a social ladder, upwards social mobility, realization of plans or simply to push life a little more forward. All of them valid reasons to take the plunge into a fish factory in the dead of winter and pulling guts out of fish for a three months period while enduring power relations and other circumstances not of the migrant's choosing. In other words, it is financial capital that is lacking. It is available, but in order to obtain it, and use it to the migrant's advantage, the migrant has to take a certain amount of punishment in the form of unpleasant work, having little local social life, and dealing with distinctive power relations. In the fish factory money is the topic of many conversations both serious and in a laughing matter. There is hardly ever enough of it which cause for plenty of complaining, especially when there is no work. At the same time, once employed in a fish factory workers enter a maelstrom of events which is beyond their control. There is either work or there is no work, and when there is work the day might go on for more hours than you wished for. Despite the necessity underlying their presence in the fish factory, workers do make the best of it, it is the only way to make it all bearable.

To optimize gaining and saving money, migrants deploy different techniques. Earlier I described how saving money through bringing your own food by car, dumpster diving and making homemade alcohol are creative ways to save money. Other ways are simply spending less money on food and avoiding alcohol all together. Some migrants try to work in other places during the times there is no work in the fish factory, but are met with limited success. Unless a migrant finds a way onto a fishing boat, money remains a commodity that is hard to come by.



Cutting and gutting, work in progress.

Photographer: Jarle

## **Conclusion.**

Intra-European legal labour migration is a multi-fractionated beast of opportunities and endurance, powered by an engine of necessity. The entanglement of necessity with migration that will eventually work its way through all facets of the migratory experience, already becomes clear in the chapter of migration in progress. The bittersweet reality of exploring and finding opportunities abroad is explored here. Through rational thought processes, migrants take the plunge to the best of their abilities. That plunge looks different every time, and although it is often individualistic, it's characteristics share similarities. The main characteristic of migratory paths is migrations internal temporality. Exploring temporality and necessity in relation to labour migration puts me in the right track of answering the main research question which is as follows:

*How do migrants from eastern Europe navigate livelihoods and belonging in small communities in northern Norway?*

In the chapter: conditions of the migratory experience, I track the circumstances that led up to necessity and temporality, the building blocks for contemporary migration. These building blocks in turn reveal how livelihoods and belonging are navigated and experienced. Necessity has a solid base in relatively low wages in eastern European countries but is acted upon through inequality between member states of the EU and the legal ways to work there. Temporality is a condition of migration that has roots in the nature of how the industry has evolved. Much seasonal work is now primarily and structurally done by labour migrants. Paths to northern Norway, long since opened up by pioneer migrants, are now institutionalized from both sending as well as receiving country. Necessity is structurally capitalized upon in a potential win win situation, and is at the same time an easy target for institutionalized commodification and exploitation of people. Especially since power relations between migrants and employer are rarely negotiable.

All in all, this defines which livelihood conditions are affected through shocks in different forms of capital during the migratory experience, and helps shape specific reactions to them. Theoretically, Bauman's ideas about liquid modernity hold true in this thesis in the case of Eastern European labour migrants in his idea of: "the growing conviction that change is the only permanence, and uncertainty the only certainty" (Bauman 2012:0). Unstable circumstances require extremely flexible and adaptable reactions to shocks and stresses in livelihood conditions, and creates opportunities for those who can muster them. Living and working under unstable conditions by remaining highly flexible offers little chance for these extraordinary circumstances to normalize. Nevertheless, it is the flexibility that people display that can still produce a livelihood that is sustainable over time, even when temporality itself remains unchallenged.

Engbersen's (2015) concept of liquid migration also holds true for contemporary migration. It recognizes its different aspects such as temporality, labour oriented migration, legality, unpredictability and the role of family in migration. However, it fails to explain why this type of migration is happening in the first place, which is really the key to understanding how migration is experienced and how livelihoods and belonging are navigated. Liquid migration does not just come falling from the sky. Migrants often do not have much of a choice but to go, that simple fact changes the dynamics of everything that migration touches. Necessity alters the life courses of people by forcing people to choose between two evils. It changes the level of exploitation a migrant is willing to accept abroad and ultimately affects

the level of social and emotional investment migrants display. Necessity raises the stakes. It forces people to endure, to become creative in finding solutions for shocks in livelihood conditions. Although nobody forces a person to take a migratory path, it is not completely voluntary either.

I do not wish to victimize migrants though. The migratory journeys they take are not necessarily good or bad in relation to hopes, dreams, livelihoods and belonging. Migration can very well be a positive solution to challenges faced. Most of all, the impact that migration has depends on the circumstances in which it takes place. But again, the fact remains that because of necessity, there is a higher likelihood that migrants will experience negative circumstances than in the case where necessity had not been present.

This thesis is based on months of fieldwork in a small village in northern Norway. Everything in this research is as close to empirics as found in the field as possible. However, there are limitations to this thesis and its arguments. The claims that I make about necessity and its implications for enduring, livelihoods and belonging might be very site specific. I suspect that when there is a shift in the mix of circumstances for migrants in northern Norway, there might also be a shift in how migration is experienced. That shift might already occur when looking at migration in larger settlements, where it might be less likely to be bored, where there might be more people with which a migrant can relate, which might influence the notion of belonging. Or a shift in climate, northern Norway is exceptionally brutal and life happens mostly indoors. If migrants migrate to places where life happens outside, social connections might be formed easier. This is just speculation of course, but I argue for researchers who cover topics surrounding migration to not only focus on the symptoms of the concept, but also on the underlying reasons for it, as well as the implications of other external factors that can be of influence on migrants experiences. Without doing that, migrants stories and lived experiences are only half explored.



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