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The social meanings of migration

PhD thesis

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Summary

The thesis addresses the relationship between systems of social meaning and social practice, and demonstrates the benefits of including a focus on social meaning in migration analysis. The analysis draws on data from Western Ukraine, produced through four rounds of fieldwork conducted between 2008 and 2011. Ukraine is well suited to the theoretical investigation of migration studies, because it is a high mobility area, with migration flows going in several different directions, and because most of the migration practices that take place today emerged in their current form, after Ukraine gained independence in 1991. Their relatively recent appearance enables us to analyse current practices in light of both the conditions under which they emerged, and the conditions under which they are reproduced today.

The thesis draws mainly on interview data. This demands access to respondents who are willing to be interviewed. In article I I address the challenges of gaining access to respondents for interviews. Researchers commonly apply various forms and degrees of institutional, economic and emotional pressure in order to convince respondents to take part in research; these include recruiting respondents via gatekeepers, paying for participation or building a relationship with potential respondents in order to increase their trust in the interviewer and therefore their likelihood of being interviewed. Although such practices are common, it is still taboo in many research communities to acknowledge this as being the use of pressure to convince respondents to take part in interviews. This means that many researchers are ill-prepared for the many dilemmas that may emerge during the recruitment of respondents and data production. In this article I argue that if pressure is applied it becomes increasingly important to ensure that respondents are not put at risk of harm.

Interviews have been conducted with return migrants and prospective migrants in order to gain insight into how they understand and talk about their own migration decisions and experiences. Interviews were also conducted with non-migrants, to contrast the experiences and narratives of migrants with those of non-migrants. These interviews were used not only to gain insight into how individuals think and talk about their own migration decisions but also to understand how migration is embedded in systems of meaning in the society they leave behind. Norms, values and knowledge about migration can influence if and how people consider migration. However, the ways in which this influences migration decisions can, for various reasons, be difficult to access when individuals talk about their own migration

experiences. By tapping into how other people in the migrant's society reflect on and talk about migration, we may get closer to understanding how these cultural aspects shape migration practices.

Migration is not a unitary phenomenon, and going abroad to work is a strategy that people draw on in very different situations in life. Even if we limit our studies to international labour migrants, the term migrant still refers to a very diverse category of people who have little in common beyond the fact that they cross international borders and work (or seek work) while abroad. But although there is a great deal of variation in terms of the ways in which migrants organise their mobility and the reasons they have for migrating, they do not travel the world at random. They often go to the same places as other migrants in their community, they organise their travels in a similar manner, search for jobs in a similar way and live under similar conditions while abroad. Migration is structured, but it is not structured in a uniform way across social groups or contexts. This systematic variation can be conceptualised as labour migrants engaging in and reproducing several distinct migration practices.

In article II I describe three distinct migration practices that take place side by side in Western Ukraine. Each of them needs to be understood as a strategy available to a particular social group in a particular situation of life, as social institutions shape when and how migration is considered. I show how the widespread practice of male short-term circular migration to neighbouring countries reflects the strong expectations placed on men to go abroad to earn if they cannot provide for their family by staying, while adventure-seeking migrants often are young people who travel because of the absence of responsibilities, because they want to meet new people and see more of the world. And then there are the migrants who abandon their home communities, sometimes even their family, and go abroad to start a new life. Breaking down labour migration into the typology sketched above can enable us to develop more precise explanations for why people in Western Ukraine go abroad. In this article I argue that it is not the typology itself which should be the focus of comparative studies. Theory development should rather focus on the institutional influences identified as the generating principles of migration practices.

In this thesis I give particular attention to a subgroup of the above listed migration practices, the large group of women who go to Italy to care for the elderly. This is a practice that is highly contested in Western Ukraine. While going abroad to earn is seen as the respectable thing for a man to do if he cannot provide for his family in Ukraine, this is much more ambiguous for women. Article III shows how several different factors have been central

to the emergence of this migration practice, but points to the religious and economic limitations on divorce in Ukraine as particularly important in making migration a part of the cultural repertoire of this generation of women. Migration is understood as a way to obtain a welcome separation from a husband while still being perceived as a responsible mothers or grandmother. Some may leave because they want to get away from a situation of violence or abuse, where marital problems function as ‘push’ factors for migration, and opportunities for independent income and a fresh start function as ‘pull’ factors. Others are more fairly described as leaving because there is less holding them back, as they don’t mind having some distance from their spouse. The article shows how exploitation and empowerment are not necessarily opposites in migration analysis. When Ukrainian women go to Italy they often meet conditions of life and work that are harsh and exploitative. Simultaneously, they often leave behind a situation of hardship in their countries of origin. The empowering potential of migration does not make the exploitation of migrants less of an issue. However, women can, and do, express their agency through migration, in choosing one way of life over the other.

In article IV I address the question of agency in understandings of female migration in Western Ukraine, through an analysis of narratives of female migration. The article challenges some of the assumptions of the care drain perspective, and shows the risk of female agency disappearing in descriptions of female migration that draw strongly on this perspective. In many communities of origin for female migrants there is widespread criticism in the media and popular discourse of mothers who leave behind children and enjoy the good life abroad, with claims that female migration happens at the cost of family and children. The stigma produced by this discourse, means many female migrants who are also mothers prefer to describe their decision to migrate as an act of sacrifice. Studies that frame female migrants as mothers tend to reproduce these narratives of sacrifice at the cost of understandings of female migration where women go abroad to improve their own lives. As a result, the focus is shifted from the women’s agency and reasons for leaving, to the consequences of their absence.

The main findings of the thesis are disseminated in the following four articles:

- I. TYLDUM, G. 2012. Ethics or access? Balancing informed consent against the application of institutional, economic or emotional pressures in recruiting respondents for research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 15 (3).
- II. TYLDUM, G. In Review. Labour Migration and Social Institutions. *Migration Studies*
- III. TYLDUM, G. Forthcoming 2015. A welcomed separation. Female migration and divorce

in Western Ukraine. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 5(3)

- IV. TYLDUM, G. 2015. Motherhood, agency and sacrifice in narratives on female migration for care work. *Sociology* 49(1)

1. Introduction

This thesis addresses how the study of migration can benefit from including an awareness of how systems of social meaning shape migration practices. The focus on social meaning is both theoretical and methodological. Theoretically I draw on theories of social practice and show how migration in a community come to be shaped by the social meanings of migration, including norms that regulate family life and ideas of responsibility and respectability. Methodologically I draw on narrative analysis, demonstrating how narrative analysis of interview data enables us to grasp how migration is embedded in systems of social meaning in communities of origin. The thesis shows how the two approaches build on and complement each other.

My initial interest at the outset of this project was in understanding migration decisions - why some people go abroad while most people in their community do not. Even in high mobility areas most people do not migrate, even if the economically rational decision would be to go abroad to earn. Finding out what distinguishes migrants from non-migrants has been the focus throughout the research; however, my approach to this question has changed along the way. The thesis is based on data produced during four periods of fieldwork in Western Ukraine between 2008 and 2011. After the second round of fieldwork in Western Ukraine, I realised that the mobility from this area could not be understood without taking into account the strong normative aspects of migration, and it was in particular the elements of stigma and shame, present in so many interviews about migration, that puzzled me.

In Western Ukraine, some types of migration are highly contested, while others are understood as part of everyday practices. There is extensive variation both in how people organise migration and in how they make sense of and give value to it. Addressing this variation, I realised that I could not answer the question of *why* people migrate without taking one step back and asking *how* we can know why people migrate. This led me to go beyond migration theory, to revisit some of the fundamental discussions in sociological theory, epistemology and methodology, to find ways to include social meanings in explanations of migration practice.

Research questions

The aim of this thesis is to conduct an empirical and theoretical investigation into ***how systems of social meaning shape migration practice***. In parallel and in order to answer this

question, the thesis also addresses the epistemological and methodological issues of *how we can study the relationship between systems of social meaning and migration practices*. The thesis addresses this relationship in the Western Ukrainian context and therefore contributes to empirical understanding of migration in Western Ukraine, as well as to theoretical debates in the wider field of migration studies.

In articles II and III I address the **empirical** question of why some people in Western Ukraine migrate while most people do not. Articles II to IV also address the stigmas of migration and ask why some migration practices, or particular outcomes of migration, are contested or stigmatised in this region.

Articles II and III contribute to **theoretical** debate on how social meanings and institutions shape migration practice. With a particular focus on the institution of the family, they ask how family roles and responsibilities, and ideas of fathering, respectability and divorce, shape the understanding of migration as a strategy available to some, but not to others. Articles III and IV address theories of female migration and ask whether the mobility of women between Ukraine and Italy should be understood as empowerment or sacrifice. In this Foundation, as well as in article II, I ask *how* we can analyse the ways in which meanings shape behaviour. This discussion touches on both theoretical and **epistemological** debates in sociology. Epistemological discussions are found in article IV as well, as it looks at how we can interpret migration practices when there are conflicting narratives describing them.

Article IV addresses **methodology**, and asks how we can use interview data in order to access people's experiences. Article I discusses the **ethical** issues of applying pressure to get access to narratives in interviews; how to balance the need for access with the responsibility to do no harm to research participants when interviewing about stigma and trauma.

These questions were not formulated at the outset of this project but were born through the initial rounds of fieldwork and my attempts to understand migration practices in Western Ukraine. They are the product of an inductive research strategy, where patterns emerging from empirical investigations gave rise to new questions that prompted me to revisit relevant literature and go back to the field, a process which in turn revealed new patterns and questions. Although the data analysis has not been as systematic as some grounded theory scholars recommend (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), the approach is inspired by grounded theory, taking as its starting point similarities and differences that emerge as data are produced (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Why Western Ukraine is good to think with for migration studies

Western Ukraine has been a good case to study to address theoretical and epistemological issues in migration research. The western regions make up about 20 percent of Ukraine's population, but are the place of origin of more than 70 percent of the country's migrants (ILO, 2013). The 2012 Labour Force Survey documents that between January 2010 and June 2012 11 percent of the population aged 15-70 went abroad for work at least once, mainly to the Russian Federation, Southern Europe (Italy, Spain and Turkey) or Central Europe (Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic). The same survey shows that in all other regions of Ukraine, the proportion of migrants in the population was less than 2 percent in the same period, in the predominantly Russian speaking areas along the border to Russia, it was less than 1 percent (ILO, 2013).

Prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, opportunities for international (and national) travel had been limited, but from the early 1990s Ukrainians could freely cross the borders into neighbouring Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Russian Federation. Simultaneously, massive economic restructuring of the economy gave rise to poverty, hyperinflation and mass unemployment, leading many to seek alternative income sources through migration. Many started as 'shuttle traders', buying goods abroad to sell at markets at home, but gradually people gained work abroad in construction, agriculture and domestic work, mainly in the shadow economy (for an excellent description of the role of shuttle traders during the years of economic transformation in the region, see Morawska, 2001). These post-reform population movements were the beginnings of the practices of migration that exist today. Now, more than twenty years after Ukraine gained its independence, these population movements have developed into distinct migration practices, in the sense that significant groups of migrants go to the same places, organise their travels in a similar manner and have similar expectations with regard to the outcomes of this mobility. However, the migration practices are recent enough for us to trace their emergence. Thus, Western Ukraine presents itself as an excellent case for analysing how migration practices emerge with their particular direction and demographic characteristics.

Migration practices in Western Ukraine are, as elsewhere in the world, highly gendered. Approaching the question of why people migrate requires that we also address the way men and women are affected differently by, for instance, legal systems, labour markets and cultural perceptions of responsibility and decency. In this thesis I give extensive attention to these gendered aspects of migration practices, and in doing this I also draw on and reflect

upon some of the insights produced in feminist scholarship. However, my ambition is to contribute to migration theory, and I only draw on feminist scholarship to the extent that it is relevant for this purpose. The more political aspects of power and ideology, that are often central to feminist scholarship, are given less attention in this analysis.

The thesis addresses some key issues in migration theory, and to do so it draws on several different bodies of literature in the field. However, it has not been an aim to position this work within a particular tradition of migration theory. Instead I have chosen a rather eclectic approach to the study of migration, where I draw on several different theoretical traditions in the four articles, within a framework of general sociological theories of social practice.

The articles

The dissertation is based on a collection of four articles that are presented in more detail towards the end of this foundation. They are referred to within the text by the numerals I to IV.

- V. TYLDUM, G. 2012. Ethics or access? Balancing informed consent against the application of institutional, economic or emotional pressures in recruiting respondents for research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 15 (3).
- VI. TYLDUM, G. In Review. Labour Migration and Social Institutions. *Migration Studies*
- VII. TYLDUM, G. Fortcoming/2015. A welcomed seperation. Female migration and divorce in Western Ukraine. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 5(3)
- VIII. TYLDUM, G. 2015. Motherhood, agency and sacrifice in narratives on female migration for care work. *Sociology* 49(1)

Structure of the thesis

As I expect some readers to be unfamiliar with the Ukrainian context, I start out with a short introduction to Western Ukrainian society and history in chapter two, with a particular focus on issues relevant to understanding how this region has become a high mobility area. Chapter three describes the data and fieldwork, the methodological approach and the ethical and methodological choices made along the way. Chapter four presents theories on social meaning and social practice, and discusses the epistemological challenges of studying social meaning, understood as a property of society that influences individual choices. Chapter five summarises each of the four articles this thesis builds upon, while chapter six brings the thesis to a close with a brief summary of the main findings and concluding reflections.

2. Ukraine and its western regions. A young nation and a mobile population.

The western regions of Ukraine are at the borderlands of new Europe. The name, *Ukraina*, literally means borderlands, and, as the name signifies, the Ukrainian people have lived on the outskirts of great empires throughout the centuries. In Lviv and surrounding areas, where I conducted my fieldwork, the Schengen border is now only a short drive away. The political and economic differences across this border were already significant at the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, but they have widened with the EU memberships of neighbouring Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The geographical proximity makes the idea of Europe present in many Western Ukrainians' reflections on the future, if not so much in their everyday lives. An at least equally strong influence comes from the Russian Federation to the east. As a former superpower and historical ally of Ukraine, Russia exerts significant economic, political and cultural influence.

Throughout the last century Ukrainians have been one of the most mobile populations in the world, with Ukraine ranking fifth in the world for number of emigrants (IOM, 2011). The western regions make up about 20 percent of the Ukrainian population but more than 70 percent of the migrants who leave Ukraine each year come from these regions¹(ILO, 2013). There are several reasons for the high levels of mobility in Western Ukraine. One important factor is the combination of strong networks and cultural and historical ties to neighbouring countries and peoples, combined with relatively weak ties to other regions of Ukraine.

Reflecting historical ties and ideological orientation, historical population movements in Western Ukraine have gone both eastwards and westwards. This was still the case for the population movements at the time of my fieldwork, where roughly one third of the migrants from Lviv would go to Russia and other former Soviet Republics, one third would go to former Eastern Bloc countries of central Europe (mainly Poland), and the final third would go to southern Europe (ILO, 2013).

The particular history of Western Ukraine is key to understanding why its population is much more mobile than the population in other parts of the country. The country Ukraine, as we know it today, gained its independence in 1991; prior to this some of its territories had enjoyed independent rule for short periods, but this was never the case for all of the territories that today make up Ukraine. Following a Cossack uprising against the Polish-Lithuanian

commonwealth in 1648, Ukraine’s central and eastern regions fell under Russian rule, first as part of the Russian empire, thereafter as an independent republic within the USSR (Magocsi, 2010). Western Ukraine remained within the Lithuanian-Polish commonwealth before later becoming part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a constitutional union that existed from 1867 to 1918, when it collapsed as a result of defeat in the First World War. Lviv and the surrounding areas where the fieldwork for this thesis was conducted, was at the heart of what was then known as the Austro-Hungarian province of Galicia. In the mid-19th century, the Polish and Ukrainian populations were of about equal size in Galicia, with a significant Jewish minority. The Ukrainian population was concentrated in the south-eastern parts of Galicia, and in the areas in and around the city of Lviv 80 percent of the population was Polish or Jewish. This period saw a massive outmigration to the new world; it is estimated that about 80 percent of the Ukrainian pre-WWI immigrants to the US came from Galicia and other Austro-Hungarian provinces; between 1881 and 1912 about 600,000 Ukrainians left these regions for the US and Canada (Magocsi, 2010).

Figure 1 Map of Ukraine’s administrative divisions



Western Ukraine consists of the following oblasts (marked in lighter grey); Rivne, Khmelnytski, Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk, Chernivtsi, Transcarpatia, Luts'k and Lviv oblast. The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted in Lvivska oblast (see methodology section for more detail about the location)

After the First World War and the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Western Ukraine was ruled by Poland (with the exception of the mountainous region of Transcarpatia, which was taken over by Czechoslovakia). Towards the end of the Second World War the territories that we today know as Western Ukraine were occupied by the Soviet Red Army, and made part of the Ukrainian Soviet republic. In 1947 140,000 Ukrainian Poles were forcibly deported to Poland, others fled to Poland voluntarily. Immigration to Ukraine was encouraged from other parts of the USSR and thus the proportion of Poles in the population fell drastically while the proportion of Russians increased throughout the Soviet epoch (Magocsi, 2010). These relatively recent large population movements have created strong ties and networks in the Western Ukrainian population to people and places in Russia, Poland and the Czech Republic, as well as in the US and Canada.

Living in the peripheries of various empires, most Ukrainians did not develop a clear sense of ethnic or national identity until well into the 20th century (Magocsi, 2010). As the dramatic events in recent years have demonstrated, questions surrounding what it means to be Ukrainian, and whether Ukraine should orient itself east or westwards, are still highly contested, not only among political elites but also among the population at large. Many Western Ukrainians feel they have little in common with their fellow countrymen in central and eastern parts of the country, and are much more likely to vote for pro-western (and anti-Russian) political parties. Post-independence elections display a strongly divided country; in the presidential elections of 2010 the west-oriented candidate, Yulia Tymoshenko won 42 out of 44 electoral districts in Western Ukraine, gaining more than 80 percent of the votes in most. In the majority of electoral districts in Eastern Ukraine between 80 and 90 percent of the votes were cast in support of former president Yanukovich, who was removed from office and accused of being controlled by Russia during the events often referred to as the ‘Euromaidan’ in the spring of 2014. These regional differences are highly politicised and vocalised in Western Ukraine, and contribute towards a strong nationalism (or regionalism) with regard to what Ukraine could or should be. But in most of the post-reform period, when Ukraine has been led by mainly east-oriented governments, identification with the Ukrainian state has been relatively weak (Magocsi, 2010).

There are also significant linguistic differences between Eastern and Western Ukraine. The Ukrainian language belongs to the Slavic language group, together with Russian, Polish and Slovak. But while Western Ukrainian dialects are more influenced by Polish and Slovak, Eastern Ukrainian dialects are closer to Russian. In some regions of Eastern Ukraine, the

population speaks predominantly Russian, with only a few Ukrainian words. Another trait that distinguishes Western Ukraine is the dominance of the Greek Catholic church, which is hardly present in other regions of Ukraine. The population in Western Ukraine is much more likely to see themselves as religious and attend church than their orthodox countrymen in the east (Rasumkova, 2010).

In sum, Western Ukraine is different from other parts of the country in terms of history, religion and to some extent language. When people in Western Ukraine consider going abroad to work, they do not necessarily distinguish as clearly between internal and international migration as migrants in other areas of the world would. The recent history of forced and voluntary mobility out of and into the region has resulted in extensive networks in Russia, Poland, North America and Canada, while the ties to other areas in Ukraine are relatively weak. At the same time, many do not feel more culturally connected to their fellow countrymen in Central or Eastern Ukraine than they do to Russians or Poles. The combination of strong networks and cultural and historical ties to neighbouring countries and peoples has diminished the differences between internal and international migration, and can in part explain the current high level of international migration in the region.

The reform years and consequences for migration

The historical events of the last three decades make up a significant backdrop for any understanding of migration practices in Western Ukraine. In this section I will not give a thorough account of all aspects of the post-independence history of Ukraine, but would like to point to a few factors that are essential for understanding current migration practices in the western regions.

The birth of the independent Ukrainian state came with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Independence followed a series of events starting with a failed coup-d'état in Moscow (against the General Secretary of the Communist Party, Michail Gorbachov) in August 1991. As part of Gorbachov's glasnost policies, a multi-candidate election had been held to local parliaments (the Supreme Soviet) in all Soviet Republics in 1990. The Ukrainian parliament was also elected through a multi-candidate election, giving this body a high level of legitimacy among the Ukrainian population. Following the failed coup in August 1991, the parliament passed a resolution that declared Ukraine an independent state and in December 1991 a referendum was held, where 92 percent of the population voted for independence (Magocsi, 2010).

In the decade that followed, all post-Soviet states went through a painful restructuring of economic, legal and political institutions; for Ukraine this process was particularly painful. There was enormous economic and legislative chaos, which strongly impacted people's day-to-day lives. Media censorship ended, Lenin was no longer a hero, and the churches re-entered the social arena after decades of strict control under the Soviet Regime. New ideologies took their shape as churches were struggling to gain influence on one hand, and on the other a new consumer culture was introduced to the population through advertising and Hollywood movies. Simultaneously, the planned economy of the Soviet regime collapsed more or less overnight. The end of government subsidies to industries and the loosening of import controls forced Ukrainian products to compete with goods produced outside the post-Soviet space; factories everywhere were forced to shut down. There was no longer a demand for 'Soviet style' Ukrainian TVs or shoes and few factories had access to the capital needed to enable them to readjust to the new market situation. In 1999 the GDP of Ukraine stood at only half of what it was in 1989. The decline in production was accompanied by hyperinflation which was on average over 2,600 percent per year from 1991 to 1995 (Magocsi, 2010). With a staggering inflation of 10,156 percent in 1993, salaries and pensions lost, on average, a third of their value a day after they were paid out, if they were paid out at all. Throughout the 1990s, employees in all sectors of the economy could go months without receiving any salary at all. This gave rise to extensive bartering and everybody needed to engage in informal trade in order to make ends meet.

This shaped migration practices in several ways. First of all, foreign currency was in great demand. The Ukrainian currency was losing value every day; during the worst years of hyperinflation you wouldn't be able to buy anything with your salary if you didn't convert it to 'hard currency' immediately after it was paid out. Salaries earned abroad could be saved for later use. Salaries earned in Ukraine needed to be spent immediately. Secondly, as people in all sectors of the economy were not paid salaries for months on end, their bosses could not really protest if they left for seasonal work. Although salaries were not paid, schools and hospitals continued to operate, and even employees in factories and shops in the private sector continued going to work, hoping they would get paid eventually. However, the ones who had an opportunity to go abroad to earn could easily leave their jobs for weeks or months and still expect to get their job back upon their return (if the job still existed). Cross-border shuttle trading, usually combined with the smuggling of alcohol and tobacco, was a common strategy for survival among people in all groups of society (Morawska, 2001).

In these years, the migration practices of brigades of construction workers formed the shape they continue to take today. The organisation of migrants who go abroad as groups of 4-5 workers is by far the most widespread migration practice in Western Ukraine. This way of organising construction work among migrants has many similarities to the post-reform organisation of construction work that we still find in much of the post-Soviet space; in the state run Soviet economy the State Committee for Construction was responsible for managing the construction sector. This ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Private initiatives took over responsibility for construction; there was very little regulation and notoriously high levels of corruption made it possible to bypass whatever laws there were. In larger construction projects, smaller groups of workers (brigades) are subcontracted to do specific tasks. Payment is usually given on completion of the job. None of my respondents working in the construction sector were paid by the hour, only on completion of the job. Payment would go to their team leader, who would then distribute the money to the workers. Nobody paid taxes. If they did not get paid as promised there was no official body to direct complaints to. Personal relations and trust between team leaders and contractors were perceived as particularly important.

This way of organising construction work is more or less the same when brigades of workers go to Poland or Moscow to work. According to my respondents, it was easy to find construction work in Russia throughout the 1900s, and as Poland recovered from the economic restructuring towards the end of the 1900s, construction jobs were easy to find there too. With the restructuring of the economy in Russia, a new class of newly rich soon developed. While most of the population had little or nothing, the new elites wanted large summer houses and refurbished apartments, which in turn created a demand for construction workers. Many Ukrainian men had good networks in Russia, either through family who had recently migrated from there, or through military service. The networks established during the years in the army proved important to many of my respondents when they describe how they found work in Russia during the 1900s. During the Soviet Union, there was a mandatory male military service of 2 years (3 years in the Navy). The conscripts were often sent to serve far away from their place of residence and Ukrainians would normally serve with conscripts of other nationalities.

But not all men handled the restructuring well. In the chaotic years of the early 1900s, many struggled to figure out how to play the new game. Factories shut down and it was impossible to find new jobs. Not everybody was good at trading and many lost money after

being fooled or caught at the border trying to smuggle. Not all brigades of migrant workers were well organised; in particular in those initial years many came home from weeks of work abroad with no money and more debt.

The expectations placed upon men to provide for their families are strong in Ukraine and having to depend on your wife to manage financially is seen as emasculating. The men who failed as breadwinners had few alternative roles available to them, as they were deprived their identity as workers and the role of caregiver in the family was perceived as only available to women. Throughout the 1900s many men struggled with depression and anxiety and for some vodka became a way to seek relief (Kiblitckaya, 2000). In this period male life expectancy in Ukraine fell drastically, becoming one of the lowest in the world, and male suicide rates and deaths from alcohol poisoning skyrocketed (Brainerd 2001; Ashwin & Lytkina 2004; Popova et al. 2007).

While men were struggling with unemployment, depression and alcohol problems, many women were left to figure out how to put food on the table on their own. When respondents among female return migrants described their husbands during these years many would talk about them with pity or contempt. They were men who were not able to provide for their families, leaving the woman to struggle to make ends meet. In these early years of crisis, female migrants did not go abroad to the same extent as the men. Some would go abroad for a few days or even a week, to smuggle or trade, but the ones who had children or others depending on their care stayed in Ukraine, barely making ends meet despite a lot of hard work.

Migration in Western Ukraine

With its 46 million inhabitants and an area of more than 600,000 square kilometres, Ukraine is the eighth largest European state in terms of population and the second largest in terms of territory (Magocsi, 2010). It also has the fifth highest number of emigrants in the world (IOM, 2011). Apart from the Western Ukrainians who left for the new world around the turn of the last century, much of the population movement took place during the Soviet regime, or in the period immediately before or after. Jews emigrated to the US to escape the increase in pogroms in the post-WWI period, the Crimean Tatars were collectively deported to Central Asia and other parts of the Soviet Union under Stalin, and large numbers of Poles were exiled after the annexation of Western Ukraine after the Second World War (IOM, 2011). However, Western Ukrainians continued to display high levels of mobility even after the dissolution of

the Soviet Union.

Despite being a high migration area, 89 percent of the labour force did *not* go abroad to work between 2010 and 2012 (ILO, 2013). The presence of networks, historical experiences of migration, weak national identity and a more or less constant economic crisis can explain why the rates of migration are higher in Western Ukraine than in many other areas of the world. However, these factors cannot explain why some groups of the population go out and others do not; for these structural factors impact all population groups in Western Ukraine in a relatively similar manner. But migrants are not representative of the population at large. Migration is a strategy chosen in particular demographic groups in particular situation in life. These mechanisms of migration selectivity, that make some groups more prone to migrate than others, are what I set out to explain in this thesis.

3. Fieldwork and methodology

In this chapter I describe the fieldwork and data that the thesis is based upon, and reflect on the implications of this methodological approach and the importance of the interview in empirical sociology. I go on to address the ethical implications of using economic incentives in the recruitment of respondents for interviews that include a focus on stigma and shame. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the challenges of interpreting meaning and practice as an outsider and foreigner.

Fieldwork and data

The thesis is based on data produced during four periods of fieldwork in Western Ukraine between 2008 and 2011. In each period I stayed in the field between seven and ten days. The fieldwork was organised from the city of Lviv, a city of about 700,000 inhabitants a little more than an hour's drive from the Polish border. Lviv is the largest city in Western Ukraine and the 7th largest city in Ukraine. In addition to the city of Lviv, a total of nine different localities were visited, varying in economic structure, from a small mountainous village with no industry beyond agriculture, where most houses had no mains water supply, to villages on the cusp of becoming towns following the birth of new industries and old industrial towns severely impacted by economic reform and recession.

Figure 2 Map of fieldwork sites in Lviv oblast, Western Ukraine.



Produced in Google maps (2014)

Ukrainian fieldwork assistants were hired to plan and organise the fieldwork. They also joined me on all fieldtrips, giving invaluable assistance in facilitating interviews and transportation to fieldwork sites. However, their main contribution was as discussion partners, helping me to contextualise the data. Their interpretations of what could be ‘read between the lines’ after an interview were hugely valuable, to guide further enquiry and to help reformulate questions for subsequent interviews. One of the assistants also conducted some additional interviews after I had returned to Norway.

The data for this thesis was mainly collected from face-to-face interviews. Interviews were conducted with a wide range of respondents, including return migrants, prospective migrants, families of migrants and others who have never been abroad. A total of 72 interviews were conducted with 68 respondents, in addition to two focus group interviews.

Table 1 Overview of respondents

Return migrants*	Women	40 years or older	8
		under 40	10
	Men	40 years or older	11
		under 40	6
Non-migrants	Women	40 years or older	9
		under 40	7
	Men	40 years or older	3
		under 40	4
Key respondents			10
Repeat interviews			4
Total			72

*Refers to international migrants who worked while abroad. Migrants to Russia while Ukraine was a republic of the Soviet Union are not counted as return migrants here.

The interviews were structured as life-history interviews, with a particular focus on work and family. When the respondents were asked to take part in interviews they were told that the topic of the interview was decisions made with regard to work, family life and economic situation. Migration was not mentioned as we were hoping to let the respondent her-/himself

bring up the topic if relevant, to see when and to what extent migration is conceptualised as a strategy they draw on or consider in their life. However, as some respondents were targeted on the basis of specific characteristics and experiences tied to migration, several respondents knew that I was interested in migration, something that probably made this a more prevalent topic of the interviews than it would have done otherwise.

Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and three hours, and were either conducted in respondents' homes or in a cafe or restaurant; in some instances interviews were held in a small meeting room in a hotel in Lviv. The interviews were conducted in Russian without an interpreter when the respondent was comfortable with this, and sometimes in a mixture of Ukrainian and Russian. A few interviews were conducted in Ukrainian and with translation into English or Russian. Most interviews were transcribed by Ukrainian native speakers and then translated into English, some I transcribed directly myself.

To get an overview of the data all interviews were coded in NVivo by major topics and themes. It was not however the aim to develop categories as in a more structured grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), but rather to identify patterns and common themes, in line with classic thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Review of newspapers and magazines

The interviews are supplemented with a review of two daily newspapers and two weekly magazines published in the month of October 2010. In this period migration and migrants were hardly mentioned in these news sources. One article described four migrants who had left for neighbouring Poland, Slovakia and Russia and returned to Ukraine to help out with the harvest. There were a couple of smaller pieces on a Ukrainian prostitute who had been at one of former prime minister Berlusconi's infamous parties (stating that this was an embarrassment to Ukraine) and several pieces on negotiations with the EU for simplified visa regimes. In the same period we also completed a review of glossy women's magazines and women's magazines with 'real life stories'. If migration was mentioned at all in the glossy magazines it was in reportage on tourist destinations (both budget and luxury travel). In the 'real life stories' there were several horror stories where migration had led to death or devastation. There were no stories of migration with a happy ending. The material was not extensive enough to warrant independent analysis, but the findings have supported and guided the analysis of narratives presented in interviews, mainly by supporting the claim that there are strong variations in how migration is perceived, and that there is a stigma attached to,

even condemnation of, certain migration practices. In addition to this material collected in 2010, Victoria Volodko, a Western Ukrainian migration scholar who joined me on my last field trip, generously gave me access to her collection of newspaper clippings from the period 2005 to 2009, when discourses of social orphans dominated in the Ukrainian media, a phenomenon described by several migration scholars (Lutz and Palenga-Möllnbeck, 2012; Fedyuk, 2006).

Theoretical sampling; searching for patterns in the field

The way in which respondents were targeted in this study loosely fits Glaser and Strauss' description of theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 45-77). I started out with some initial hypotheses of which groups would present which kinds of experiences or narratives, I then targeted respondents with particular experiences or characteristics to attempt to falsify my expectations.

Western Ukraine was originally chosen for this project because it is a high mobility area and one that I expected would have been harshly affected by the expansion of the Schengen area to include Poland in December 2007. However, the changes in migration opportunities to Poland were hardly mentioned in the interviews and when asked directly only a few respondents stated that this had affected their migration strategies. Even for these few, the main change was that they started to go more often to Russia instead of Poland, while the overall strategy of migration (short-term circular) remained the same. Others claimed that they could easily get documents to travel to Poland, and had continued to go to there on a regular basis for work in construction or agriculture, including after it became part of the Schengen area. Although this was given much attention in the initial interviews, as the data did not show that the expansion of the Schengen border had shaped migration practices in any way, it has not been a central point in my analysis.

The original design also had a strong emphasis on middlemen and smugglers, as agents facilitating and making migration possible, but this too was given only a marginal role in most respondents' migration narratives. Access to illegal documents (for a certain price) was taken for granted and included in the travel cost calculations of those considering going to Western Europe. Going to Russia to work was talked of as a migration option available to all, as no visa was required to go to Russia as a tourist at the time when the fieldwork was conducted. I could not see that middlemen and smugglers were important in determining if my respondents went abroad or stayed (beyond their role in increasing the cost of travels to the west), and

consequently their presence and role is given limited attention in this thesis. In Western Ukraine almost everybody knows someone who works in Russia, Poland or Italy. Within most social groups there is a firm understanding of how migration can and should be practised; a lack of understanding cannot therefore be seen as shaping migration practices.

In the first rounds of fieldwork I also put an emphasis on poverty and recruited several respondents based on their low economic status; a category of respondents I believed could benefit greatly from going abroad to work. I conducted some awkward interviews about migration with respondents who had never really considered going abroad before and who did not understand why I insisted on talking about migration with them. At the same time, some of my return migrants would talk about economic needs driving migration, but the economic problems they described did not resonate well with the economic resources available to non-migrants. Two separate male respondents claimed they needed to go abroad because their children needed computers for their schoolwork, a resource that was not very common among schoolchildren in Lviv at that time. In another interview a woman who did not know if she could afford the bus fare to work the next day said she had never considered going abroad to work, although her colleagues went to Poland to pick strawberries every summer, and had invited her to come along. These interviews have been important for the analysis because they demonstrate that there is no direct link between the potential economic gain from migration (or economic desperation) and the extent to which people in this region consider migration. This led me to look for other factors that could explain why some people migrate and subsequently target other population groups for interviews. Based on the patterns that emerged from the analysis of the initial interviews, my focus came to be on the institutional influences on migration; respondents were then sought out based on their occupation, labour market status, family roles, marital status and age of their children.

Accessing culture and experience through interviews

This thesis is based on the use of interviews as a tool to gain access to peoples' lived experiences and their evaluation and interpretation of their own experiences as well as the experiences of others. The interview can be understood as a particular type of narrative, where the respondent tells his/her story in response to the questions of the interviewer. Although people might not understand how structures and culture shape their preferences and perceived options for action, they are still the experts on their own lives (Smith, 2005). To understand why they act as they do, we need to listen to their own accounts of their experiences and

choices. But this does not imply that we should accept their narratives about experiences as sociological explanations. Narratives give access to experiences but the relationship between narrative and experience is not simple (Smith, 2005). Experiences are interpreted and given meaning even as they take place. Professor Karin Widerberg at the University of Oslo illustrates this in her teaching, with how one person knocking into another on the bus is immediately given meaning by the inflicted person who can either think of it as an accident or as a hostile strike. Another layer of meaning is added to this event when it is retold, as it is filtered through active identity construction, and the storyteller chooses which elements to emphasise and which to leave out, in light of how they want to be perceived by the listener. This way, narratives tend to vary with the circumstances they are told within; they are adapted to context and to their audiences (Presser and Sandberg, 2014). Stigmas and taboos make some elements of an experience easier to talk about than others. There are also experiences for which there is no available discourse (Smith 2005). An important contribution of feminist movements in the last decade has been to help create a language to enable people to talk about, for instance, domestic violence, rape within relationships and date-rape.

Another type of silent experience is what the respondent takes for granted and does not even think about bringing up in an interview. When asked about the reasons behind their actions, most individuals can and do formulate explanations, however these explanations are only intelligible in light of the unformulated background knowledge that the actor takes for granted (Bourdieu, 1977). If we bring this thinking to the field of migration research, we should be aware that migration, or parts of the systems of meaning that migration is related to, can be given a commonsensical understanding, linked to practices that are understood by those involved, but taken for granted, and as such not expressed as reasons. The main social mechanisms that influence action in a society can therefore be felt to be so ‘natural’ or ‘obvious’ that it is never stated in an interview.

In my earlier research in development studies I came across an illuminating example of this. While analysing data on school dropouts among Palestinian children in Lebanon (Tyldum and Brashour, 2003), I was surprised to find that almost no parents said their child had dropped out of school due to poverty, but instead stated that the child left school due to poor performance or lack of interest. The same survey showed that dropout rates were substantially higher in lower income groups than among the wealthier parts of the population. It was tempting to suggest that there was a stigma attached to poverty that made people unwilling to admit to this being the reason. After conducting qualitative interviews in other

parts of the world I later came to realise that in poorer population groups families constantly consider whether or not they should keep a child in school - if s/he doesn't do well, what point is there in investing in his/her education? However, parents will often insist that it is not poverty that causes them to take the child out of school, for if s/he had performed better, they would have been able to find the money. However, the richer parts of the population don't have to consider if the investment in education will pay off, and for them dropout rates are low, and 'poor performance' and 'lack of interest' are rarely presented as reasons. Among the less well-off the practice of considering the potential benefits of education for children is taken for granted, it is a mechanism produced by poverty but not recognised as such by the actors involved, because everybody else in the village thinks the same way. It is part of the social meaning of education. Such taking-for-grantedness is key to understanding social processes but difficult to discern in empirical research.

My approach has been to draw on interviews to analyse migrant experiences both directly, through interviews with the migrants themselves about their experiences and choices, and indirectly, in light of how these choices and experiences are, or can be, given meaning in the society where they take place. This implies not only understanding how the respondent him/herself gives meaning to the experiences and choices described, but also how they are understood by others in the social groups in which they belong. This can bring us closer to the ideal of interpreting narratives about experience in light of what is taken for granted by the respondent themselves (but perhaps not by others), how the person wants to present themselves, what a person is expected to say, and what it is not possible say.

Access to respondents

Some groups have been particularly difficult to access. In light of the dominance of the narrative of social orphans (children left behind while their parents are working abroad) in media representations, existing research on female migration from this region and my own interviews (see article IV), I tried to gain access to mothers who had gone abroad and left young children with their father or grandmother. Despite significant efforts through all four periods of fieldwork, I was only able to recruit two women, who had each been away for a few weeks. The difficulties of recruiting this category of respondent may be due to the strong stigma attached to leaving young children with relatives to go abroad in some social groups in Ukraine. Another possible explanation is that women who leave small children behind and go abroad do not return. I heard some accounts of women who had left children behind and were

still abroad, or who first left a child with a grandparent and sent for them once they were established abroad. Although the theme of women who leave young children behind is present in media representations and in my interviews with migrants and non-migrants, there are no available statistics on how common it actually is for parents of young children to leave children behind and go abroad. It is possible that the main reason why I could not identify women in this group during my fieldwork is that this group is rare in these regions. As I describe in article III, the migrant women I interviewed were able to endure extensive hardship while their children were young, and only when the children were old enough to take care of themselves, or had moved out of the house, did they start going abroad to work.

Another group that was difficult to recruit for interviews was men who were still in Ukraine while their wives were in Italy. However, this was not because the group was rare; I met several of these men when I interviewed their wives and almost all of my respondents knew a man who had been left behind. However, I was not able to convince these men to talk to me. Several other researchers have described difficulties getting access to this group for interviews (Vianello, 2011; Fedyuk, 2011). I assume the stigma of not being the main breadwinner and of having been left by your wife (factors addressed in articles II and III) influenced their decision not to be interviewed.

With these exceptions, recruitment went relatively smoothly, helped by an economic incentive of 50 or 100 grivnas (approximately 5 or 10 euros at the time) paid to everyone who participated in an interview. This made it possible to recruit and get access to respondents from a wide variety of social groups and experiences in the relatively short periods of fieldwork. Most interviews were arranged by the field assistants based on instructions of what categories of respondent I wanted to interview next; most were recruited through the assistants' networks or through the networks of former respondents. On one occasion we asked students of sociology at the local university to identify respondents with particular characteristics (construction workers, nurses, women who had left young children in Ukraine and been abroad etc.). Students were paid 5 US dollars for their effort, in addition to the 50 grivnas paid to the respondents.

Article I discusses the problems of access, and how empirical research often depends on getting access to the narratives of people who have little interest in or time to take part in interviews. When our analysis is based on interviews we need to find respondents that are willing to take the time necessary to sit down and talk to us about issues that we find interesting, but that they might not. The challenges of access have been strangely ignored in

sociological literature on qualitative methodology and ethics. Often the altruistic respondent is assumed, where respondents are expected to take the time to be interviewed without expecting anything in return. There is a danger that such an approach can create a systematic bias in our analysis. While bias in the recruitment of respondents is given extensive attention in quantitative studies, it is rarely discussed in qualitative analysis. As quantitative analysis aims at generalising to and describing populations, it also follows that there is a stronger focus on the consequences of bias in this type of research. However, in qualitative research too quality will suffer if we rely on interviews with only some subgroups of the population we are interested in. This is because by using recruitment methods that rely on people participating through altruism or because they see the importance of research, we tend to get a bias in favour of groups with more human and social capital (see article I). How then can we convince people to take time to be interviewed for our research? And at what point do strategies to convince people to take part amount to unacceptable pressure that breaches the respondent's right not participate?

Research communities often rely on gatekeepers, trust building or economic incentives to gain access to respondents. These methods are usually unproblematic to apply but can amount to unacceptable pressure in some situations; for instance, when relying on gatekeepers that hold a certain position of power over the respondent, when building trust develops into 'faking friendship' or when economic incentives are offered that the respondent cannot afford to refuse (see article I).

Determining when it is acceptable to apply pressure in order to recruit respondents is not a question of how much pressure is considered acceptable; many countries have for instance made participation in censuses or other official statistics production compulsory by law. This means that in some instances it is perceived as ethically defensible to draw on direct coercion to recruit respondents for interviews. How then can we determine when it is ethically acceptable to apply pressure, and when it is not?

In article I I suggest that the principle that respondents should not come to any harm as a result of participating in our research can be used to guide when it is acceptable to apply some pressure in order to recruit respondents. The sociological literature on research methodology has given relatively limited attention to the notion that people can be harmed from taking part in a sociological interview. However, depending on the kind of research conducted, respondents can be exposed to harm, either arising from the way research results are used, or through emotional distress or psychological strain suffered during and as a consequence of the

interview, as well as potential consequences from family members or others in a position to introduce sanctions (Brannen, 1988).

How did I address this? As economic incentives were used, an awareness of risk of harm guided the interviews conducted. My approach has been not to ask questions about issues that might be sensitive for the respondent. If the respondent in spite of this started talking about events that were traumatic, private or sensitive, I listened as long as the respondent felt a need to talk, even if this was not relevant to the study, sympathising with the situation they describe, but did not encourage the respondent to go deeper. If a respondent had told me about a current situation of abuse or exploitation, and indicated that what they were telling me had not been shared with anyone else, it would have been my responsibility to make sure they sought professional assistance, and I had made contact with several organisations working with return migrants that could be drawn on to address such needs if necessary. Such situations did, however, not arise, during these fieldworks

As I paid the respondents an incentive to participate I had to be careful not to put pressure on respondents to talk about issues that did not want to talk about. This has the potential of creating bias in my data, in particular in a study where questions of stigma, respectability and contested behaviour are central. However, in this thesis my focus has been on how social structures and social meanings influence people's actions to create particular migration practices. This analysis is largely conducted on an aggregate level. As I describe in more detail in chapter four, I do not analyse individual migration decisions in light of the same individual's understanding of what migration means. In such an approach it would have been necessary to insist on talking about failures, shame and stigma with each respondent. However, as my analysis conceptualises meanings of migration not as particular to the individual but as particular to the context, I was able to rely on interviews with all members of society, as well as written sources, to map out the different ways in which migration is given meaning. This means that I did not need to put pressure on the women who left their drinking husbands behind to reflect on what their neighbours or children thought of their behaviour. I could let the women talk about their mobility and present themselves as they wanted to be seen. And I would access the condemnation through interviews with other members of society.

The foreign researcher and my impact on the interview data

A central theme in this thesis is how narratives presented in interviews need to be understood

as constrained by established discourses, of what it is possible or expected to say about a particular experience. However, it is not only the social meanings of migration in communities of origin that shape what is said in interviews, the context of the interview itself can also impact what is said and what is left out. How then did the interview situation shape the narratives I gained access to?

It is fair to say that the narratives this thesis draws on were stories about migration told to an outsider. Speaking Russian with a Scandinavian accent and sometimes searching for words or struggling to express myself properly not only marks me as an outsider, not speaking the language properly makes you sound childish and makes some of the questions sound banal. This has several effects on the interview situation. First of all, it evens out the power balance between the academic interviewer and respondents from various social groups somewhat, and makes the respondents less nervous about saying something stupid. It also makes it possible to ask banal questions about details in everyday life; things that tend to be taken for granted and that the respondent him/herself would not bring up by themselves. My respondents would sometimes change their tone of voice, as if talking to a child, to explain to me what they felt was obvious, but that they accepted that I did not know, as I was an outsider. This was an advantage for me, as I wanted to grasp the social meanings of migration.

The disadvantage of interviewing in a language that is not your own is that there is a danger of misinterpretation. When reading the transcripts I realised that I sometimes had misinterpreted what was said, in particular in interviews where respondents spoke in a mix of Ukrainian and Russian. As the transcripts were mostly produced by native speakers, such misunderstandings were cleared up and therefore did not influence the analysis. However, misunderstandings in the interview situation might have led me to miss important information if I failed to identify opportunities to follow up on potentially important points.

A number of the interviews were conducted without an assistant present. Some of these interviews were the ones that I have experienced as most fruitful in terms of the information gained and in providing new perspectives. These interviews were often longer than the others; one lasted close to three hours. In subsequent analysis I noticed that if a Ukrainian assistant was present in interviews, return migrants were much more likely to focus on the negative aspects of migration experiences than if there were no other Ukrainians in the room. This may reflect a stigma of migration (a need to argue that they did not go abroad because they liked it there), that was not felt as strongly when there were no Ukrainians in the room. As a Western European, I could relate to their memories of the good life abroad, but in Western Ukraine,

talking about the good life abroad as a reason to migrate tends to be taboo.

Concluding remarks

The findings of this thesis reflect practices typical for a small area of Ukraine during a particular period of time. With the recent political change, the war in the east and the economic crisis that has come with it, migration patterns today might very well have changed. However, my main ambition of this thesis has not been to describe migration in this area, but to enhance our understanding of how people make migration decisions and to develop an approach that enables us to understand the emergence and reproduction of migration practices. The data produced were well suited to this purpose.

This thesis reflects a strong preference for the interview as a method to get access to information. If we want to understand why people do the things they do, there is no better way than talking to them, and letting them explain the conditions that made them act the way they did. However, drawing on the interview to understand people's actions is methodologically challenging, as I have shown in this chapter. We need to interpret data with an awareness of how the interview situation itself shapes what is said as well as what respondents feel it is possible to say. Furthermore, in order to interview we need access to respondents. We need to recognise that many respondents have other things they would rather do than be interviewed, and it is often necessary to apply some sort of pressure to convince respondents to take part in interviews. This heightens the researcher's responsibility to make sure that respondents are not exposed to harm as a result of their participation in interviews. As there are limits to the extent to which we can apply pressure in order to recruit respondents for interviews, we need to accept that sometimes important narratives will be missing.

4. Theoretical perspectives on social meaning and social practice

A desire to explain migration decisions does not mean that we need to explain the behaviour of every individual who engages in migration. My interest is in migration as a social phenomenon, or what I refer to as migration practices. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice, migration practices can be understood as a way to approach the study of migration as both structured and structuring (Bourdieu, 1977). Migrants from the same community often organise their mobility in the same way; they go to the same places, with the same expectations, live in similar ways while abroad and when they come home they talk about their stay in similar ways. These similarities reflect the structured properties of migration practices. Migration practices are also structuring as they are generative of thought and action; potential migrants observe what others do, and draw on their experiences when they contemplate going abroad themselves. In this thesis my focus is on the mechanisms through which migration practices come to be structured and structuring. This chapter presents the theoretical foundation for this analysis. In the first part I describe how practices are product of, and simultaneously producing, social meaning in social groups. In the second part, I address the epistemological challenges of studying social meaning in coherence with these theories, and explain why, rather than drawing on the theoretically more advanced concept of habitus, I have broken the concept down into social meaning and cultural repertoires (Swidler, 1986), which I find better suited to an empirical approach.

The theoretical model for this thesis

The main causal relationship addressed in this thesis is how social meanings, and in particular the social meanings embedded in social institutions, influence people's strategies and through this shape migration practices (see Figure 3). I draw on an understanding of social institutions in line with Hall and Taylor's sociological institutionalism (1996), that gives a relatively broad understanding of what institutions are and includes the symbolic systems and moral templates that provide the frames of meaning for human action, in addition to formal rules, procedures and norms. Migration practices are understood as constituted by groups of individuals who engage in migration in similar ways; they are in similar situations of life and understand migration as a strategy that is well suited to this situation. Here I draw on a large body of sociological literature, based on a social philosophical tradition that explains social

practice as embodied meaning, inspired by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (Heidegger et al., 2010).

Figure 3 Theoretical model for this thesis: The influence of meaning and institutions on migration practice

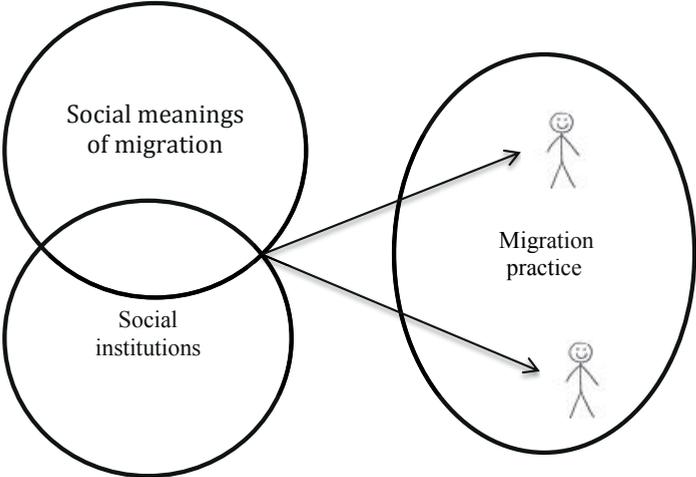
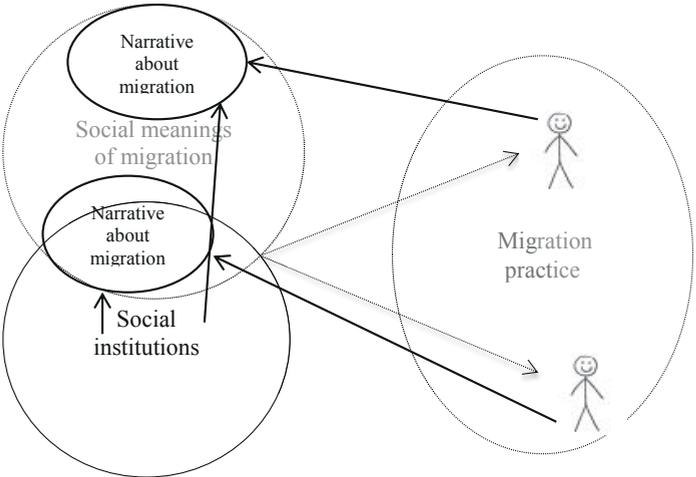


Figure 3 illustrate how social meanings of migration shape migration practices as they make people make similar migration decisions, reflecting their roles in institutions and their understandings of who migration is appropriate for. The figure is of course not an attempt to give an extensive account of all factors that may influence migration practices; there are numerous other elements that could be added to the model, including for instance economic structures and various environmental factors. This is a sketch of the main causal relationships that I address in this thesis. It should be noted that the arrows do not indicate a causal influence on migration practices per se, they represent influences on people, who engage in and make up migration practices. Institutions and social meanings, as well as other elements of context, shape the conditions under which potential migrants live and their understandings of the world. As I come back to below, these are influences that shape what kind of strategies people choose from in various situations of life.

In this thesis I also examine the relationship between experiences of and reasons for migration on one hand and narratives about migration that are presented in interviews, on the other (see Figure 4). I also explore how institutional influences shape these narratives, and

discuss how we can interpret interviews in contexts of stigma and contested behaviour in light of this. I draw on interviews not only to describe concrete experiences of migration, but also to access the meanings of migration in the community at large. In this approach narratives about migration are understood not only as a property of individuals, but also as a property of the community from which migration takes place.

Figure 4: Epistemological model for this thesis. Drawing on narratives in interviews to study social meaning



A Heideggerian approach to the study of migration

The meaning and application of the concept of *culture* has been debated in the field of cultural sociology for decades. Most scholars agree that the concept can be used to refer to some systems of meaning, including discourses, values, norms and symbols. A major disagreement lies in where and how we can look for culture. Is culture a distinct realm that must be understood in its own terms, or is it part of a unitary social system?

To me it has been useful to take the Heideggerian position - that we cannot separate culture from other element of the social system, such as institutions and practices - as a starting point. Heidegger argued that the way we are constituted as individual beings is directly linked to the shared world we inhabit, and that the way we exist in this world is always essentially structured by others (Dreyfus and Wrathall, 2005). To Heidegger it did not make sense to separate the individual and the society s/he lives in – an individual is who s/he

is because of their social environment, and the social system is constituted by its individuals. We are always enmeshed in a context of meaning, and are at the same time the ones who produce and reproduce this meaning.

There are two central elements to this line of thinking that social theorists and philosophers inspired by Heidegger have continued to build upon. First of all, culture, including meaning, values, norms and knowledge that may influence our actions, should be understood as embodied, and often non-reflexive. Secondly, these cultural elements are properties of both the social system and the individuals who engage in it. It does not make sense to separate the two, and they need to be analysed together. I expand on these two points below.

Charles Taylor and embodied social meaning

Charles Taylor is one of the later social philosophers inspired by Heidegger's line of thought. He argues that much of our day-to-day behaviour is embodied, in the sense that we know very well what to do in particular situations, but we might not be able to articulate what it is, or the reasons why. It is not only our actions but also our understanding of how to act that is embodied (Taylor, 1995). He illustrates this with the example that we are able to navigate our way around a familiar city without a map, but we might not be able to draw a map if someone asked us to, or even to give directions for getting from one place to another.

This embodiment does not only relate to our inanimate environment; our sense of ourselves, of the footing we are on with others, is also largely embodied. When I choose my course of action, this action and its alternatives are meaningful to me and others around me, a meaning that has been established through the social practices of others. This *social meaning* determines what behaviour I find desirable in a given situation, as well as the social costs or benefits of alternative forms of behaviour. This is often the result of unreflective action – we do what we and others expect us to do in certain situations, when this is common social practice. But Taylor (1995) emphasises that human behaviour should not be presented as automated or socially determined. Social practices around me give my behaviour its sense, its meaning; but based on this meaning I can choose different courses of action. And as Taylor points out, much behaviour should be understood as strategies applied in suspense and uncertainty. The actor does not necessarily know if his actions will pay off the way he expects. But based on his understanding of the social environment he engages in, he has reason to think that they will produce a particular outcome. His actions are not caused by

properties of the situation, but by his understanding of the situation, including his perceptions of alternative courses of actions and their consequences.

If we wish to follow this line of thinking in empirical migration research, we need to investigate not only the properties of the situation itself (what ‘actually’ happened), but also actors’ understandings of the situation and available alternatives, at the time when decisions were made. Key to understanding any social action is to understand what this action means to the people involved.

Pierre Bourdieu, habitus and practice

A Heideggerian approach implies that norms and social meanings cannot be understood simply as properties of individuals. Norms govern the practices available to social groups and consequently there is an inescapably public character to the intelligibility of the world (Dreyfus and Wrathall, 2005). To understand how this contextual social meaning shapes the individual actions that make up practices, I find it fruitful to draw on Bourdieu’s concept of habitus. As habitus is arguably the most contested of Bourdieu’s concepts, and subject to a large variety of interpretations (Grenfell, 2008), I will briefly present the parts of Bourdieu’s writing that I draw upon here to explain how social meaning shapes migration practices.

Bourdieu developed the concept of habitus to allow sociology to move away from seeking to identify statistical regularities and towards a theory of practice that can allow us to see the principles behind the construction of this observed order (Bourdieu, 1977). Habitus can be understood as the principles that generate and structure our practices and representations. It is a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures made up of individual dispositions. These individual dispositions are both durable and transposable in that they can be applied in other social settings than the one where they were developed. They are structured by an individual’s past and present circumstances (such as family upbringing and educational experiences), and are themselves structuring in the sense that an individual’s habitus helps to shape their present and future practices (Bourdieu, 1977; Grenfell, 2008).

A basic premise of the concept of habitus is that dispositions and classificatory schemes are embodied in the sense that they exist in people’s ‘heads’ but are simultaneously shaped by, and expressed through their interaction with others (Jenkins, 1992). Habitus is both subjective, in that it is unique to the individual and based on the individual’s experiences, but at the same time ultimately social, as it is created and expressed through interaction in social groups. Here we find a clear Heideggerian influence in Bourdieu’s work (Bourdieu, 1990: 5).

Through the development of a shared habitus, social groups tend to develop homogeneity of thought, as the habitus creates a consensus of meaning for people with similar backgrounds. This can also produce a perceived sense of objectivity. It creates practices that we see as natural or inescapable, or on the other hand, impossible or unthinkable:

‘One of the fundamental effects of the orchestration of habitus is the production of a commonsense world endowed with the *objectivity* secured by consensus on the meaning (*sens*) of practices and the world. [...] The homogeneity of habitus is what – within the limits of the group [...] – causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible and foreseeable, and hence taken for granted’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 80)

This production of a commonsense world that leads us to take certain actions or responses for granted, makes social meaning and practices intimately connected. People act in line with what they perceive to be the best or common sense option, and they do so drawing on a shared understandings and knowledge of what other people in similar situations normally do. And in doing this, they produce and reproduce social practices.

In describing habitus Bourdieu emphasised that although people may not consciously calculate what it is rational to do in a particular situation, in line with what classical rational choice theories tend to suggest, people behave in line with what they find to be reasonable. When the social system they live in reflects the system in which their habitus was developed, their behaviour will reflect what can be described as ‘rational’ actions (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Put simply, people act in accordance with what they have learned to be the reasonable way to act, and while this is not always in accordance with the actual structures we engage with, it usually is. However, in periods of rapid change people tend to act out of sync with the conditions they live in, as their habitus is conditioned for another social system. This is also when some social agents find new ways to engage with this social reality. It is in such periods of change that we find migration practices being contested; where several conflicting understandings of what a certain migration practice entails can exist in the same society.

My understanding of migration as practice, reflected in articles II and III, is strongly influenced by this perspective. In line with Bourdieu’s writings, I understand migration as shaped by structures and institutions that create a context where particular actions of migration are understood as reasonable. If we were to stand in their shoes, it is very likely that we would act the same way. In periods of stability, we find practices that are not questioned

but are instead taken for granted. In periods of rapid social change, it is more likely that migration practices will be contested and given different meanings, depending on whose shoes you are standing in.

Social meaning as a property of contexts within which choices are made

To study social practices we need to recognise that the social world that shapes actions is always essentially structured by elements of context. Habitus describes the mechanisms that bridge individual action on one hand, and the elements of context – social meaning, institutions and structures, on the other. This is what has made it such an important contribution to the sociological literature.

The inherent duality of habitus is essential for its theoretical contribution; it is what gives the concept of habitus its dynamic properties. However, the same duality is also what makes it difficult to draw upon directly in empirical studies. As I describe above, habitus is made up of individual dispositions, and as such can be understood as a property of individuals in our analysis. But it is also the mechanism that reflects elements of context that *influence* individual action, and can, as such, be understood as property of context. Individual dispositions reflect the structured capacities of habitus; the way we find it reasonable to act. The contextual elements are the structuring properties of habitus; the reason why we act as we do. In order not to lose the dynamic properties of habitus, we need to approach the concept as a *theoretical* mechanism that reflects the relationship between the individual and the context, and not as an empirical property of one or the other. If we measure habitus as property of individuals, and claim that these observations simultaneously reflect the society in which these individuals live, as habitus is supposed to do (or vice versa), we risk getting a static, and even deterministic, analysis of social practices; the observed features come to describe both what our studied individuals do, or want to do, and the reason why they do it.

Individuals' habitus, as described in Bourdieu's theories, will change and adapt (although with a lag) to reflect structural and institutional changes, as well as with new experience. Thus, if we aim to explain social practices with a concept of habitus that reflects only individual norms, values or knowledge, without recognising its dependence on context, these mechanisms of change and influence are difficult to grasp.

Furthermore, describing habitus as a property of individuals makes it difficult to view habitus as context-dependent. Even our unreflexive reaction to a particular event can differ depending on the social context we are in; an event that would make us feel shame and

embarrassment in a work setting, for instance being the object of explicit sexual attention, could in a private setting give a feeling of satisfaction or pride. Our reactions are dependent on both previous experiences, and how we have learned to interpret these, and the setting we are in when the reaction is provoked. Thus in empirical analysis habitus cannot be understood solely as a property of the individual; habitus gets its shape as individuals act in context. However, as individuals react differently to an event depending on previous experience, as well as social positions and roles, it cannot be conceptualised only as a property of context either. Consequently, to describe how habitus shapes social practices in empirical analysis it is necessary to distinguish between social meaning as a property of context, and social meaning as a property of individuals, and to describe the relationship between the two.

Studying migration practices in light of social meaning (as property of context) enables us to analyse migration decisions in light of multiple and even conflicting evaluations of migration in a social group. This allows us to understand how the same individuals rely on narratives that seem to be conflicting when they talk about their own experiences (Swidler, 2001). If we were to approach the evaluation of migration practices as property of the individual alone, variation and contested meanings would be difficult to handle.

Dorothy Smith (2005) addresses the way that social meaning varies depending on context, and that respondents are not always consistent in their accounts about, for instance, their choices or experiences. But rather than making this an argument against empirical research, she embraces the fact that people have different perspectives and uses this to understand the phenomena of interest. Instead of assuming and looking for similarity across narratives, we should explore variation in perspectives, and map out how people coordinate social practices as well as how differences in perspective are used and expressed.

Understanding why people act as they do entails understanding how a process appears differently from different perspectives, and how these differences in perspective also shape experiences. Every new perspective added to our investigation improves our understanding of the social context in which our respondents engage, even if it conflicts with our previous observations. Respondents may experience a social reality from unique positions, and based on these positions give varying, and even conflicting accounts of an event, or of how people in their society understand their world. But even if there are several, conflicting accounts, the social reality they describe is still the same (Smith, 2005).

For migration studies, this means that rather than attempting to arrive at one coherent

description of what migration means in a given social community, we should accept that meanings of migration can be contested. In article IV I show how female migrants, when framed as mothers, can be reluctant to talk about the positive aspects of their migration experiences. The condemnation their action receives from others, if they talk of this mobility as an act of self-interest, leaves these women little choice but to present their mobility as an act of sacrifice. Among my respondents, women who had been to Italy to work would often switch between narratives where migration was talked of as an act of sacrifice and narratives where migration was presented as a way to improve their own life.

Analysing social meaning as a property of context also enables us to analyse people's actions in light of how it is understood by others. It is not only our own norms and values that shape the way we act; our behaviour can be shaped by views held by significant groups in our society, even if we do not share these views ourselves. For instance, a person may not have any objections to premarital sex him/herself, but if he/she lives in a community with strong norms against it, it is probable that he/she will behave in accordance with these norms. Similarly, for migration studies, the decision to migrate or stay needs to be understood in light of the social expectations of various groups, and the normative evaluations of what migration entails (for instance: degrading yourself by taking low-skilled jobs, being a good provider, being vulnerable to sexual abuse, leaving dependants behind, having fun). This might not be understandings or expectations that potential migrants holds themselves, but that they still need to relate to, in particular if they wish to return to their home community.

In article III I show how the focus on the sanctity of marriage, as advocated by the Greek Catholic Church in Western Ukraine, limits the extent to which people consider filing for divorce (despite legal divorce being available to all). This widespread idea of the sanctity of marriage does not only limit access to divorce through the influence of values directly, but also through a fear of social sanctions in a society where these values are held high.

To understand a phenomenon's social meaning it can also be useful to take account of mediated experiences (Giddens, 1991), i.e. narratives of others' experiences distributed through TV, film, news or literature. Such mediated experiences may be particularly relevant for migration studies, as they present alternative lifestyles and conditions of life abroad. This may also have a significant impact on how migrants and non-migrants understand and make sense of opportunities to migrate. An understanding of social meaning as a property of the social group enables us to analyse individual action in light of the collective ideologies that shape this action, even if the actor himself does not share these views.

Institutions and cultural repertoires

In this thesis I draw on Anne Swidler's concept of cultural repertoires (1986) to refer to the structured elements of habitus which can be accessed through empirical research; the way habitus shapes strategies in people's heads. Swidler recommends thinking of culture as an oddly assorted tool kit of strategies for action, containing implements of varying shapes that fit the hand more or less well (Swidler, 1986; Swidler, 2001). Her concept of cultural repertoires refers to cultured capacities for action and perception; specific tool kits of strategies and narratives that create ways of addressing and talking about the world.

I suggest using the concept of *social meaning* to refer to the structuring elements of habitus; the way practices are generative of thought and action as people learn from the experiences of others and reproduce what they believe are successful strategies. Social meaning, as a shared way of evaluating and giving meaning to experiences and practices (knowledge, norms, values), can be the outcome of shared historical experiences (for instance war or periods of hunger), but often social institutions play an important role in the structuring of this meaning.

Hall and Taylor's (1996) understanding of sociological institutionalism gives a relatively broad understanding of what institutions are and includes the symbolic systems and moral templates that provide the frames of meaning for human action, in addition to formal rules, procedures and norms. It is a way to conceptualize institutions that reflects the perspectives described above, as they are understood to influence behaviour not simply by specifying what one should do, but also by specifying what one can imagine oneself doing in a given context (Hall and Taylor 1996).

Social institutions define roles and responsibilities in a society (Portes, 2010). These roles also position people in relation to migration, as migration is a strategy for action available to people in particular roles. Depending on the roles you have in society, you have a particular set of strategies at your disposal, from which you can choose. People can, and do, choose strategies that are not perceived to be available to them; for instance we can imagine a father in Ukraine leaving his family behind to travel around Europe for a year, without sending home money. The fact that I have never heard of such an action does not mean that it cannot happen. If it happened, it would, however, be frowned upon. This is not a kind of behaviour that is understood as available to a man with responsibilities in Western Ukraine. It is not part of the cultural repertoires for individuals like him.

Implications for empirically-oriented studies of migration

In this chapter I have presented a framework for understanding how social meaning shapes social practice, and explained why I have chosen to distinguish between social meaning as property of the social group, and cultural repertoires as properties of individuals. I have showed how an analysis that describes the relationship between these two aspects can reflect in part the mechanisms tied up in the theoretical construct habitus. This reflects a somewhat eclectic approach to the study of migration; I do not apply an established theoretical framework, but draw on several different bodies of literature that I find useful for the task at hand.

There are several elements of crucial importance for explaining both the emergence and reproduction of migration practices that I have not given any attention here. I give very little attention to how social structures, in terms of the distribution of power and resources, create constraints and opportunities for migration. This does not reflect a belief that cultural explanations should be given priority over structural explanations. However, cultural explanations have thus far been given relatively little attention in migration studies, compared to the attention given to structural explanations. I hope that this study can contribute to a better balance between the two. It is my firm belief that in order to understand the structured and structuring properties of migration practices we cannot only study how structural factors, such as economic resources and networks, create opportunities and incentives for migration. We also need to include a focus on how social meanings of migration in a community interact with social institutions and make migration part of social repertoires for people in particular roles in particular stations of life.

Another issue that I do not address is the relationship between social institutions and social structures. When looking at the role of social meanings and institutions in shaping migration practices, we could of course take another step back to look at the origins of these social meanings and institutions, and how they in turn are influenced by social structures. There is a significant body of literature that focuses on the origins and power structures of discourse, inspired by, for instance, Foucault's archaeology of knowledge (Foucault, 1972). This has, however, not been the ambition of this thesis.

The basis of my approach can be summarised as follows: to understand a decision to migrate or how migrants organise their mobility we cannot only look at opportunities and incentives to migrate; we need also to look at how migration is understood by both the

migrants themselves and the people around them. Potential migrants act in line with what they perceive as reasonable, rational or possible in the context they are in. This context can be understood as made up by social structures and social institutions. Depending on the roles people have in social institutions, they will have at their disposal different toolkits of strategies, to be applied in various situations of life. These strategies make up social practice.

5. Summary of articles

This thesis presents four articles. The interviews this thesis draws on were conducted during four relatively short periods of fieldwork; efficiency, and therefore the targeted recruitment of respondents, was essential. Article I addresses some of the ethical issues this presents. Article II gives an overview of the theoretical approach taken in this thesis, while article III illustrates how the emergence of one particular migration practice can be explained in light of historical, institutional and structural factors. Finally, article IV addresses narratives presented in the interviews, and the challenges inherent in drawing on interview data to explain behaviour.

ARTICLE I: TYLDUM, G. 2012. Ethics or access? Balancing informed consent against the application of institutional, economic or emotional pressures in recruiting respondents for research. International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 15(3).

This article addresses the challenges of gaining access to respondents for interviews in qualitative studies. While the question of access is given extensive attention in quantitative studies, in terms of strategies to increase response rates, the topic is rarely addressed in qualitative studies. The altruistic respondent, who participates for the benefit of society or research in general, is often assumed.

The article shows how groups with low human and social capital are less likely to volunteer to participate in research if participation offers no direct personal benefit. Consequently, if we base our research solely on volunteers, we risk our knowledge of social practices being biased in favour of groups with high human and social capital. These are groups that are more likely to have their voices heard in other arenas as well.

To gain access to respondents for interviews, qualitative researchers apply various forms and degrees of institutional, economic and emotional pressure; these include recruiting respondents via gatekeepers, paying for participation, or building a relationship with potential respondents in order to increase their trust in the interviewer and therefore their likelihood of being interviewed. Although such practices are common, it is still taboo in many research communities to acknowledge this as the application of pressure. This leaves many researchers ill-prepared for the many dilemmas that may emerge during the recruitment of respondents and data production. The importance of gaining consent is a firm feature of the

ethics literature, but little is said about when this can be breached. It is not so much a question of if it can be ethically defended to challenge the principle of consent, but rather when and how. In many countries participation in censuses and other forms of official data production is made compulsory by law, a practice widely understood as ethical defensible. In this article I argue that if pressure is applied it becomes increasingly important to ensure that respondents are not put at risk of harm. The ways in which participation in social science interviews can harm respondents has received relatively limited attention in the literature. To facilitate research that is ethically sound empirically oriented research communities could benefit from widening their focus, from one strongly focussed on informed consent to a wider awareness of factors that can entail risk of harm for participants.

ARTICLE II: TYLDUM, G. in Review. Labour migration and Social Institutions. Migration studies

This article presents a framework for the study of migration practices, drawing on theories of social institutions and social practice. Even if we limit our study to labour migrants, the term ‘migrant’ refers to a very diverse category of people, who have little in common except that they cross international borders and work (or seek work) while abroad. At the same time, migration tends to be highly structured – migrants often go to the same places as other migrants in their community, they organise their travels in a similar manner and live under similar conditions while abroad. This systematic variation can be conceptualised as labour migrants engaging in and reproducing several distinct migration practices.

In this article I suggest that we address variation in migration practices by focusing not only on the variation itself, but also on the mechanisms that generate this variation; the institutional and structural factors that together with historic events shape people’s perceptions of what is appropriate behaviour in particular situations of life and for people in particular roles. I illustrate this by showing how the institution of family, and the roles embedded in it, shapes three distinct migration practices in Western Ukraine (breadwinners, adventure seekers and emigrants). While the specific typology developed may have limited analytical value beyond this region, I show how the mechanisms identified, the way institutions and other contextual factors shape distinct migration practices tied to family roles, can be relevant for comparative or cross-national studies.

ARTICLE III: TYLDUM, G. Forthcoming 2015. A welcomed separation. Understanding female migration in light of limited access to divorce. Nordic Journal of Migration Research 5(3)

This article explores the relationship between migration and empowerment and demonstrates the benefits of addressing the conditions migrants leave behind in order to understand migration practices. A significant proportion of Ukrainian migrants are women aged 40-70 who leave family behind in Ukraine and migrate to Italy where they work in elderly care for private households. The article describes several factors that have shaped the high level of mobility for this generation of women in Ukraine.

The article shows how migration can enable and empower women to leave situations of oppression and, in light of the limited opportunities at home, go abroad to start a new life. However, it emphasises that exploitation and empowerment are not necessarily opposites in migration analysis. When Ukrainian women go to Italy they often face harsh and exploitative living and working conditions; at the same time, they often leave behind a situation of hardship in Ukraine. To properly understand and evaluate migration practices we need to recognise that migration practices can have both empowering and exploitative potential at the same time, and that women can, and do, express their agency through migration in choosing one way of life over another.

ARTICLE IV: TYLDUM, G. 2015. Motherhood, agency and sacrifice in narratives on female migration for care work. Sociology.

In this article I address the stigma attached to female migration in many regions with high levels of female mobility. I show that there are three different narratives that people draw on when they talk about female migration from Ukraine to Italy; migration as sacrifice, migration for a better life, and migration at the cost of the family. Due to the strong condemnation of women who leave dependants behind, produced through an understanding of migration at the cost of the family, many women are reluctant to draw on narratives that present migration as a way to improve your own life. Such narratives are particularly difficult to draw on when the migrant is framed as a mother in an interview. I argue that studies which frame female migrants as mothers tend to reproduce narratives of sacrifice at the cost of understandings of female migration where women go abroad to improve their own lives. As a result, the focus is shifted from the women's agency and reasons for leaving, to the consequences of their absence.

6. Conclusions

At the outset of this project I wanted to understand *why* people migrate. In the search for answers to this question, this thesis has come to be just as much about *how* we can know why people migrate, addressing the way social meanings shape migration practices and the consequences this has for theoretical and methodological approaches to empirical migration research.

Migration practices in Western Ukraine

Western Ukraine has proved a good case for investigating the emergence and reproduction of migration practices. As international migration was strongly restricted until Ukraine gained independence in 1991, migration practices in the region are relatively recent in their current form. This makes it possible to trace their emergence, and to show how people still engage in migration practices with particular characteristics even if the initial reasons why they emerged with these characteristics do not.

When the current migration practices in Western Ukraine emerged, structural factors were important in making large numbers of people engage in migration. The combination of a severe economic crisis, mass unemployment and relatively open borders to neighbouring countries with higher income levels, led large groups of people to go abroad to work throughout the 1990s. However, as mobility came to be an expected strategy for men who could not provide for their family by staying, the cultural and institutional impacts on migration practices became more apparent. Men who did not go abroad, and could not provide for their families by staying, were stigmatised for not taking their responsibilities as breadwinners seriously. These men risk being ridiculed or pitied for not being real men. Today the short-term circular migration of male breadwinners is so common in Western Ukraine that it is perceived to be part of everyday practices. It is particularly common among peasants, where the agricultural cycles often enable them to stay away for a few months a year, and among construction workers, who work in brigades in the shadow economy under similar conditions in Ukraine as they experience abroad.

In Western Ukraine, as in many other regions of the world, female migration is more contested. In media-driven public discourses we find strong condemnation of women who leave their children behind and go abroad to work. These discourses were reflected in how both men and women talk about female migration in Western Ukraine. In interviews, most

respondents would talk about the ‘widespread’ practice of mothers of young children leaving Ukraine for work. However, only three respondents personally knew someone who had gone abroad and left young children behind. The female migrants with children that I interviewed, or who were described by other respondents who knew them personally, waited until their children were old enough to manage on their own. Many left when the youngest child was 15, others waited until all children had moved out of the home. They describe how they managed through a decade of economic crisis in Ukraine, working around the clock and still barely being able to put food on the table. In many of these stories the husband did not do much to help. When they decided to go abroad in the end, it was not due to the onset of another economic crisis. Most went abroad because it was no longer perceived as required that they stayed home, as their children no longer depended on them. However, their mobility is still contested, as husbands are often left with no one to care for them. The strong stigma attached to mothers who go abroad and leave their families behind makes many women reluctant to talk of their mobility as an act of emancipation. They rather talk of it as an act of sacrifice, something they do for the good of their family.

In focusing on women who go to Italy for care work it became apparent that to understand this mobility we needed to consider not only the women’s reasons for going, but also the absence of reasons to stay. For some women, domestic violence and husbands with substance abuse problems would constitute a reason to want to get away. For others it was simply that the relationship with the husband was not of a quality to make them want to stay. There was less holding them back when faced with opportunities for a new life abroad.

While earlier literature has been criticised for overstating the importance of social rupture (Castles, 2010), the emphasis on transnationalism in much of the current migration literature can be criticised for an equally exaggerated stress on continuity (Amit, 2012). Migration can be widespread or expected in some social groups in high mobility areas, and come to be part of daily life, as in the description of breadwinner migrants above. Others move abroad because they want to put a distance between themselves and family members, a patriarchal culture, or unpleasant memories. Sometimes social rupture can be an important motivating factor for those who choose to go abroad.

Both migrants and non-migrants know that migration can entail breaking away from a familiar way of life, and often leaving behind responsibilities that others then need to take on themselves. Understanding what holds people back includes taking into consideration the ways in which gender norms influence the distribution of labour and responsibility within the

family. This is relevant in order to understand both male and female mobility.

Migration is not a unitary phenomenon

A central aim of this thesis has been to demonstrate that migration is not a unitary social phenomenon, and that we cannot expect to find universal theories of migration that are valid for all groups in a society and across societies. Migration is a strategy that can be applied in many different situations of life. In order to understand and explain when migration is perceived as a suitable strategy, we need to identify how institutional and structural influences interact and shape particular systems of social meaning, into which the meanings of migration are entwined. Migration is chosen not only because someone gets an offer to go abroad, or because there are significant economic incentives for going. Migration is part of the cultural repertoires from which people devise their strategies, and migration is a strategy that is perceived as relevant for people in particular roles in particular situations of life.

What can constitute a reason to stay for some can constitute a reason to leave for others. In the areas of Western Ukraine that I visited, fathers of young children would feel obliged to go abroad to work if they could not provide for their families by staying. Mothers of young children on the other hand would accept extensive hardship, for themselves and for their children, before they would leave young children with their father or grandparents and go out to work. Similarly, for young people the absence of responsibilities constitutes an opportunity to travel, for married breadwinners, responsibility for family creates an obligation to go out to work. This means that the migration mechanisms that appear so clearly when we look at the practices one by one, disappear when we look at them all together, as family and responsibility can be both a reason to stay, and a reason to leave, depending on your role and situation of life. Thus if we want to explain the mobility that take place in an area as a whole, we risk not finding any valid patterns unless we deconceptualize migration at large into individual migration practices.

Key to understanding this variation, and how migration practices fulfil different functions for different migrants in different situations, is recognising the institutional influences on migration. Migrants and non-migrants embody roles in social institutions, and these roles make migration seem like a natural choice for some, while it is not even considered by others.

Understanding the emergence and reproduction of migration practices

Taking a Heideggerian approach to the study of migration practices can help us to appreciate

the difference between the emergence and reproduction of migration practices. In chapter 2 I describe how the years of crisis in Western Ukraine led large parts of the male population to go abroad to work. In these years the migration practice of breadwinners formed the shape it continues to take today. The particular conditions of the economy, local labour markets and border regimes created a distinct migration practice with particular properties – short-term circular migration involving short, labour-intensive stays abroad, organised in groups tied to networks and friends and headed by someone with connections in Russia or Poland. It became so widespread that it is now established as part of everyday practices, and an expected practice for men who are unable to provide for their family by staying. What emerged as a response to crisis has become an established way of being a father and breadwinner. Migration has become part of the cultural repertoires of men in particular roles, in particular situations of life. This can be conceptualized as the emergence of a specific migration habitus regulating not only when to go, but also how.

A few years later, another migration practice emerged. I describe in article III how specific historical events, combined with particular institutional factors, create the very particular migration practice of middle-aged women. A migration habitus has emerged, making it possible for women over the age of 60 to go to Italy to work. It will be interesting to see if this new social meaning of migration, that makes migration available for this group, is strong enough to reproduce the high levels of mobility for women of this age in the future, when the particular factors that led to its emergence no longer exist. Of course much will depend on how the institution of the family develops in the future, and if the next cohorts of women go abroad to work rather than facing the social and economic costs of divorce at home.

The role of stigma and normative evaluations of migration

At an early stage of my fieldwork I became aware of the relevance of stigma in relation to questions of migration, evidenced in almost all of the interviews I conducted. Most clearly, I could detect the stigma attached to women leaving behind people who depended on their care, in particular if they left in order to improve their own life, and not as a sacrifice to improve the lives of their family (as described in articles III and IV). But there was also an element of stigma in narratives of young adventure seekers, as young men and women insisted on talking about how much fun they had had while abroad, and refused to talk about the exploitation they had been exposed to. As they had not left as an act of sacrifice, they were not supposed

to suffer while abroad. Having been exploited to the point where it was no longer fun was a sign of failure. I could also identify an element of stigma in the way some men who had not been out to work during the years of crisis legitimised their decision to stay. They condemned those who went abroad for being materialistic and shallow. These narratives can be understood as a defence against implicit accusations of not being proper breadwinners. And finally, the unemployed men who did not go abroad, but who ended up depending on their wives during the years of crisis, were perhaps the most stigmatised. They were pitied or ridiculed by most.

Given these strong normative elements in my data, I looked for discussions of stigma in the migration literature. Stigma has, however, received surprisingly little attention outside of the literature on female migration and prostitution, where the stigma of returning both with and without money is debated (Jacobsen and Skilbrei, 2010; Doezema, 2000; Brunovskis and Surtees, 2008). In much of the remaining migration literature, if normative aspects of migration are approached, it is the positive aspects of migration that are emphasised. This can in part be explained as a consequence of approaching social meaning as a property of the individual, rather than as a property of the context, and as a consequence of much migration research interviewing migrants in countries of destinations, rather than countries of origin. It is the evaluation given to migration by the migrants themselves that is emphasised, while mobility is less often analysed in light of the normative evaluations of the people left behind. When the migrants themselves talk about their own migration experience we only find traces of the stigma and condemnation that can be found when others reflect on their mobility. These are often traces of defensive discourses that are difficult to interpret unless we are familiar with the implicit accusations respondents are defending themselves against.

When we produce and analyse interview data we need to acknowledge that not everything is easy to say in an interview with a stranger. Some of the factors that shape our behaviour we may not even admit to ourselves. Encouraging respondents to reflect on stigmatised aspects of their lives that they don't want to relate poses severe ethical challenges. As I point out in article I, sociological interviewers rarely have training as therapists and they should usually try to avoid the 'deep' report and revelations of innermost feelings, shame and stigma. We should not encourage respondents to reflect on emotions and experiences in ways that make it likely that they will discover and disclose experiences and feelings which, upon reflection, they would have preferred to keep private from others, or even from themselves. By building rapport too effectively interviewers run the risk of breaching the respondent's right not to

know their own innermost thoughts. It should be questioned to what extent interviewers, no matter how well-meaning, have the capacity or the right to consciously or unconsciously transform their subjects' lives (McRobbie 1982 in Duncombe and Jessop, 2002).

However, by analysing behaviour in light of all the different ways it is given meaning by others in the society where it takes place, we gain access to much of the social meaning of migration that shapes migration practices. We can grasp this if we listen to the gossip about and evaluations of various forms of mobility, by people who do not engage in migration themselves, and hear the explanations given by the people who have chosen to migrate.

Embracing variation in, and discrepancies between interviews

There can be many different ways to understand and give meaning to an action. As I have described above, the same person can understand an action differently depending on context and depending on whom they perceive the actor to be. If we want to understand migration, we need to access all of its social meanings. In order to do so, we need a variety of respondents, but also a variety of interview sites and approaches to the interview.

In quantitative studies, the aim is often to standardise the format of the interview so that groups of respondents can be systematically compared; we want to minimise the external influences that can create variation in our dataset. Such systematic comparisons are rarely of interest in qualitative studies, where we do not aim to describe populations but to identify mechanisms or describe processes. Rather, as in the design described here, we want to grasp the different ways a phenomenon or process can be given meaning, and how the 'habitus' triggered depends on the setting of the interview. This means that rather than aiming to standardise how interviews are conducted, qualitative interviewers should embrace variation, not only in types of respondents, but also in approaches to the interview; for instance by conducting interviews in various locations, having different interviewers and interviewing both one-on-one and in groups (or with other people present), as this will create different types of interviews, and give access to different aspects of the social meaning of the phenomenon of interest. People tell a story differently depending on where they are and who they are addressing.

Such variation is not a problem for the analysis qualitative interviews as long as we acknowledge that meaning can be understood both as a property of the context and a property of the individual respondent. Mapping all the different ways of telling the story can be compared with taking a picture of a building. Pictures from the back and the front of a

building may give a very different appearance, and the building might be easier to describe by focusing on only one. However, the two pictures in combination still give a better illustration of the object they represent.

The importance of the interview for empirical sociology

Finally, with this thesis I wanted to demonstrate the importance of the interview for empirical sociology. Nothing beats face-to-face conversations, if you want to understand why people act as they do. People may not always be consistent in how they tell a story, but they are still extremely knowledgeable about their own lives, and most of us enjoy talking about ourselves. Through interviews we can grasp emotions and evaluations, as well as behaviour and access to resources. I have shown in this thesis, how social institutions and structures combine to shape peoples strategies, and make them act in similar ways, in spite of individual differences and preferences. The interview is the best tool we have for understanding social practices in other contexts than our own, as long as we are aware of its epistemological limitations and the ethical responsibilities that come with recruiting respondents for interviews.

Contributions to the literature

In addressing the above questions, the articles of this thesis have made specific contributions to the sociological literature. I highlight four of these contributions here:

In article I I address the taboo of applying pressure to convince respondents to take part in interviews. Literature on the ethics of access in the field of sociology tends to emphasise aspects of consent and rarely recognises the need to convince respondents to take part. The article suggests how a stronger awareness of the risk of harm can help determine when applying pressure to recruit respondents for interviews can be ethically defended.

In article II I develop my approach to migration studies and demonstrate the need to not only develop context-dependent typologies but to look for the generating principles behind such typologies. I demonstrate that institutional influences, and in particular the institution of family, are essential for understanding how migration becomes a strategy perceived to be available to some, but not to all.

Article III contributes to the substantial theories of migration studies, in showing how access to divorce, absence of reasons to stay and conflicts in the family can be conceptualised as reasons for migration.

Article IV addresses the need to recognise that women, when framed as mothers, may not

have available to them a discourse that allows them to talk about migration as an act to improve their own lives. It demonstrates the importance of understanding mobility not only in light of the understanding the migrants themselves have of their mobility, but also in light of the evaluations others give of the same mobility, as well as the reasons others give for not going abroad.

Future research

This thesis has described a small piece of the landscape of migration practice from a particular country of origin, an approach that is still not very common in migration studies. For future research there is a need to further elaborate how local understandings of migration shape migration practices, from Ukraine as well as from other regions of the world.

Monitoring these practices over time will enable further theoretical development on the relationship between the emergence and reproduction of migration practices. When I conducted my fieldwork Russia was by far the most important destination for the large group of short-term circular male breadwinner migrants in Lviv. Due to the recent conflict between Ukraine and Russia, opportunities to go to Russia are today much more limited. Further research should investigate if, and how, migration practices have changed as a consequence of these recent events, and how these changes are reflected in changes in institutional and structural factors. Have the breadwinners who used to go to Russia to work started looking for work in Ukraine? Did they settle, or did they start going elsewhere? And if so – do these new patterns of mobility show some of the same characteristics of the former migration practice to Russia? Similarly, it would be useful to monitor over time what happens to the flow of female migrants to Italy, as new cohorts of women reach middle-age, and their children move out of the home. Is the mobility we see today a property only of the post-reform families? The emergence of this practice can be clearly related to the situation in the post-reform years. However, it is possible that new generations of women will continue to go abroad in the same way, because the experiences of other women before them have made it possible. Both of these migration practises also open up interesting potential for cross-national comparative analysis of how family roles shape migration.

Finally, this thesis has demonstrated the benefits of including the social meanings of migration in studies of migration practice. It is my hope that this approach will be taken up by others and used in future research in migration studies. The decision to migrate is always attributed meaning, and as migrants engage in migration practices they produce and reproduce

this meaning. Approaching migration with an awareness of this can bring new insights into how migration practices emerge and are reproduced in various regions of the world.

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¹ According to the State Committee of Statistics of Ukraine, Western Ukraine consists of the following regions: Volyn, Rivne, Khmelnytskyi, Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk, Chernivtsi, Zakarpatska and Lviv.

Article

I

Ethics or access?

Balancing informed consent against the application of institutional, economic or emotional pressures in recruiting respondents for research

Article
II

Labour Migration and Social Institutions

Article **III**

A welcomed separation
Understanding female migration
in light of limited access to divorce

Forthcoming in 2015 in Nordic Journal of Migration Studies:

A welcomed separation. Understanding female migration in light of limited access to divorce¹.

Guri Tyldum

Abstract

This article explores the relationship between migration and empowerment, and demonstrates the benefits of addressing the conditions migrants leave behind, to understand migration flows. Among Ukrainian migrants a significant share are women aged 40-70 who leave family behind in Ukraine to care for the elderly in Italy. The article describes several factors that have shaped the high level of mobility for this generation women in Ukraine, and identifies as a key mechanism the religious and economic limitations on divorce.

Keywords: Migration, Ukraine, Italy, domestic work, divorce, empowerment

¹ The analysis of this article is developed with the invaluable assistance of Dr Victoria Volodko, at the University of Lviv. Helping me organise my fieldwork and being an excellent discussion partner throughout my fieldwork period, she has been essential for how this analysis developed. The rich material of newspaper clippings, literature and interviews that she generously shared with me has been of great value as well.

Introduction

In the last decades, female dominated migration flows have grown in size and numbers, and in countries like the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, there are now more women than men who go abroad to work (Parreñas 2008). Scholars disagree on how to interpret this. Some argue that women are empowered through migration, as it constitutes opportunities for economic independence, and a chance to get away from family control, repressive gender roles and unsatisfactory relationships at home (Morokvasic 1993 in Kofman 2000; Constable 2005). Others see the increase in female mobility as an indicator of female marginalisation. Their mobility is understood as a sacrifice for the wellbeing of their families, and not as a move to improve own lives. Migration is not seen as empowering, but rather as a mechanism that marginalizes and increases vulnerabilities for exploitation (Bonifacio 2012; Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2002).

In descriptions of migration flows in much feminist literature on migration, exploitation and marginalisation on one hand, and empowerment on the other, tend to be treated as opposites. In this article I show how this is not always the case. Through an analysis of one of the major female migration flows in Europe today, the flow of mid-aged Ukrainian women who go to Italy to care for the elderly, I show that when female migrants leave unsatisfactory relationships at home and go abroad as domestic workers, it is not easy to classify their migration as either good or bad; as either empowerment or exploitation. They often work under exploitative conditions, but in spite of this, many experience the move as empowering.

This appears more clearly if we consider what the women see as alternatives to migration and what they leave behind. Here it doesn't suffice to look at the economic conditions migrants would have lived under had they stayed, but also their familial relationships, working conditions and the opportunities they have to shape their own lives.

This article draws on a study of international migration from Ukraine to Italy. Italy is second in importance as destination country for Ukrainian migrants (UCRS 2009). Approximately 80 percent of the migrants to Italy are women, most of them between 40 and 70 years of age¹. To analyse the mobility in light of what migrants leave behind, I have studied it as it appears from the country of origin, drawing on interviews with both migrants and non-migrants.

I start my analysis with a short overview of the role of family and divorce in migration research, before I describe the data on which this article is based. The next sections describe

the factors that have shaped this particular migration flow; the economic crisis of the 1990s and the changes in the organisation of families that coincided with this, the demand for care workers in Italy, and the conditions of life and work for women in Ukraine. Before I conclude, I return to the questions of empowerment, family and migration.

Family and marriage – a reason to stay or leave

There is extensive variation how migrants organize their mobility and in the reasons they have for migrating (Kofman et al. 2012; King 2002). But although there is extensive variation, migrants do not travel the world at random. They often go to the same places as other migrants in their community; they organize their travels in similar manner, search for jobs in the same way and live under similar conditions while abroad (de Haas 2010; Tyldum forthcoming). Migration is structured, but it is not structured in a uniform way across social groups or contexts. These structured and structuring (in that new migrants copy the ways of previous migrants) properties of migration, makes it useful to think of migrants as agents who produce and reproduce distinct practises of migration (Bourdieu 1977).

In this article I approach one specific practice of migration, the Ukrainian women aged 40 and above, who go to Italy for care work. I show how this mobility is shaped by economic, social, political and cultural relationships particular to this geographical places and historical juncture (Castles 2010). Several contextual and institutional factors are of relevance to understand how this practice of migration has emerged in a population group that tend to be relatively immobile in other regions. First of all, the unique historical experiences of this generation women in Ukraine have accustomed them to take the economic responsibility for the family and made them value economic security. The opportunities for employment for women of their generation in the Italian labour market are also of importance. However, first and foremost, this mobility needs to be understood in light of the relations these women have to their families, and the institutions of marriage and divorce in Western Ukraine.

The relationship between migration and the family has been given extensive attention in the migration literature. There is extensive scholarship on family migration (White 2011; Kofman et al. 2012), international marriages with ethnic majority population (Tyldum 2015; Constable 2003), international marriage with minority groups (Timmerman & Wets 2011; Nadim 2014) and how migrant women develop caring practices across transnational spaces (Schmidt 2011; Parreñas 2001). While much of this literature focuses on how migrants establish, maintain or renegotiate familial relationship through migration and across space,

current scholarship have given less attention to how men and women can use migration to intentionally create a distance to members of their family,

In the European scholarship on migration, there are some authors who address how familial relationships in regions of destination are not always a positive resource; Evergeti and Ryan (2011) points out that the migration literature tend to emphasise the positive relations to families back home, but does not recognize the heavy demands these relations can place on migrants. Other authors write of female migration to Europe as a way to improve own life, distance themselves from family expectations and patriarchal societies (Timmerman & Wets 2011; Schmidt 2011).

There are few explicit references to divorce in the European literature on female migration, and as in the literature worldwide, if it is mentioned, divorce is usually described as a *consequence* of migration (see for instance Lan 2003; Landale & Ogena 1995). However, the relation between migration, marriage and divorce is more complex than this, and sometimes migration may be more fairly presented as a temporary or permanent solution to marital problems, rather than their cause. Migration can become an alternative to divorce, in response to marital problems, when divorce is not available. This is pointed out in several studies on migration in Asia, and in particular in studies of migration from the Philippines, one of very few countries in the world, where the state does not grant legal divorce (Constable 2003). In the Philippines, two-thirds of migrants are women, and female migration tends to be long-term, with a significant element of marriage migration (Parreñas 2001). The population in the Philippines sometimes talk of migration as a ‘Philippine divorce’ (Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2002), as Filipino women whose marriages are failing, tend to opt for migration, to assert their independence and minimize the stigma attached to separated women (Tharan 1989 in Zlotnik 1995). Nana Oishi (2005) writes about ‘Distressed women’ (mainly from the Philippines and Sri Lanka) who emigrate to free themselves from problems at home, either with husbands or in-laws. Nicole Constable (2003) shows how a dream of (re-)marrying can become a reason to migrate for women who are not able to do so in the Philippines because they have had a child outside of marriage, or because of lack of access to divorce. The Asian context may seem very different from the European context at first glance, however, the above mentioned countries all have institutional and economic obstacles to divorce, an institutional trait they have in in common with Ukraine, as I will demonstrate below.

Although aspects of migrants’ marital situation and access to divorce has been identified as shaping some of the major female migration flows worldwide in the literature referred

above, the notion that problems or conflicts in marriage can make women (or men) leave, is still rarely considered in the migration literature. This can in part be because the migrants can be reluctant to express this as their reason for leaving. Difficult personal relations may not necessarily be a reason to leave, or a push factor for migration (although they can). But they can give people less of a reason to stay. Some turn down opportunities to migrate, because they wish to be close to family and friends, for practical and emotional reasons (Fisher, Martin & Straubhaar 1997). Men and women whose close relations do not hold them back, are more likely to grasp these opportunities to go abroad to work.

Methodology and data

The subsequent analysis is based on four periods of fieldwork conducted in Western Ukraine between 2008 and 2011. Through personal interviews, focus groups, participant observation and monitoring of newspapers and magazines, I explored how migration is understood by the migrants themselves as well as by the people around them.

Seventy-two interviews and two focus group interviews were conducted in urban and rural areas in the Lviv region in Western Ukraine. The interviews used a life history approach, giving particular emphasis to situations where migration decisions were made, covering respondents' family situations, work experiences at home and abroad and their relationship to and perception of (other) migrants in their local communities. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 3 hours. Most of the interviews were conducted in person in Russian and Ukrainian without a translator, recorded with the permission of the respondents, and transcribed and translated to English by native speakers. Pseudonyms are used to protect respondent's privacy.

Respondents with varying experiences of migration were targeted, including families of migrants, return migrants, and people planning to go abroad. The project deliberately included non-migrants, in order to contrast their situations and actions with those of migrants.

The aim of my research has not primarily been to assess how people describe and explain their own decision to migrate. Instead I have investigated how migration is understood in the communities migrants leave behind. Migration is here understood as a cultural repertoire (Swidler 2001), a type of behaviour that is seen as natural or possible in a given situation. When potential migrants decide whether or not to migrate, they draw on local understandings of what migration entails, and who it is appropriate for in a given situation. In my analysis of female migration between Ukraine and Italy, I draw on only eight interviews with return

migrants in this group. The female return migrants told relatively similar stories, and it was assumed that additional interviews in this group would not add much new information. Instead I expanded the study by including other respondent groups who could give complementary perspectives on the families and communities from where these women leave. I interviewed women in similar life situations who did not go abroad, as well as left behind family members and neighbours. I interviewed nine non-migrant women over 40, some of them middle class, others living in poverty, asking why they had not gone abroad to work themselves. Among my respondents were also five children of middle-aged female migrants in Southern Europe, and several siblings and neighbours. As most respondents had a neighbour or acquaintance in Italy, this mobility was touched upon in all interviews. The middle-aged women's narratives are also contrasted with the narratives of other groups of migrants, including five younger women and men who have been in Italy. I also lean on scholars who have interviewed Ukrainian women in Italy (Fedyuk 2011; Solari 2010; Vianello 2011).

Experiences from an economic and ideological collapse

The flow of migrants to Italy emerged from the mid-1990s (UCRS 2009). The women who go to Italy work for private households, either as live-in caregivers for the elderly, or as cleaners or caregivers working in households, but living separately. Most of them have no legal basis for residence. The women mainly migrate alone or with friends, leaving husbands in Ukraine. It is not uncommon to stay from six to ten years; some stay even longer (Fedyuk 2011; UCRS 2009).

To understand why Ukrainian women dominate among domestic workers in Italy, it can be useful to look at the shared history these women have. Larger migration flows often emerge in societies that are in transformation and rapid development, and not necessarily in countries that are stable and poor (Massey et al. 2008). Major changes in society tend to spur migration, as people become displaced from their traditional livelihoods and need to look for new solutions in a changing world (Sassen 1988). In Western Ukraine extensive restructuring of politics and economy throughout the last century, has forced the population to regularly adapt and find new strategies for livelihood. In the massive economic restructuring of the 1990s, the generation of women that today are in Italy, were among those most harshly affected.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, most of the Ukrainian women who are in Italy today were in their twenties and thirties. They had grown up in the Soviet Union, married and had children without ever lacking food, healthcare or heatingⁱⁱ. As Ukraine gained its independence, a major restructuring of the economy took place. By 1993, employees in all sectors of the economy could go months without salaries, and unemployment was rising quickly. Some were paid in-kind (anything from cement to eggs), items which they then needed to sell at local markets. Those still being paid in cash saw their money rapidly lose value, with more or less constant hyperinflation between 1992 and 1994. Shops were almost empty of goods, and there were queues everywhere. Many attempted to make ends meet selling things at the market. During my travels in the post-Soviet region in the early 1990s, it is difficult to forget the women and men who were selling used light bulbs and a few pieces of old cutlery on a small table by the subway stations. The acute poverty was intense.

The major political and economic changes throughout the 20th century, and in particular the reforms of the 1990s has made Western Ukrainians used to adapt to change, and this flexibility is likely to have made them more mobile than the population in more stable societies (Sassen 1988). But the reforms of the 1990s also started micro processes that contributed shaping migration flows, as the restructuring of the economy and ideological changes in government also had consequences for the division of labour within the family.

Ukraine achieved a high female employment rate under the communist regime. This gave women a degree of economic and social independence from their husbands, as extensive welfare-arrangements and strong institutions were developed to assist in the raising of children. To a certain extent, the governmental welfare provisions made the traditional male role of provider and patriarch for mothers and children obsolete. Men were encouraged to develop alternative masculine identities based on work. Motherhood was strongly politicised in the Soviet ideology, and simultaneously, there was a relative neglect of fatherhood. This created mothers with much responsibility, and undermined the position of men within the family (Ashwin 2000).

The erosion of the Soviet welfare provisions, coincided with process of nation building and a renewed focus on traditional values, including a reemphasis of traditional gender roles (Fedyuk 2011), and in popular culture masculine ideals where men reassumed the traditional ‘male’ responsibilities as providers and patriarchs dominated. However, the expectations to fulfil traditional male responsibilities came at a time when male-dominated industries were particularly badly hit by the economic crisis (Ashwin 2000). Some did succeed in ‘properly’

fulfilling the role of head of the family, but with record-high unemployment, hyperinflation and salaries not being paid this was often difficult. The widespread male labour migration within the country and to neighbouring countries throughout the 1990s and 2000s (mainly short-term circular migration) needs to be understood in this light. The men who failed as breadwinners had few alternative roles available to them, as they were deprived from their identity as workers and the role of caregiver in the family was perceived as only available to women. During these years, male suicide rates and male alcohol consumption rose to become among the highest in the world (Brainerd 2001; Ashwin & Lytkina 2004).

And as many men struggled to fill the job as breadwinner, their wives often felt that the responsibility for the family rested on their shoulders alone. Some of my respondents describe how they in the mid-1990s had two or even three jobs, in addition to the daily struggle to make ends meet at home, as poverty creates a lot of extra work. Few could afford processed food, and thus all food needed to be made from scratch. Hours were spent standing in queues, and yet more hours were spent travelling to markets where food was cheaper, or to nearby forests for berries or mushrooms. Some were lucky enough to have access to a plot of land, but they needed time to plant and to harvest, and also to process cabbage, berries and other products so they would last through the winter. Even so, many saw their families go hungry.

My respondents were often reluctant to speak of how they managed in the 1990s. In between narratives of coping and general statements of how hard life had been on her, one woman described the sadness she felt when she had to put plastic bags in her son's shoes when the first snow fell. Another spoke of how she served the same dish for dinner every day for months, even for Christmas. One woman told how she still, ten years later, can wake up at night with nightmares of her daughter crying because she is hungry. From 1995 the economy gradually improved and – just when people had started to believe in economic stability – a new crisis struck in 1997. Again, salaries were not paid, factories closed, and unemployment rose.

The middle-aged women who have worked in Italy the last 15 years not only experienced this strongly chaotic and for many very frightening period; they were often in a particularly vulnerable situation at the time. They were young mothers who had had children within the economic security of the Soviet Union, but who were suddenly left to provide and care for their families alone.

These experiences of poverty and instability are not easily forgotten, and they create an important incentive for going abroad to earn money. It is through this lens we need to understand the immense satisfaction these women express when they speak of their bank accounts with international currency saved up through work abroad. One of my respondents, a woman in her seventies told me how it felt to come back from her first trip abroad in the mid 1990s. She had been in Poland to work in agriculture:

It wasn't hard. What is there to it? You pick an apple. There is a ladder, and you stand on the ladder. We were talking, laughing. [...] Then it started snowing. Not all apples were picked, but I said that I was going home. It was cold already. I had earned... [sighs happily]. I went to the market and bought... [another satisfied sigh]. We had nothing then! My God! I bought a jacket for my daughter. I bought shoes for myself. I was so happy!

She only stayed home a few weeks before going abroad again, this time as a domestic worker. She came back 14 years later with hundreds of euros in a bank account. Today she lives mainly off the interest from her savings and her pension.

Mid-life migration, and the care for grandchildren

While this mobility is often talked of as the mobility of mothers, the women who leave are rarely mothers of young children, and quite often they are already grandmothers (Solari 2010). However, in Ukraine there are strong expectations of grandmothers to retire early to take care of grandchildren, to allow their children to work. The women who go to Ukraine breaks with this expectation.

One of the few authors who explicitly frame this mobility in light of their role as grandmothers, is Cincia Solari (2010). She argues that gendered ideologies in Ukraine now demand that younger women stay home with their children, and that as a consequence of this the older generation is expected to go out to earn. When I did my interviews in the Lviv region I did not find that there is a strong expectation for this generation women to go out to earn (Own publication 2015). Rather I find a tendency to condemn women who go out and leave family behind, independent of how old their children are. Similarly Olena Fedyuk (2011) documents in her work how female migrants often face condemnation by children and other family members for leaving. For although the women themselves sometimes talk of their mobility as an act of sacrifice for their families, it is not always understood as such in the society at large.

The female migrants described in my material mainly left when their children were in their late teens or early twenties, and before the children had started a family of their own. The migrants daughters were in other words not yet stay-at-home moms and their sons were not yet married. Two of my respondents had grandchildren in Ukraine while working in Italy, and have upon return started looking after the children while their daughters are working. They both say explicitly that staying home taking care of grandchildren is not their preferred choice.

One of them, Victoria went to Italy and left the responsibility of the farm, the household and her husband to her daughter and son-in-law. After she left, her husband's drinking got worse and there were constant quarrels between him and his son-in-law. In the end the daughter convinced Victoria to come back. Upon her return, her daughter and son-in-law left for Poland, leaving their two teenage children with Victoria. She thinks it is hard work to raise two teenagers, and says that she wishes she could have stayed in Italy longer. But she did not have a choice. They needed her at home.

Economic need and migration

In this article I show how migration can sometimes be motivated by a wish to get away from a difficult marriage. In this I do not intend to argue that this mobility does not improve the economic situation for the migrant women and their families. It is however, worth noting that in my data, the female migrants economic situation at the time of leaving can rarely be argued to be worse than the situation for the ones who choose to stay; as in other high mobility areas, it is rarely the poorest who leave (Massey et al. 2008). Neither can sudden economic shocks explain the mobility of the women I interviewed. The women who move abroad often do so at a time when one could expect the pressure on their finances to lessen, when their children have left home or have started working.

In the interviews, the women give much emphasis to practises of sending home gifts and remittances, and talk extensively of the gratitude of family members and the importance of their contributions. But upon more detailed enquiry, respondents explained that they would send home presents and money to their children (and sometimes also husbands) at regular intervals, but most of the money was saved and brought along on return. The money earned abroad was in other words not mainly used to cover expenses in daily life in Ukraine while they were gone, but rather saved for later investments or for security when they reached retirement age. Some say they did not trust their husbands or children to spend the money

wisely, but there was also no acute need of money at home that made it necessary to send all money home at once. Thus it was possible for these women to save up considerable amounts that they could bring home and decide how to use, upon return. However, the women sent home enough money to legitimize being absent, and through these remittances, engaging in labour migration becomes a legitimate way of leaving behind family and responsibilities in Ukraine.

Italian opportunities for Ukrainian caregivers

The women who leave for Italy work in the Italian domestic sector, often as live-in caregivers for the elderly. The Italian welfare model has economic transfers to households with elderly to enable them to make arrangements for necessary care themselves. Rising female labour-force participation rates in Italy combined with an aging population has made it increasingly difficult for households to self-produce these services, creating a demand for hired help. The local labour force does not meet this demand, and immigration has become part of the solution (Sciortino 2004; Solari 2010).

In Italy there is a demand not only for migrants who accept low salaries, but for migrants who are perceived as trustworthy and caring, and who will not only accept the slow pace and limited freedoms associated with this kind of work, but are likely to stay long term in spite of it. The middle-aged women I interviewed found such work acceptable.

Although male domestic workers exist (Sarti & Scrinzi 2010), women are generally seen as more suitable for this kind of work among employers (DeVault 1991). If it is physically demanding, the job as care worker may seem more appropriate for younger women. However, younger Ukrainian women would often be frustrated by the lack of freedom to leave the house and the relatively slow pace of the job. In Italy, migrant care workers are expected to stay with their clients day and night, except for some hours on Sundays and Thursday afternoon. I met several younger women who had worked or had considered working as caregivers for elderly; none of them described it as a job they would actively seek. One young Italian student tried to work as a live-in caregiver for three weeks, and gives the following description of her experiences:

Some Ukrainians found a place for me. Then I worked – if I could call it work – for three weeks. I looked after one old woman. She was very nice. I had no problems with her. [...] But I still didn't like it. I was used to being free, to go wherever I wanted, and do whatever I pleased. [...] I couldn't leave if I wanted to. I could go out

of course – it was not a prison. After about a week, we watched a movie together... It was not an interesting movie. She was 80 years old. After the movie she said: ‘It was not so good, but we watched it to kill time.’ I realised that I – 25 years old - was sitting there killing time with her! I wanted to live! [laughs]

The women who have worked in Italy claim that younger Ukrainian women can hardly stay in such jobs for a few weeks, because of the limited freedom and slow pace. The middle-aged return migrants I met did not seem to mind the slow pace, and many described how they enjoyed the company of the person they cared for, a relationship that sometimes developed into mutual respect and friendships. This is reflected in the way Elisa talk about the summers she spent with her client at their holiday home; they treated her as one of the family, and she felt that she belonged to the family as well:

G: Were you the only person to come along, who was not a family member?

E: I did not feel that I was not a family member. They treated me very well. I went everywhere with them – to all restaurants and bars. They bought the same food for me as they did for themselves. They asked me what I wanted. We went for a walk along the coast every evening.

Several respondents stayed with the same employer for six to ten years, changing jobs only when the employer died or became too ill to stay at home. Some stated explicitly that they would not work in families with children, as this entailed much more work.

Dirty and degrading work, but less exhausting than what they left in Ukraine

Relative to the standards expected in Western Europe, the conditions under which the Ukrainian migrants in Italy live are harsh. They work in an unprotected sector of employment, often without proper documents, away from family and a familiar way of life. This is also reflected in my interviews with return migrants from Italy, and many describe the first year abroad as particularly tough. The women who worked as live-in caregivers usually changed employers at least once before they found someone they could accept, and many had bad experiences along the way. This is thoroughly described in existing studies on Ukrainian-Italian migration (Fedyuk 2011; Montefusco 2008; Piperno 2006).

However, in approaching migration from the country of origin, and from the perspective of both migrants and non-migrants, I also heard stories where migration was given different value, and that has been given little attention in the literature this far. All of my respondents said they ended up with a job they were satisfied with in the end, and spent most of their time

working abroad in such a job. The job itself was rarely claimed to be physically demanding, and some even described their jobs as slow-paced. All respondents, without exception, said that housework in Italy was easier than in Ukraine. Their employers could usually afford processed food, and Italian food was claimed to be simpler, both in terms of the number of dishes and extent of work involved when compared with Ukrainian food. There were often dishwashers and other modern equipment for cleaning, and the houses were easier to clean. And while cleaning and caring was their only job in Italy, in Ukraine the women would all have had one or two jobs outside the house in addition to housework and caregiver roles.

On their day off (Sundays), they all reported more or less the same program: after church, they visited the parking lot for the minibuses about to leave for Ukraine (Fedyuk 2011). Here they met up with other Ukrainians and sent home presents with bus drivers. The rest of the Sunday was spent with Ukrainian friends, sightseeing, going to a lake or the ocean, or simply getting together to eat and drinkⁱⁱⁱ. This is a kind of freedom many could only dream of in Ukraine. As one respondent pointed out when comparing life in Italy with her life now:

Here [in Ukraine] I cannot go for a walk every Sunday. I need to prepare lunch [...], and there are lots of other things. I can perhaps visit my sister or a friend for a half an hour and that's it.

My respondents would also talk about how much their work in Italy was appreciated by the people they worked for. All the return migrants I interviewed told of old men and women who would regularly let them know how grateful they were, who gave expensive presents for Christmas and cried when they left. When these women talk of their life in Ukraine prior to departure, there is little that indicate that they felt as valued by husbands and teenage children.

Some of the return migrants I interviewed talked extensively about how difficult it was to be so far away from children and grandchildren while in Italy. Others gave more emphasis to how their children had missed them, and say they came back for practical reasons, such as the need to care for grandchildren or a drinking husband. Several of the women also arranged for their adult children to join them abroad, and two of my respondents had returned while their children were still in Italy.

Marriage and divorce in Western Ukraine

While only eight percent of male labour migrants in Ukraine are formally divorced, this is the case for 22 percent of female migrants surveyed in Ukraine (UCRS 2009). Legal divorce is quite easy to obtain in Ukraine, and divorce rates for the country at large are relatively high

with one divorce per 2.5 marriages. However, while in eastern regions of Ukraine one in two marriages end in divorce, in Lviv county, where the fieldwork for this study was conducted, there is only one divorce per 3.5 marriages (KyivPost 2011).

Greek Catholicism is the main religion in Western Ukraine, while Orthodox faith dominates in the rest of the country (Tsentr Rasumkova 2010). The Greek Catholic Church does not grant divorce and can only offer annulment or separation under certain conditions, mainly if the marriage was entered into under false premises. As married couples have promised to stay together for better or worse, the onset of alcoholism, mental illness and psychological abuse do not qualify for annulment. Growing apart, becoming tired of each other or even disliking each other are not seen as acceptable reasons for separation. This can be argued to have few practical implications for women who wish to move away from a husband, as legal divorce is easily granted and the church has no formal sanctions if a couple chooses to separate. However, in a highly religious society as Western Ukraine (Tsentr Rasumkova 2010), the strong emphasis on the sanctity of marriage and of keeping families together make men and women willing to endure more to save their marriages. It produces practices where women and men who find it difficult to live with their spouses find alternative ways to live apart, and put off formal divorce for as long as possible. For example, Katarina travelled abroad together with a friend whose husband had an alcohol problem. She talks about her friend's situation in the following manner:

Katarina: They did not live together. [...] He did not work much. All this... He went to his mum there, in [city] to his parents. And she was here.

G: Why didn't they divorce?

K: She was saying: 'I am not going to remarry. I don't need a divorce'.

Katarina's story illustrates how it in some social groups is not uncommon to separate in practice, but still stay married on paper. Katarina's husband is also a heavy drinker, but she sees wedding vows as sacred and believes it to be her duty to endure. She thinks young people take marriage too lightly and are not willing to make concessions. She admits that if she could do it over she would not have married him, but would have raised her daughter alone. However, having committed to the marriage she will not abandon him. But as soon as her children had grown up and moved out, she travelled to Europe to work for years.

It is not only tradition and religion that may make it difficult for women and men to end a marriage. In Ukraine, the legal provisions pertaining to the division of shared financial resources can be complicated in cases of divorce. According to a divorce lawyer at the West Ukrainian NGO 'Women's Perspective', courts may decide not to evict a spouse from a shared dwelling, if his share of the income from sale of the apartment will not be enough to acquire a new dwelling. This has been the ruling even in cases where violence has been documented. Consequently, a woman who has divorced her husband may still have to continue living with him if he does not agree to move out or sell. Housing costs are high relative to incomes in Western Ukraine, and some women move back in with their parents after a divorce while their spouse remains in the shared apartments. For others, labour migration becomes their best chance to get away, earn enough money to find a separate dwelling and make a fresh start.

In recent years, Ukrainian women have been the second-largest group to enter into international marriages with Italian men (Gilaroni 2010). International marriages were also often a topic in interviews. Some would joke about the opportunities of finding an old, rich grandpa to work for and later marry, while others told that they had met Italian men who were interested, but that they themselves were not. Women who had divorced or were contemplating divorce in Ukraine would argue that opportunities for remarriage in Ukraine were few for middle-aged women with children. Italian men, on the other hand, do not mind if you have a child, they said. In all the villages I visited, there was at least one woman who had left and married in Italy, and the return migrants from Italy would all know several Ukrainians who had stayed and married.

Among the female return migrants I interviewed who left after turning 40, all were married when they left, and their husbands remained in Ukraine. None of them described a close relationship with husbands. Some simply stated that they had grown apart and developed different interests; others reported open conflicts, substance abuse and domestic violence. One divorced her husband upon return, another came back after her husband died. The others claim they returned only because they had to, usually due to a conflict between their husbands and children. They all said they would have stayed longer in Italy if they could have.

For some migration to Italy is a first step towards divorce, as migration gives geographical distance, creates opportunities for economic independence and opportunity for remarriage. For others, it is a response to lack of access to divorce, but is not understood as a form of

divorce, as many would see divorce as morally wrong. Most of my respondents didn't talk about their mobility as a way to get away from their husbands. Due to the stigma tied to women who leave family behind, and live a good life abroad, such a narrative is hardly available to Ukrainian women (own publication,2015). It is their remittances, and their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the good of the family, that legitimates their absence. They all describe complicated relationships with their husbands, but only one said explicitly she left to get away from a husband. Non-migrants in their community are, however, more likely to talk about this migration as motivated by a wish to get away from a bad marriage. A Greek-Catholic priest who has worked with migrants in Ukraine and abroad, explained:

I think that migration can be a mediator or an environment that creates circumstances where a woman says: 'Thank God, I'm free now. I can suit myself. I no longer work hard in the fields every day with cows, pigs and so on. I feel like a normal woman here. I don't live with the smell of alcohol every Friday or every day in my home. [...]' So migration entails some sort of freedom for the women. And some don't want to come back because in their words, their life in Ukraine was a hell before they left.

Some respondents reported that their husbands have problems with alcohol, and this is also reported in qualitative studies among migrants in countries of destination (Fedyuk 2011). There is no way of knowing if the rate of alcoholism among the husbands of migrants is disproportionately high, as such data are not available. But far from all husbands that are left behind have problems with alcohol.

Conclusion

Several factors have shaped the high level of mobility among mid-life women in Western Ukraine. First of all there are employment opportunities particularly well-suited for this generation of women in Italy. Experiences from economic and political reforms have made them more independent than what is common elsewhere for women of their generation, and have made many give particular importance to economic security and predictability. Finally, the religious and economic limitations on divorce in Ukraine has made migration a part of the cultural repertoire of this generation women, as a way to get a welcome separation from a husband, and still be perceived as responsible mothers or grandmothers. Some may leave because they want to get away from a situation of violence or abuse, where problems in marriage function as 'push' factors for migration, and opportunities for independent income

and a fresh start works as 'pull' factors. Others are more fairly described as leaving because there is less holding them back, as they don't mind having some distance to their spouse.

An aim of this article has been to show how migration can enable and empower women to leave situations of oppression, and that in response to limited opportunities at home, some Ukrainian women leave and start a new life abroad. I have also showed how exploitation and empowerment are not necessarily opposites in migration analysis. When Ukrainian women go to Italy they often meet conditions of life and work that are harsh and exploitative. Simultaneously, they often leave behind a situation of hardship in their countries of origin. The empowering potential of migration does not make the exploitation of migrants acceptable. However, women can, and do, express their agency through migration, in choosing one way of life over the other.

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ⁱ Much insecurity is tied to these estimates. Migrants are only partially covered in surveys in both country of destination and origin. In Ukraine the best source of migration data are produced through an attachment to the labour force survey in 2008. This survey only targets the officially defined labour force, excluding women aged 55 or older. Women or men who are no longer counted as members of a household in Ukraine will also not be included, which probably means there is an underrepresentation of divorcees. And finally, as the reference period is only 3.5 years, long term migrants are not included. According to these data 38 per cent of the female migrants in Italy are aged 40-49, and another 23 per cent are aged 50-54 (data made available to the author by the State Statistics Committee of Ukraine November 2011).

ⁱⁱ The information in this section is taken from interview data produced in this and other qualitative and quantitative research conducted in Post-Soviet countries between 1997 and today, from travels in the region from 1990 and until today, as well as stories conveyed by Ukrainian and Russian friends and colleagues who lived in the region these years.

ⁱⁱⁱ These practises are also thoroughly described in research conducted in Italy (Fedyuk 2011).

Article
IV

**Motherhood, Agency and Sacrifice
in Narratives on Female Migration
for Care Work**

