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The Migrant Making Organization  
Gender, Labor and Agency in a New Migration Process

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**Abstract**

Labor migration is increasing in scale and diversity and is characterized by a new feminization. Despite these transformations, a common theme remains unchanged: immigrant workers are employed in low-skilled jobs. This study of labor migration from Russia to Norway analyzes the establishment of a new migration process, who was involved in this migration, and why this migration from Russia to Norway became dominated by women. It also discusses the situation of the Russian workers in the Norwegian labor market. Analyses of the recruitment processes show how gender, sexuality, age, marital status, education, and motherhood construct women as suitable migrants and how cultural processes combined with immigration policy restricts the migrants and contributes to deskilling and ethnic/national subordination. Focusing on the situated migrants' contextual practices acknowledges the migrants' willingness to seek challenges, intra- and inter-household relations, the costs involved and individual strategies and goals. This prevents the victimizing of migrants' experiences inherent in the "othering" of migrants and adds to the understanding of migrants' decision-making processes.

## Introduction

Labor migration is increasing in scale and diversity: new countries are involved, migration streams are becoming more complex, labor migration (including the use of short-term contracts is rising), and the number of female migrants is growing, a phenomenon often referred to as the feminization of migration (Castles & Miller, 2003; Kofman & Raghuram, 2006). Nevertheless, the main feature common among migrant laborers persists: they are employed in low-paid, low-skilled jobs regardless of their skills (Holgate, 2005). More than thirty years ago, Burawoy (1976) showed how the *system* of migrant labor is enforced through structural, particularly legal and political, “supramarket” mechanisms, thereby making integration impossible and upholding migrant labor differentiated by race and ethnicity (Burawoy, 1976, p. 1051).

This article argues that analyzing the employers, their practices, and the *cultural* “mechanisms” implicit among them will add to the understanding of the feminization, deskilling, and racialization of migrants. It also argues that the migrants’ practices and considerations have to be analyzed so as to avoid making migrants “the other”; this is necessary to understand who the migrants are, as the structural approach does not explain why some people migrate, while others do not. Burawoy stated that focusing on individual rights may represent too narrow a scope to explain the *system* of migrant labor and how it renders migrant workers powerless. I ask how this new migration came about, who was involved in this migration, and why this migration became dominated by women. I argue that in order to understand the establishment of the new labor migration system, analyses must include (1) employers and migrants as individual actors and (2) gendered meanings and their intersections with other processes of difference and similarity.

In the autumn of 1998, a project leader and representatives of a fish-processing plant in Båtsfjord, in Northern Norway, visited Teriberka, a community on the Kola Peninsula in Russia, to meet with their joint company’s Russian partners. The company aimed to establish a Russian-Norwegian fish-processing plant in Teriberka and provide Russian middle managers with training in Båtsfjord, resulting in an operator’s certificate (a trainee scheme invented by the business managers which would make the migrants subject to the trainee permit of paragraph 4a section d of the Immigrant Regulation). The joint company would gain, thus, access to the Russian raw-fish and consumer market, the technology, network, and capital of the Norwegian plant, and, finally, the trainee scheme would provide the Norwegian plant with the labor force it constantly lacked, which was otherwise difficult to obtain since Russia is outside the European Economic Agreement Area. According to the Norwegian business partner, the labor exchange program created a win-win situation: it qualified mid-level workers for the plant planned in Teriberka while supplying labor to the Norwegian plant in Båtsfjord.

In October 1999, a bus from Teriberka brought sixteen Russians,<sup>1</sup> twelve women and four men, to Båtsfjord. The next day, they began working in various unskilled positions, which their visas, under the trainee scheme or Barents permit, allowed. (Paragraph four and five of the Immigration Regulations allowed trainee jobs and Russian citizens from the Barents Region to work in the fish industry, under the same working conditions and tariff wages as national workers (§ 2.2 Immigration Regulation). Six weeks later, a new group, consisting solely of women arrived from Teriberka; more than thirty people from this Russian village now worked at the Båtsfjord plant. This article recounts the story of their labor migration between 1998 and 2002.

Teriberka and Båtsfjord are both small, rural, resource-based communities situated on the Barents Sea coast.

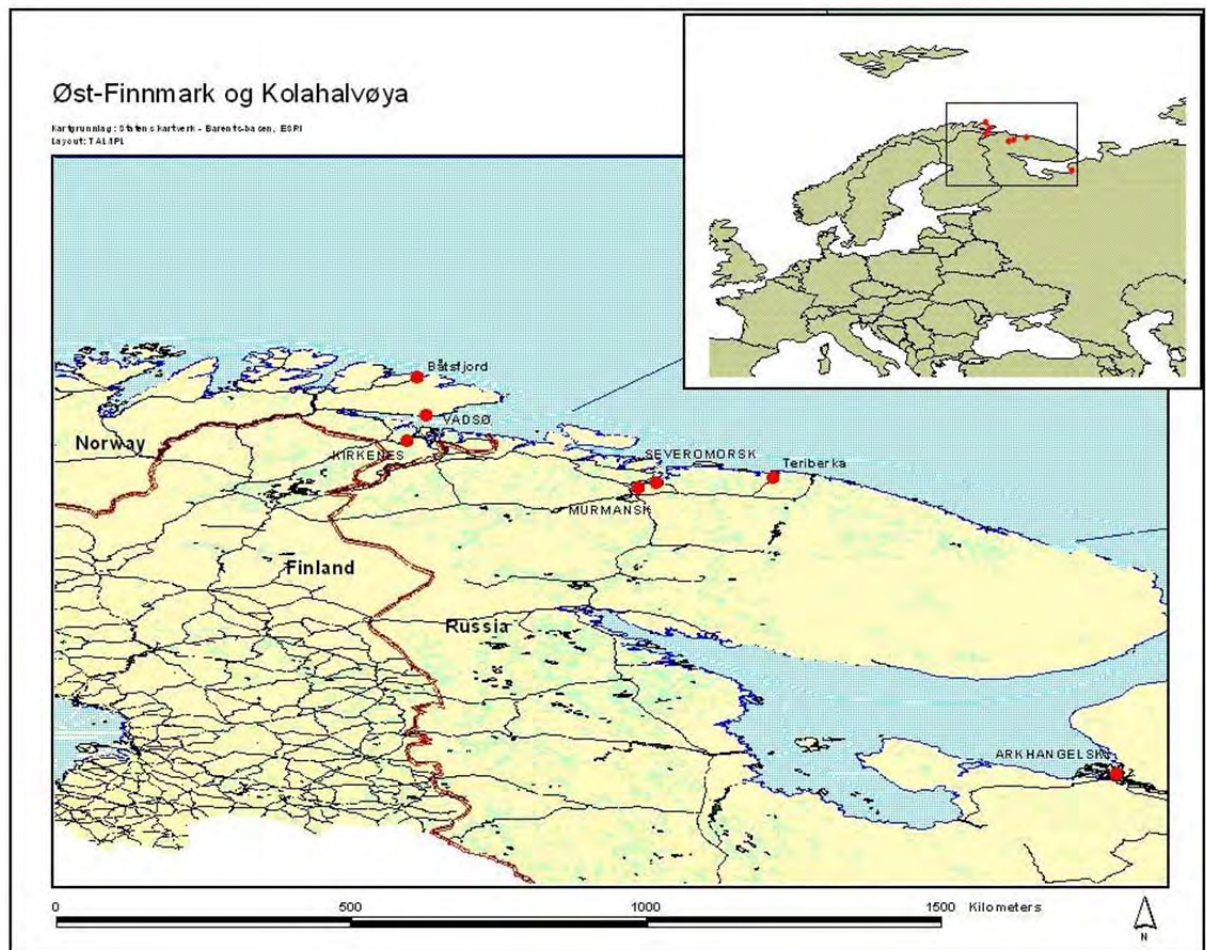


Figure 1 Map

Teriberka is located northeast of Murmansk and can trace its roots back to the 1500s. Its population reached a peak of 12,000 in the 1960s, as people moved there from all over the Soviet Union. The village was thriving and played a major role as an administrative and cultural center in the early Soviet fishing industry. Later, Teriberka was subject to a dramatic downshift and a policy of centralization, which moved most industry to the fishing port of Murmansk, at that time an urban center with one million inhabitants. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and ensuing changes reinforced Teriberka's decline (Riabova, 2001). In 1998, when this migration to Norway began, Teriberka had about 1600 inhabitants and a workforce of less than 500, of whom approximately eight percent later worked in Båtsfjord.

Båtsfjord, on the Finnmark coast, was home to some 2500 people in 1998. This is a post-WWII fishing village, based on four fish-processing plants, which employed about 500 people in 1998. The plants constantly lacked sufficient labor, and about one quarter of the workforce was of foreign extraction. From the 1960s, these laborers were mostly women from Finland, Southern Norway, and Sweden, while in the 1980s, Tamil asylum seekers predominated. After the USSR's

dissolution, the Båtsfjord fishing industry became highly dependent on raw fish from Russia, allowing Båtsfjord to retain its position as one of Norway's main fisheries ports, and, unlike most Norwegian coastal communities, its population figures remained stable. Women in Båtsfjord have a high income and labor market participation (Statistics Norway, 2000). The trade union holds a strong position in the industry, facilitating fairly good working conditions compared to other unskilled/low-skilled work.

Labor migration from Teriberka to Båtsfjord resulted from geopolitical changes and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Changes in Russian migration regulations, allowing people to leave the country, and bilateral agreements between Russian and Norway allowing student and expert visas (Immigrant Regulation, par. 4a) and the later Barents Permits facilitated this migration. A total of about thirty-five people, mostly women, arrived in Norway from Teriberka between 1998-2002. Hence, this is small-scale migration yet resembles global migration trends, involving new countries, feminization and the increased use of temporary contracts for unskilled work (Castles & Miller, 2003). This article asks how this new migration amidst global trade and transnational economic cooperation came about, why it became dominated by women, why some migrated while others did not, and why these educated laborers were employed in the secondary labor market in Norway.

For analytical purposes, the migration process has been divided into two phases. The first phase familiarized people in Teriberka with migration; people were interviewed and offered jobs in Norway. The main focus of this section is the employers and the recruitment process. In the second section, the workers' decisions whether to leave for Norway are presented, focusing on the migrants' considerations. Before introducing the phases, the context, background, and theoretical and methodological approaches, as well as the methods applied will be presented.

### **Crisis and change in Post Soviet Russia**

The dissolution of the Soviet Union led to a difficult political and economic situation in Teriberka. In August 1998, the rouble was devalued, exacerbating the economic situation. Jobs and welfare vanished; production dropped; there was a goods shortage, and inflation rocketed. Many state-owned community farming companies were privatized, often bought cheaply by their management. The responsibilities of the *kolkhoz* (collective farms, organized as production cooperatives) for sanatoriums, kindergartens, flats, and maintenance, and so forth became unclear (Andrle, 1994), and the system partly disintegrated. Salaries and pensions went unpaid, and electricity, hot water, and gas were in short supply. People gathered driftwood and installed homemade, wood-burning stoves in their flats to provide supplementary energy. The military and the police force reduced their presence. People in Teriberka experienced a new, unfamiliar poverty. Young and old alike told of economic, social, and moral decay. As one female informant said: "We are surviving in a ruin," while one young boy stated: "It's all down-hill."

Unemployment in Teriberka in 1998 stood at some twenty percent. Privileges attracting people to the Soviet North were withdrawn; many who had moved there now wanted to return south. The mayor reported that one hundred families applied for a government-initiated program for relocation from the north, while only four people were actually given relocation grants and permits. Inflation ate up personal savings, rendering people unable to leave their low-rent flats in Teriberka. Without a new place of residence, relocation was forbidden. Political and economic changes nationally that were supposed to lead to freedom paradoxically placed new restrictions on people's geographical mobility. They had to find new ways of managing.

In people's homes, doing fieldwork and interviews in 1998, we were served pickled mushrooms, home-made jams, and fresh, tinned and dried fish, in Russian tradition. Along the roads and around blocks of flats, we saw that the soil was sown and planted, and by asking who did what and how, it was explained to us how a chain of people, relations, and resources were involved in this network of reciprocal exchange, self-support, and "*blat*," the traditional exchange system (Ledeneva, 1998). Older women demonstrated how they had hidden salmon under their coats to bring it home, while others proudly talked about crops, catches, and skills. Many managed the difficult times by returning to a subsistence economy, making the situation "liveable." Some found pride in this, while others found it humiliating.

### **Background: Migrant Labor, Gender and Fish Plants**

Recent years have witnessed large increases in female labor migration and a growing political and academic interest in this field (Kofman & Raghuram, 2006). Early feminist research on women and migration focused on women's participation in the low-skilled labor market and how it differed from men's migration (Morokvasic, 1984). These studies have shifted from a preoccupation with gender differences and gender as a variable to the way in which migration processes are gendered (Willis & Yeoh 2000; Anthias, 2001). Later studies have largely been in-depth ethnographic studies of the working experiences of domestic workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Parreñas, 2001; Huang & Yeoh, 2007; Pratt, 1997), but there have also been studies examining skilled women migrants (Kofman & Raghuram, 2006), focusing on gender constructions among elite migrants (Yeoh & Willis, 2005). It might be fair to say that less attention has lately been paid to migrants performing traditional industrial work. Nevertheless, some studies have provided good insights into the working conditions of unskilled workers and the (de)valuation of labor (i.e. Selby et al. (2001) in the crab industry; Holgate (2005), Barndt (2008), and Kandel and Parrado (2005) in food production; and Bair and Gereffi (2003) in the clothing industry). They describe demanding, low-paid work. But we still need a better understanding of why there is a gendered structure associated with migration, how economics and gender are connected in migration, and why this has not been at the forefront of our understandings of migrant labor. This is why this article juxtaposes women's agency/women's voices with structural matter and geo-political change, the gendered nature of work, cultural constraints, and the positions of the employers.

As early as 1989, Boyd called for a "greater specification of the role of networks and the inclusion of women" in future migration research (1989, p. 638). Ten years later, Kofman et al. concluded that little attention remained paid to the gender aspects of migration channels (2000). Phizacklea maintains that migration organizations are of prime importance in understanding female migrants, since women have little access to other networks (2001), but according to Mahler and Pessar (2006), there is still an "inattention paid to how gendered recruitment practices structure migrations." There are few current studies on migration organizations, with the exception of Johnson-Webb (2003) and Krissman (2005), and even fewer analyzing gender in these organizations, as Tyner's (1996) study from the Philippines did. It is thus crucial to understand the interplay between migration organization and gender, as migration is increasingly organized (Phizacklea 2003).

Phizacklea addresses the questions of victimizing and denying women agency (see Spivak 1998) in migration theories and asks "whether, conceptually, we can move towards a model of migration that avoids casting migrant women as victims of globalizing forces without denying

the impact of those same forces” (Phizacklea, 2003, p. 23). She also elicits an approach attending to agency as well as to the structural forces in the new institutionalization of migration.

Migration is, nevertheless, not only influenced by gender. Staunæs (2003) and Yuval-Davis (2006) show that specific cultural positions are created in interaction between different bases of differentiation and similarity, an intersectional approach. I analyze how perceptions of differences and similarities are part of the recruitment process, a cultural unpacking of the migrant organization and institutions such as households (Phizacklea, 2003).

Northern fishing communities, as studied here, have depended historically on migrant women’s labor (Gerrard, 1975, also highlighted by Phizacklea, 2003). Female migration to the fisheries is far from new, and this is related to characteristics of the industry: the plants are located in sparsely populated communities, close to the fishing grounds; the work used to be seasonal; the industry is highly international, and the work is strongly gender divided (Neis et al., 2005). Women were a flexible work force, with nimble fingers and a strong feeling of responsibility to make the most of the fish catches, aspects central to women’s role as ground crew members in the fisheries (Gerrard 1995).

### **Theoretical and Methodological Approach**

To strengthen the theoretical understanding of international labor migration, Koser and Lutz (1998) recommend studying real, contextual migration processes, as well as the social, ethnic, and gender construction of migration. According to Kofman et al. (2000) and Wallace and Stola (2000), a three-tier model combining a micro, meso, and macro level may be useful in explaining the establishment of migration processes. The meso-level connects migration institutions, actors, households, communities, and recruitment organizations, including what Prothero calls a migration organization: systems “...for obtaining supplies of labor and transporting it to where it is required...” (1990, p. 221). Migration organizations vary in size, complexity, and formality and may include private or public institutions, social networks of former migrants and employers, and state institutions. They serve to explain how migration comes about, who becomes a migrant, and why migrants from particular places (in this case, Teriberka) come to work in another particular community (Båtsfjord). It also explains the function of migration chains (e.g. Massey et al., 1987; Kofman et al., 2000). I ask how recruitment practices in migration organizations are gendered to understand the increased number of women in migration and how cultural meanings are imbued in migration systems. Hence, I include the practices of situated migrants and employers as subjects in these processes.

### **Methods and Analytical Style**

This study (1) includes formal and informal qualitative interviews and ethnographic field talks and notes from participant and non-participant observations. Interviews were conducted in Norwegian, English, and Russian. Understandings and analyses were later compared and discussed. Eight of the approximately thirty-five migrants from Teriberka were interviewed once or several times, both individually and in focus groups. Information on other migrants from the group was also obtained through these interviews. Some employers and industry managers, spouses, family members, co-workers, non-migrating workers in Teriberka, neighbours, organization representatives, and political and administrative leaders on both sides of the Russian-Norwegian border were also interviewed. In total, some seventy Russian and seventy

Norwegian women and men have been interviewed in private homes and at work places, conferences, meetings, and cafés in Russia and in Norway for this research.

The analytical style in this article is based on my narrative of the recruitment and migration process. Through the two “phases,” I tell the story of this labor migration from the perspectives of the people involved. It is, thus, a narrative of narratives.

### **First phase: constructing migrants**

In the autumn of 1998, posters at municipal buildings and kolkhozes invited people in Teriberka to a meeting about the new employment opportunities offered by a planned exchange project. At the time, rumors circulated among people in Teriberka as to who would be allowed to join the program and what this was all about. As a Russian owner of several workshops and plants in Teriberka explains: “I am responsible for my present and former employees and their families.” Even after the privatization of state industries, he remains committed to the company’s civic participation in the Soviet Union. According to him, working in Norway is in his former employees’ best interests, as they will “get the chance to make crazy money.” The Norwegian project leader said that he was looking for the “best workers, regardless of previous workplace” and was determined to “anchor the project with the local and regional authorities.” He involved local and regional authorities in the scheme and somehow made it into an international, joint private-public project.

### ***Selecting migrants***

After the first information meeting, a group of prospective workers was invited to a recruitment interview. The Norwegian manager says that he conducted these interviews in private, as he wanted to ensure that “the workers have the right attitude,” although the Russian leader found this unnecessary, saying, “I know these people by name or by their families.” According to the Norwegian leader, the two leaders did agree that they want “talented, good people.” The Russian partner finds these to be the former middle managers from his companies: experienced men in their fifties. He does not consider the senior women appropriate, saying, “It is important to distribute the work abroad in a proper way.” When asked why he initially wanted only men, the Russian manager says only that he has been to Båtsfjord and this will be “a great experience.” Gender, seniority, and previous positions in the company are important to him.

For his part, the Norwegian manager wanted *women*, explaining, “They are better suited, better at such work.” In truth, he says he preferred *housewives* above all. When questioned, he explains: “They are responsible and caring.” He finds them dextrous, responsible, and, as such, appropriate for filleting work in the Norwegian fish-processing industry, in line with Gerrard (1975) and Neis (2005), and as found in food, clothing, and assembly industries around the world (Willis & Yeoh, 2000). Female workers also apply such gender assumptions, as they felt that their qualifications were “devalued by male Tamils doing filleting in fish plants” (Bersvendsen 1998). My observations from the processing plants in Båtsfjord show that Tamil men of all ages do filleting, while there are only a few young Norwegians who do such work. This indicates a persistent gendering of the work, intersecting with ethnicity, nationality, and age.

The Norwegian leader is reluctant to hire Russian men; he considers them unsuited and overqualified and even fears that they will abuse alcohol. On the other hand, Tamil men and Russian women were deemed appropriate regardless of their age and formal qualifications.



Gendered assumptions and stereotypes representing ideas of ethnicity thus work differently for men and women, Norwegians, Russians, and Tamils. Hence the *meaning* of qualifications, age, and the value and degrees of similarity are negotiable. This, nevertheless, led to Russian women being selected at the expense of Russian men; mostly women were hired. This re-established filleting as women's work, although in the case of Tamils, it was immigrants' work, as well. These assumptions are contextual, as a group of Norwegian managers' agreed in a discussion, "If we lack people, we will have to take anybody, all kinds." The gendered organization of labor thus seems manifold, stable, *and* flexible.

While the Båtsfjord manager focused on the functions the migrants were to perform and what he conceived of as gendered qualities (care and nimble-fingers), the Teriberka manager highlighted the economic possibilities of working in Norway and who "deserved" this. Different evaluations led to different selections, though based on a complementary gendered system of meaning.

Moreover, the Norwegian project manager prefers housewives. He contrasts them with young women and "girls." In a group interview, several Båtsfjord foremen agree that their experience with Finnish and Swedish women is that younger women work faster and adjust more easily to life abroad than older ones. However, one said that "the mature housewives are stable. They use the raw material better, and they work hard even though the piecework rate is low." The older women, who are assumed to be married and have children, are also regarded as "fitting in better and probably partying less," as one foreman says to the others. Another adds: "They will not have dishonest intentions," hinting at the stereotype prevalent in the Norwegian media in the 1990s of Russian women as prostitutes (Stenvoll, 2002). Age, marriage, and motherhood serve to make these women sexually decent. While gender makes Russian women more suitable for migration than men, age distinctions among women devalue younger women. Gerrard (1975) has analyzed how young Finnish women in the fish industry were subject to sexual rhetoric in the 1970s as a matter of gender and foreignness. The status of foreignness changed when the Finns were granted permanent permits as members of the common Nordic labor market. Russian labor migrants, however, are granted only temporary work permits. They remain strangers due to the legal regulations of the nation state, and many of these migrants express that they experience this as a matter of national subordination.

In the recruitment interview, the prospective migrants were asked about restaurant visits and leisure activities. One migrant said: "We saw these questions as irrelevant. It wasn't really uncomfortable, more just weird." They did not know the interpretation framework of the Båtsfjord manager. He offers assurances that "the Teriberka workers are good and necessary workers" but feels "obliged to make sure they have the right attitudes." In his own words, this is because "I am bringing them here, and if they don't behave, I am to blame." In this small community, people live geographically close, interacting in face-to-face relations; they are often related, often childhood friends, and have social, political, and economic relations. This creates transparency, obligations, and responsibilities. The managers are conscious of not challenging the society in which they and their families participate as members, businesspeople, parents, neighbors, politicians, and leaders. Gendered expectations and practices thus lead to demands on the migrants which are not related to their roles as employees, and these limit and subordinate the migrants. But, as argued by the manager, the transparency of the community restricts the entire population in some way or other. As one community member said, "We are all neighbours, we are equal, no one is better than the other." Between residents, this is partly true; manifold relations among people may contribute to reciprocity and equality. But the migrant workers are not part of these relations. They are subject to single, strained relations and strict control.

The first group of labor migrants from Teriberka arriving in Båtsfjord consisted of four men and twelve women, indicating that the Norwegian manager's views had had most impact. The women did filleting work, and the men tidied up and did quayside work, regarded as men's work. Naturalization and stabilization are important mechanisms in differentiating processes according to Yuval-Davis (2006, p. 199). Women's "suitability" seems to be naturalized as that of a caring, dextrous, filleting worker, as opposed to young, unmarried, indecent. Even so, the systems of meanings are flexible enough to include and modify new categories, and this may in turn make these understandings more durable.

### *Qualified to do what?*

Only one of the migrants had earlier experience of fish processing, but most of them did have "an impressive educational level, and there are lots of clever and reliable people" (Norwegian manager). Educational levels in Murmansk County and in Teriberka are relatively high for Russia, and considerably higher than in Båtsfjord (Didyk & Riabova, 2002; Statistics Norway, 2000). The migrant women included engineers, electricians, and those educated in pedagogy, the arts, or economics. None of them, however, was considered overqualified for the processing work, and the Båtsfjord manager praised them as good workers. In a focus group, he and other managers expressed that the migrants' high level of education reflected their willingness to learn and their commitment to the work. However, one foreman proposed a different point of view: "Of course, people who haven't had been paid for a long time ought to be good workers," thus linking the migrants' reputation for a good work ethic to the transitional period in Russia. Nevertheless, the Båtsfjord managers emphasised that "unlike people from Southern Scandinavia and the Tamils," the people from Teriberka have the valued "climate competence" (the quality of being used to the harsh climate). However, most managers celebrated the perceived qualities of migrant workers as good, stable, and hard-working because of who they are, rather than as a result of the situations within which they found themselves; this resembles Mackenzie and Forde's (2009) study of the rhetorics of the "good migrant worker."

The educational level and "climate competence" of the people from Teriberka gave them "the right attitude to work" in the eyes of the Norwegian employers. They were offered filleting work, which was what the industry needed. Paradoxically then, education and skills qualified and made Teriberka workers particularly suited for the unskilled work in the Norwegian fish-processing industry. This shows the importance of the distinction between unskilled migrants and the unskilled work (of migrants) (Kofman & Raghuram 2005, p. 151). These migrants are not unskilled – the work offered is unskilled, even though several were licensed to maintain the machinery.

Norwegians too, it can be argued, work in non-skilled positions for which they are formally overqualified. The managers at all the four plants in Båtsfjord say that they do not ask why people want to work: "It doesn't matter what you say, it's what you do. We can't afford to turn down workers here." One of them continues, "We give everyone a shot, followed by an active use of introductory trial periods. The useless ones are not kept on." This sentiment was shared by other managers, foremen, employees, and union leaders. However, the overqualified workers themselves, co-workers, and managers often relate overqualified Norwegians working there to special circumstances: unemployment after finishing education, marital breakdown, a need to overcome "hard times," or "to put some money aside." These situations are temporary and partly chosen by the actors themselves. For the Russian migrants, the lack of permanence is

systemic, as the training scheme *is* temporary, and the Barents permits were restricted to one year, later two.

The Barents permits were also granted conditionally upon the migrants being *Russian citizens performing unskilled work in the fish processing industry* (Immigration Regulations, par. 5, later par. 4a). The clause of non-skilled work positions the migrant workers in subordinate positions, regardless of education. De-qualification in migration processes are a matter of the immigrants' qualifications not being recognized in the arrival country (Piore, 1979). In the Teriberka/Båtsfjord connection, cultural meanings make education qualify (women) for migration, but the legal system establishes migrants as a group permitted only unskilled work. They are thus de-qualified as Russian nationals by the cultural system of meaning and the immigration laws. The migrants applied for work in Båtsfjord based on limited knowledge of the work in question, and they focused on the buying power of the salaries rather than the downward shift working in the fish industry entailed. Piore showed that such homeward orientation may make migrants able to accept temporary losses in status in the arrival country (Piore 1979). When some Teriberka migrants discussed this in Båtsfjord, they were bitter about the low status of Russians in Norway. Most acknowledged the drop in status this kind of job involved in both in Russia and in Norway, but in Norway it clung to them "as Russians." As important as their satisfaction with the buying power that their salary gave them in Russia was, they felt ambivalence.

What is the importance of these conceptions and cultural constructs? The workers from Teriberka were selected for migration through concepts based on intersecting cultural systems of meaning both in Teriberka and Båtsfjord and placed in the society of the country of arrival's social structures according to these constructs. These cultural "mechanisms" influence who migrated, their jobs and salaries, and how the migrants were met. It indicates an even broader significance than found by Tyner (1996) and Pratt (1997), showing how the migrant organization is imbued by gender and other cultural meanings.

### **Second phase: Migrants' situation and Views**

According to classical theories of push and pull (Ravenstein 1885) in migration, the socio-economic situation in Teriberka and the geographic proximity to Norway should have caused considerable migration from East to West. This would involve crossing one of the starkest economic contrasts in the world: from the rich, Western, oil-producing, social-democratic Norwegian welfare state, with its high salary levels to the harsh transition in post-Soviet Russia. Even so, *no one* had so far moved from Teriberka to Norway or Western Europe since 1991. Wallace and Stola have shown that despite many Eastern Europeans reporting that they wished to migrate and were struggling to make ends meet, very few at the time actually did so even when they formally could (2000).<sup>2</sup> Hence, we ask why people did not move (Hammar & Tamas, 1997) from Teriberka.

Interviews and observations have revealed that people in Teriberka lacked knowledge about Norway, the transport and accommodation possibilities, and the labor market. They did not know the language or the visa requirements, and few had a "foreign passport" or the economic and social means to apply for one and the visa. They did not have the work contract demanded by the migration regulations (Immigration Regulation, par. 5). The migration organizations consisting of employers, former migrants and officials (Johnson-Webb, 2003; Krissman, 2005) provided these resources to the prospective migrants. The migration *organization* thus offered the *possibility* of migration and know-how, while also organizing and paying for a passport, the visa

application, bus transport, accommodation in Båtsfjord, and salary advances. They conveyed the workers from Teriberka to Båtsfjord both practically and figuratively.

### *Coincidences, wanderlust and choices*

After the job interviews, a year elapsed before the prospective workers were asked to go to Båtsfjord. In this section, I will consider the reasoning of the candidates, predominantly women, who chose to go, as well as a few who chose to stay. “Much had happened in the meantime,” one woman interviewed in Båtsfjord says: “Some had got married and had children, others now got their salaries more regularly.” The migration organization had selected a group of prospective migrants with access to network resources from previous or current jobs. None of them was unemployed, although migration as an “escape from unemployment” is a strong myth (Massey et al., 2002). I asked why some decided to go, while others did not.

The mother of the woman cited above told us that the entire family was worried. “We saw documentaries on TV about Russian women’s experiences in Western Europe. Rumors of seized passports and the sexual abuse of Russian girls were very frightening.” Even so, she advised her adult daughter to go: “Just go, I said, it can’t possibly get worse.” Her daughter said on a later occasion: “Everything was so unclear. The offer of work in Båtsfjord was too good to be true. I could hardly believe it!” She explains that since her children no longer needed her to be there for them every day, as her mother could look after them, she wanted to go, even though she also said she was afraid. She rolls her eyes when talking about the salaries. Another woman interviewed twice in Russia experienced more fear and uncertainty regarding the migration but said that she decided to go nevertheless: “We knew the Russian manager. He and the mayor are both decent men. They belong here.” The Russian partners and the mayor guaranteed acceptable working conditions and strengthened the project’s legitimacy. To her, this made it safe enough to go. She was in her twenties and the mother of a small child when the possibility of migration was presented to her. She had a leading position in Teriberka. “In 1998-99, I would have done just about anything,” she said after returning from a period of work in Båtsfjord. “We were so badly off. I had not been paid my salary for eight to nine months. There was no money at all.” For her, this was a unique opportunity to escape a demeaning, hopeless situation. While crying and holding her child tightly, she added: “Yes, yes, I doubted that this was true and believable, and yes I had doubts whether to leave my child. I will never, ever do so again,” she said. She asks me to help her get a new period of work, and says that she would go, even though she obviously knows that the regulations would not allow her to bring her child. She tried to escape the poverty, her strenuous everyday life and to qualify herself for better work in Teriberka. In her case, migration was a costly strategy for a better life. She could remain in an intolerable situation or go abroad. The latter option included a different kind of loss and absence, and her choice entailed great contradictions, ambivalence, and perplexity. Ramamurthy’s study of sari production and consumption employs the concepts of ambivalence and perplexity to discuss the bewildering experiences with which globalization can overwhelm actors, emphasizing that individual experiences of confusion, loss, hope, joy, and desire are not separate from processes of accumulating capital (Ramamurthy, 2003). Perplexity can thus describe the tensions between “leaving” one’s child and enjoying the money for redecorating one’s apartment, buying a stereo television, and escaping poverty felt by this migrant mother.

A young woman explains that she and her husband were given to understand that she could make more than twice the money in Båtsfjord than at home. She says this led to her

decision to go. In the end, she says, she made some ten to fifteen times more. Others thought differently about going to Båtsfjord. A woman in her late thirties interviewed on several occasions in Teriberka says: “No, this is not for me, it doesn’t suit me. I have a good job.” She added: “Now, today, when I see what those going abroad have learned, I have regrets.”

In an interview in the Båtsfjord workers’ dormitory, another woman looks back and says: It was exciting. I was curious; I wanted to try living in a Western country. The children were older; their father could very well look after them. I really wanted to go and almost felt forced to take the opportunity when it came, since the others who were given the chance were so young.

She and one of the men in the group interviewed together both emphasize the spirit of adventure and the possibility of learning about other countries and languages that migrating to Northern Norway offered. “The chance to get a look around was important, and of course,” they say, laughing, “the money - the good salary.” A woman in her early twenties had applied for a job in Båtsfjord without telling her husband.

Would it come through? This was the only way I could make some real money. Whether or not [my husband] was against it, I wanted to make my own decision. I wanted to go, I wanted to try this. In the end, he let me, when he heard about the salaries. My mother took care of my three-year-old daughter. Our mothers do. It was like that with more than half of us that went.

For this woman, the uncertainty of waiting was exhausting. She knew that there was the possibility of conflict; her husband had a good job and was paid for it, unlike her, who had not been paid for months.

The economic situation in the last two households seemed fairly good considering the circumstances. The older woman felt that she had been given a unique chance. The commitment she felt was not one of need or poverty; rather, she would use the opportunity, despite her husband being “lukewarm” to the idea, as she put it. The younger woman felt that her husband was working against her, but to her, the possibilities inherent to labor migration were more important. These spouses seemed to have different interests. Several women emphasize that they were tired of “the new poverty,” while their husbands, they said, did not stress this, perhaps related to the gendered division of rights and duties in the households.

The spouses seemed to be connected to their home place in different ways. The older woman says: “My husband loves hunting and fishing; he will never leave Teriberka.” A desire for economic independence, emotional relations, and different dreams and goals may be part of the decisions. The household is involved in these spouses’ assessments, but their deliberations are also colored by the individual household members, possible power relations, and conflicts (Phizacklea, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Hondagneu-Sotelo studied Mexican immigrants in California and showed that the household is important but must be unravelled (1994). The decisions to migrate in these Teriberka families seemed not to be questions of the households allocating their resources and spreading the risk of migration, as Massey et al. (2002, p.11) suggest. For many of the women with children, the children’s age and care situation were important, but these commitments hardly prevented them from labor migration. Rather, they

involved mothers and sisters to migrate if the father was not available. Relations outside the household, typically kinswomen, were of importance to their migration decisions. In analyzing this particular migration experience, it is thus necessary to (1) distinguish between household members, (2) ask whether and how the household acts like a unit, and (3) include the organization of everyday life: the tasks and teams and the intra- and inter-household relations involved therein.

Some of the migrants interviewed emphasised the spirit of adventure and their explicit wish to travel. As the male migrant mentioned above explains: "I was lucky. I was at the right spot at the right time." He is married and has a wife and children in Murmansk. He used to be a sailor on a vessel registered in Teriberka and made good money, but he thought that work in Båtsfjord was better, cleaner, and safer: "This could be a useful experience, too, you know, with all the talk about the Barents Euro Arctic Region," he says, thereby also addressing the geopolitical situation. Hondagneu-Sotelo has tried to show how coincidence plays an important role in migration narratives (1994). Coincidences are not random, though. The young man in question was employed by the Russian shipping magnate involved in the Teriberka-Båtsfjord company and was known to be reliable, and the employers needed to make up the numbers. This man felt lucky. He and some of the other migrants emphasized their enthusiasm. Worry and fear did not characterize them.

Another female migrant had lived for five years in Teriberka before the offer of labor migration arrived; she compared the temporary migration to Båtsfjord with moving to inland Russia. To her, the salaries and geographical proximity were good arguments in favour of temporary international migration since the internal migration in Russia she would have preferred was harder to bring about.

These migrants may be considered a group in the sense that they actually migrate, but the evaluations they made, the situations they experienced, and what they wanted to accomplish differ. The three candidates interviewed that were invited to go to Båtsfjord but chose not to also differ. One emphasizes her lack of spirit of adventure, a fear of the unknown, and a job that kept her at home: "This just wasn't for me; why would I go? I was fine here." Childcare, her partner, or other commitments were not what kept her from travelling. Another said that she could not go to Båtsfjord because of her family situation but also that "it wasn't necessary, either; after all, I didn't want to leave my family and Teriberka - I like it here. Of course, if I had been obliged to, things would probably have worked out somehow."

In industrial countries, adventure and the wish for new experiences are vital factors in explaining migration (Boyle & Halfacree, 1998). I argue that this is undercommunicated in studies of migration from the south to the north, from developing country to developed country, or from east to west. Economic factors, understood as compelling structural forces, tend to explain such migration regardless of the individual's position in the economic system. The public debates about immigration are, however, often characterized by migrants being *either* poor, "worthy," and granted legitimate protection *or* fortune hunters to be kept away (Brochmann 2004). Situations in which migrants are quite well off, from a "poor" country, and adventurous are rarely described and analyzed. Even if Eastern European labor migrants before the 2008 recession were viewed as a necessary and desirable workforce, this polarized framework prevents that "wanderlust," the spirit of adventure, and economic interests being explored. *Making* the migrants from Teriberka merely economic migrants, denying their adventurousness, also blurs the understanding of their strategies and perspectives and thereby, the ability to be treated as

subjects in their own lives. Hence, we fail to see the migrants' role in the system of migrant labor, implied in Burowoy's statement that migrants *are* "powerless" (1976).

Spivak (1988) and Ramamurthy (2003), among others, have shown that Western feminist analysis has contributed to marginalizing non-white, non-middle class women. This study shows that this sort of marginalization can also occur in migration studies in three ways: First, migrants may be marginalized by being placed in the positions of victims and being stripped of agency. Second, they may be portrayed as a uniform group acting in concert, while individual variation is silenced. Third, individual migrants' reasoning may be portrayed as one-dimensional and solely economic and strategic. These three portrayals simplify the phenomenon of migration and leave no room for ambivalence and perplexity, processes integral to the migrants being made the "other" (Said 1978).

### Conclusion

Analyzing the recruitment of a Russian labor force from Teriberka to a fish-processing plant in Båtsfjord contributes to an understanding of how a new Russian-Norwegian migration came about through the migration organization. It has shown that the migration network and organization make migration possible by facilitating migration channels for interested and available workers. The migration organization draws on cultural understandings and social structures from both places and, combined with the immigration regulations, this constructs the labor force as a particular group of Russian labor migrants.

During the recruitment process, women were constructed as suitable for employment and for migration at the expense of men. This explains the feminization of this migration and is based on a gendered system of meanings, showing that there is a feminization of labor migration also outside the demanding jobs with little security. The business managers' social roles and practices are also gendered. It is further demonstrated how gender interacts with age, marital status, nationality, sexuality, and motherhood in the construction of the migrant labor force. This, in combination with education being valued, qualified the workers from Teriberka for migration. However, in concert with the immigration regulations, it relegated them to non-skilled, subordinate positions in the industry, thus temporarily de-qualifying them as a national group. These cultural constructs are both naturalized and flexible, and, as such, also durable.

Economy is important in the migrants' decision-making, but informal relations, exchange, and self-support have to be included in the analysis in order to understand how people perceive their living conditions and the migration possibilities offered. Migration assessments are made inside and outside of households, but they are not necessarily made by the household acting as a unit. Hence, unpacking the concepts of the household, sorting out household members' intra- and inter-households relations, and tasks and teams is necessary. Focus should also be placed on the migrants' practices and narratives about the emphasized element of adventure as important, ambivalence, and the perplexity involved, as well as on variation among migrants. These aspects are needed in a study of labor migration to see migrants' agency in the migration process.

### Epilogue

In 2002 –2003, there were just a few workers from Teriberka left in Båtsfjord. The Norwegian fisheries industry was experiencing difficulties, and several Båtsfjord companies went

bankrupt. The workers from Teriberka were laid off according to the Health and Safety at Work Act, and the need for foreign labor ceased. Apart from two women who got married in Båtsfjord, all labor migrants returned to Teriberka. A few years later the fish processing industry was blossoming again and new migration organizations and processes occurred.

(1) Draws on a project by the Norwegian Research Council, the Regional Development Program 1998-2003.

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<sup>1</sup> The concepts are geographical not analytical.

<sup>2</sup> The changing migration regulations following the expansion of the EU (2004) led to considerable migration flows from Eastern to Western Europe, but the first decade from 1991 saw few migrants.



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