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"WHEN YOUR CHILD GETS EASY MONEY, IT FEELS GOOD BEING A MOM"

Thai migrations and wild-berry picking in northern Sweden as a form of social reproduction

Abstract

The present article explores 'free' wild-berry picking in Sweden, as experienced by Thai migrants. Thai women with permanent residence permits in Sweden pick and sell wild berries to earn extra income during the summer holidays. They also invite seasonal migrants who provide the wild-berry industry with berries, but who have no formal employment. This private form of organising berry picking can be understood as a strategy, in that women with heavy social and financial responsibilities have found a way of maintaining the social reproduction of their Thai families and helping them earn important additional incomes.

Keywords

migrant labour • wild-berry industry • gender • social reproduction • Thailand

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Introduction

My intention in the present article is to analyse migration between rural Thailand and rural Sweden in relation to wild-berry picking. I argue that this type of migration can be understood as a way of negotiating scarce livelihood opportunities in Thailand, and that Thai women in Sweden organise 'free' wild-berry picking as a way to maintain the social reproduction of their families across vast geographical distances. I analyse the narratives of Thai women who live permanently in Sweden and who both take part in and organise 'free' wild-berry picking with visiting Thai family members. For these women, organising berry picking is a way of maintaining social relations and helping the family earn important additional incomes. In the women's life stories, circular labour migration is a norm in their natal regions and something they have experience of in the Thai context. Their decision to migrate to Sweden can thus be seen as an extension, or internationalisation, of their circular migration strategy in Thailand. In the women's narratives, internal migration from northern/northeastern Thailand to the Bangkok region and international migration to northern Sweden with a Swedish man are different expressions of the same effort: improving their livelihood and creating a future for themselves and their children.

I contribute to the emerging field of research on migration to the wild-berry industry in the Nordic context (i.e. Eriksson & Tollefsen 2013; Hedberg 2013; Jonsson & Uddstål 2002; LO 2013; Rantanen & Valkonen 2011; Richards & Saastamoinen 2010; Sténs & Sandström 2013; Woolfson *et al*. 2011; Woolfson *et al.* 2014) by analysing 'free' wild-berry picking and the organisation thereof as an expression of social reproduction (Bakker & Silvey 2008; Katz 2001; Kofman 2012; Kofman 2014). The production of goods and services, such as berry picking which is the very basis of the wild-berry industry, and the social reproduction of family life are two parts of the same globalised process. By inviting relatives to pick and sell wild berries in Sweden, these Thai women simultaneously supply the wild-berry industry with the valuable raw material it needs and fulfil their gendered reproductive responsibility.

The people I have met while collecting data are so-called 'free' berry pickers who supply both the Swedish wild-berry industry and private consumers with berries. 'Free' pickers are characterised by the fact that they pick berries during their leisure time and sell their harvest either to berry stations or private consumers. They thus perform a labour activity, but lack formal employment as berry pickers, and in this respect they belong to a different category compared with contracted workers employed by staffing companies who work for Swedish berry companies. In Sweden, the Swedish Right to Public Access (Sténs & Sandström 2013) makes it permissible to pick and sell berries equivalent to a value of 12,500 SEK tax free, and this right applies to Swedes and foreigners alike. In my case, the 'free' pickers are Thai women who have permanent residence permits in Sweden, which they have obtained based on their relations to Swedish men, and Thai citizens who come to Sweden on visit or tourist visas during the berry season on invitation of the women who live in Sweden permanently. The women and the seasonal migrants in my research are close relatives. The seasonal migrants are usually siblings/children/nieces/nephews or cousins who come to stay and work with their sisters/mothers/aunts/cousins during the summer

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months every year. Below, I present the narratives of some of the women who live permanently in Sweden.

My analysis of Thai migrations to the Swedish wild-berry forests builds on perspectives that emphasise how international labour migrations form part of larger social, economic and political contexts, meaning that these migrations have particular geographies, durations and scales (Castles & Miller 2009; de Haas 2005; Sassen 2000). Although migration dynamics have multiple causes and ramifications and cannot be generalised, it is possible to make sense of how and why migration occurs 'in and across social, economic and political spaces with particular reasons and with particular outcomes' (Rigg 2007: 164). Geo-political orders, such as the global north-south dimension, shape conditions for transnational migrations, where social networks and institutions are central in determining who migrates, for how long and between which places (Basch *et al.* 1994; Faist 2000; Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992). Economically induced labour migration, for example, cannot be separated from a global system of uneven capitalist development, economic restructurings and the international division of labour (Davies 2007). Further, structural gender inequalities also shape processes of economic globalisation and migration patterns.

Feminist geographers (Nagar *et al.* 2002) argue that informal spheres such as households, communities and transnational migrant networks are key sites for understanding globalising processes. The different social locations of people shape experiences of globalisation; it is the relations between high-skilled work, formal and informal economies, production and caring work and globalised and marginalised places that have allowed global capitalism to assume its contemporary forms. A grounded feminist approach thus starts from the lives of a variety of people with diverse relationships to globalisation, including unorganised workers, undocumented immigrants and people who are not involved in political movements (Nagar *et al.* 2002). Therefore, while not neglecting the importance of macro-scale dynamics, I highlight how social constructions of gender shape migration patterns in a particular migration system between the north/northeast provinces in Thailand and northern Sweden. A process-oriented understanding of gender and migration also has implications for how we understand regional development and policy intervention (Nagar *et al.* 2002; Silvey & Lawson 1999; Skeldon 2006).

I begin the article by presenting the context of wild-berry migration to the Nordic countries. Then, I give an overview of the economic restructuring in Thailand and the patterns of mobility and migration that have emerged between Sweden and Thailand. Many Thai migrants in Sweden originate from the north/northeastern provinces in Thailand, where circular migration for labour purposes is imperative to making a living. Further, I argue that it is relevant to analyse 'free' wild-berry migration as an expression of Thai women's gendered reproductive responsibilities. I base this argument on a feminist use of the concept of social reproduction. Finally, in two empirical sections, I analyse the women's circular labour migration in Thailand, their permanent migration to Sweden and subsequent organisation of wild-berry picking, respectively.

The context of wild-berry migration to the Nordic countries

During the past two decades, an organised large-scale recruitment of seasonal labour from countries both inside and outside the EU/EES area to the Swedish wild-berry industry has been established. The wild-berry industry has expanded owing to the importation of a migrant workforce, consisting of around 5,000–8,000 yearly contracted workers from outside the EU/EES area, in addition to thousands of 'free' pickers from different countries who travel as EU citizens and/or on tourist visas to pick berries without formal work contracts. The latter group arrives as a result of both the organised and non-organised recruitment of migrant workers. A large majority of the labour force comes from Asia and Eastern Europe, with Thai migrant berry pickers constituting the largest group of seasonal workers (Swedish Migration Board 2014).

Studies on migrant labour in the Swedish wild-berry industry are part of a growing field of research on migration and labour market restructuring examining contemporary globalising labour markets characterised by increased migrant circularity, insecure and short-term employment, new forms of contract labourers and undocumented migrant workers, predominantly in economic sectors such as service, construction and agriculture (Castles & Miller 2009; Delgado Wise & Cypher 2007; Neergaard 2009; Rye & Andrzejewska 2010; Schierup *et al.* 2006; Widding Isaksen 2010; Woolfson *et al.* 2014). The wild-berry industry is a business area in which both recruitment processes and regulatory frameworks are adjusting to new markets and new competitive conditions (Eriksson & Tollefsen 2013; LO 2013; NAT 2009; Wingborg 2011; Wingborg & Fredén 2011; Woolfson *et al.* 2011). Following its systematic incorporation of a large migrant labour force, the wild-berry industry in Sweden and Finland has grown into an important economic sector (Jonsson & Uddstål 2002; Rantanen & Valkonen 2011; Richards & Saastamoinen 2010; SIK 2010), linked to a global commodity chain (Hedberg 2013). The berry industry's buyer-driven value chain is dominated by a few major lead firms operating on a global market, in which Nordic berries are exported to China and Japan for processing into high-value cosmetic and health products.

Wild-berry picking is an integrated part of the Nordic economic and cultural heritage (Pouta, *et al.* 2006). For generations, people in rural areas, mostly women, have been picking berries for subsistence, but also to earn extra income. Until the 1970s, picking berries and mushrooms for household consumption was commonplace in most parts of rural Sweden, but between 1977 and 1997 the volume of berries picked by Swedish households declined by two-thirds (Lindhagen & Hörnsten 2000). In the early 1990s, people from Poland, Russia and the Baltic states began travelling to Sweden to pick and sell berries. Subsequently, in the early 2000s, the economic value of nutritious Nordic wild berries increased on the global market, while at the same time the opportunity for larger-scale recruitment of Asian migrant workers laid the ground for a new expansive phase in the industry (Wingborg 2012; Wingborg 2013).

Following the introduction of the new migration legislation in 2008 (2009–2012), close to 70,000 temporary work permits were issued, of which 18,610 were granted to Thai citizens (LO 2013). The EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007 allowed former berry pickers from Eastern Europe to seek better-paid jobs in other EU countries, which propelled massive recruitment of Asian workers by berry companies to the Nordic berry industry. Labour rights in the industry have been weakly protected, with repeated reports of abuses, including human trafficking (NAT 2009; Wingborg 2011; Woolfson *et al.*, 2011). Schierup & Ålund (2011: 60) called the past decade of Swedish labour migration policy 'a new business-friendly "guest-worker" system', and the 2008 law on labour migration has been strongly debated and partly reformed over time (LO 2013). Of the 18,610 temporary work permits granted to Thai citizens between 2009 and 2012, almost 90% were granted to male workers, indicating the gendered character

of this migration (LO 2013). While male Thai seasonal migrants constitute the core workforce in the expanding business sector of wild berries in the Nordic countries, Thai women now constitute the largest group of foreign-born women living permanently in rural Sweden (Haandrikman 2014; Webster & Haandrikman 2014). This phenomenon is related to the growth in international tourism and the globalised marriage market (Hedberg & Haandrikman 2014; Hedman *et al*. 2009; Niedomysl *et al*. 2010; Plambech 2008).

Economic restructuring and patterns of Thai-Swedish mobility and migration

Since the 1960s, Thailand has reoriented its economy from being based on agriculture to production for export and the earning of foreign currency to allow import (Rigg 2004). Expansion of the international tourism sector has been an important strategy in this effort. Close to 400,000 Swedes travel to Thailand for holiday purposes every year. According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (2013), a total of 364,681 Swedes visited Thailand in 2012. During the past few decades, Thailand has become one of the most important tourism destinations for Swedish people. Sweden is among the top five European senders of tourists to Thailand, along with Russia, the UK, Germany and France, which is notable considering Sweden's relatively small population. The massive expansion of tourism and business travel between Stockholm and Bangkok has provided for frequent flight connections, which in turn are used by the comparatively small number of Thai people who travel in the opposite direction to work in the wild-berry industry.

While Thailand's economic development from the 1960s onwards reduced the incidence of poverty for at least three decades in the nation as a whole, it also increased the economic disparity between the haves and the have-nots – between the urban and the rural (Aoyama 2009: 66; Gullette 2014; Pholphirul 2012). The north/northeastern provinces have lagged behind in the process of economic readjustment (Gullette 2014); the agricultural sector is under pressure, and the farmland frontier was reached in the mid-1980s (Rigg & Salamanca 2011). The regional underdevelopment has thus fuelled circular migration streams, both nationally and internationally, in order to find work and to be able to remit money to family members left behind (Rigg 2004). Since 1975, Thailand has exported almost four million workers to fishing industries and the construction sector in other ASEAN countries as well as to the Middle East. Ninety percent of these workers are men and the majority are labourers and farmers from poor villages in the northeast of Thailand (Jones & Pardthaisong 1999; NAT 2009: 9). Thai migrants to Sweden thus continue a historical trajectory of circular migration from this area. The berry season in Sweden fits well with the rice-growing cycle, in the sense that the berries in Sweden are ready to harvest during the period between sowing and harvesting rice in northeastern Thailand.

Women from the northern provinces of Thailand have frequently migrated to the manufacturing zones around Bangkok, or to work in the tourist industry in the south (Angeles & Sunanta 2009; Mills 1997) as was the case with the women in my data. Meeting and forming a relationship with a Western man may also be seen as an attempt by women from the northeast to transcend limited opportunities for social upward mobility (Sunanta & Angeles 2013). Aoyama (2009: 46) suggests that any attempt at understanding Thai women's relationships with foreign men requires an understanding of gender relations in the Thai context. It is necessary to look at how women's social positions are constructed in relation to men and their gendered roles as husbands, fathers, brothers and sons. In their research on Thai-Western marriages, Angeles & Sunanta (2009) assert that in the northeast, daughters' duties extend beyond the family to the community. They show how women who have married and migrated internationally with Western men, by sending remittances, assume a huge responsibility for their natal communities. In fulfilling their gendered roles as nurturers of the family and community, they bypass the nation-state's agencies and institutions, which have failed to address their natal regions' disadvantaged economic position in Thailand (Angeles & Sunanta 2009: 555; Suksomboon 2008).

Methodology

The empirical data in the present article were collected in rural villages in the province of Västerbotten in northern Sweden between May and September 2014, using the qualitative techniques participant observation, photo documentation and in-depth interviews. Respondents include Thai women who live permanently in Sweden and their relatives who come seasonally to pick berries. Respondents were recruited using a snowball sampling procedure. The interviews covered topics such as life in Thailand prior to migration, the decision to migrate and experience of migration between Thailand and Sweden, contact with and care for family members in Thailand and in Sweden, the meanings of wild-berry picking, future plans and gendered aspects of Thai migration to Sweden. After the interviews, I kept in touch with the respondents via telephone calls, text messages and visits. When the women's relatives arrived in Sweden, they agreed to let me and a professional photographer join them in the berry forest for participant observation, photo documentation and further interviews. Although the article is based on data collected in this manner among a total of 17 people, below I only cite women who live permanently in Sweden.

In summary, data collection has taken place in a step-by-step manner on several occasions, roughly according to the following routine: First, I interviewed a Thai woman who lives permanently in Sweden. I then met her a second time to discuss whether I could observe berry picking in the forest. The third time we met, participant observation and photo documentation took place during a day in the forest together with her and her relatives, the seasonal migrants, from Thailand. During the fourth visit, we discussed the developed photographs, and when we met for the fifth time I conducted an interview with her relative/s from Thailand, an interview in which she served as interpreter. With this arrangement, the interview situation resembled a group interview in which the participants discussed among themselves and took turns answering my questions. The atmosphere was relaxed and they had more control over the conversation than I had. The repeated meetings have allowed me to gain a deeper and more complex understanding of Thai migrants and the content and meanings of 'free' wild-berry picking.

Gender, migration and social reproduction

Grounded in Thai women's narratives, I understand their organising of 'free' wild-berry picking in Sweden as a way of maintaining their socioeconomic responsibilities for family members left behind in Thailand. Feminist migration studies approach spatial mobility as a phenomenon that is interconnected with changes in economic and cultural landscapes, of which mobility is understood to be a constitutive

part (Silvey 2006: 65). Similar to analyses of the substantial number of migrant women who make their living in care labour, I analyse Thai women's migration strategies as an expression of the globalised process of *increasingly privatised social reproduction*. Neoliberal economic policies and migration policies have contributed to shaping global family and care arrangements that are part of a system of macro-structural inequalities (Bakker & Silvey 2008; Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2003).

In global care chains, women from countries in the global south travel abroad to do care labour and to remit money to family members left behind. In the present case, the Thai women in Sweden have different types of jobs, but they invite relatives to work seasonally in the wild-berry industry. In this practice, the women make sure family members themselves earn money; the women would otherwise have been expected to remit in order to fulfil their gendered duties. Although the Thai women in Sweden are not care labourers *per se*, they assume a great social as well as financial responsibility for their families in Thailand, and by inviting family members to work in Sweden they sustain the social reproduction of their families. They thus assume responsibility for financial assistance they cannot expect from the Thai state. Being a daughter and mother from the north/northeast of Thailand means providing for parents and children, and often even for the wider community (Angeles & Sunanta 2009).

As Kofman (2014) points out, the connections and differences between production and reproduction were the topic of lively debate among feminists already in the 1970s, but only recently has the concept of social reproduction been applied by migration researchers (Bakker & Silvey 2008; Kofman 2012; Strauss 2013). Evelyn Nakano Glenn, in her seminal paper, defined feminists' use of social reproduction in terms of […] 'the array of activities and relationships involved in maintaining people both on a daily basis and intergenerationally' (1992: 1). According to Kofman (2014), revisiting the concept of social reproduction may be useful in analysing the complex transfer of migrant labour across the globe and, as a consequence of this, the spatial extension of social reproduction.

Social reproduction is about 'the material social practices through which people reproduce themselves on a daily and generational basis and through which the social relations and material bases of capitalism are renewed' (Katz 2001: 709). It is the 'fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life' (ibid. 711), the biological reproduction of the labour force, both generationally and on a daily basis, through the acquisition and distribution of the means of existence, including food, shelter, clothing and healthcare. Katz argues that social reproduction is a concept that can enable researchers to deal with questions concerning a global and fluidly differentiated labour force, in a time of globalised capitalist production. As stated by Katz, globalisation processes cannot be understood without addressing the restructuring of social reproduction. While geographical boundaries such as national borders are becoming increasingly meaningless for production, people continue to live and work somewhere. In that sense, social reproduction – such as the ways in which family life and income-generating activities are organised – remains essentially place-bound. Below, I show how the north/northeast regions of Thailand are connected to the inland of northern Sweden through both permanent marriage migration and seasonal migration to the wild-berry industry.

Kofman (2012) connects social reproduction and migration by suggesting that the concept enables analyses that link different types of migration such as family migration and labour migration, because as disparate as they may seem, they are in fact oftentimes connected. Further, diverse circuits of migration contribute to different arrangements of social reproduction, which may in turn be initiated by different migratory flows (ibid: 144). As Kofman puts it, bringing together family and labour migration – as I do in my study of Thai women who live permanently in Sweden and invite relatives for seasonal work – renders more complex the chains of care and reproductive labour, for example, owing to the fact that migrants with resources may employ other migrant workers (p. 152). Further, connecting labour and family life may build a more complete picture of the migrant caring subject within a broader perspective of the social reproduction of their own and other families (p. 153). As I will show below, by virtue of their relationship with a Swedish citizen, migrant Thai women can facilitate the entry of children from previous marriages and they can invite family members to earn important complementary incomes in a globalised business sector open to anyone willing to perform the work required. In the view of these women, starting a life with a Swedish man can be one of very few available options if they are to maintain reproductive responsibility for children from previous marriages as well as for extended family members in Thailand.

Sustaining a living through circular internal migration in Thailand

As noted, the wild-berry season in Sweden fits well with the agricultural production cycle in Thailand, where the rice is planted in May–June and ready to harvest in November. While the rice is growing on the paddy fields and requires less attention, many farmers migrate to the greater Bangkok area or to tourist areas in southern Thailand in order to earn additional incomes (Angeles & Sunanta 2009; Jones & Pardthaisong 1999; Mills 1997). This is the context in which (circular) labour migration from the northern provinces in Thailand must be understood, according to the women in my research:

> Sunee: After planting the rice they come to Sweden. When they go back, the rice is ready. Then they can harvest. It fits perfectly, but they must have someone looking after [the rice fields] too, in Thailand. There must be water all the time and you have to remove weeds.
> *If they didn't come to Sweden, would they work with something else then?*
> Sunee: They might go to Bangkok to work and then come back.
> *So they have to have a job during that period?*
> Sunee: Yes.

The women have experiences of internal labour migration in Thailand prior to the migration to Sweden. They have migrated from their natal provinces in the north/northeast to work in the construction sector, the manufacturing industry, the tourist sector and the healthcare sector. They have experienced difficulties in managing financially on incomes from agriculture in their hometowns. This has made circular labour migration a norm among young people from the north:

> *What was your life like before you came to Sweden? Did you go to school or did you work?*
> Sunee: I worked. At a factory, as a seamstress.
> *Did you make clothes?*
> Sunee: Yes.
> *Did you work there long?*
> Sunee: Yes, but in different places. First, I worked in Bangkok and then I got married and worked in my hometown, there is a small factory too.

So you were born here [pointing at a map of Thailand] and you went to school here?
Sunee: Yes, for nine years. Then I quit school and went to Bangkok with my cousin. I worked in Bangkok for about five years. Then I got married and moved back to my hometown.

The above narratives correspond with previous literature on the necessity of circular migration between the north/northeast and the southern regions of Thailand (Mills 1997; Rigg 2004). The women's ability to make a living, however, deteriorated drastically when they divorced their Thai husbands, the fathers of their children. The combination of greater responsibility for providing for themselves and their family and a lower income made their life situations almost desperate. They experienced difficulties in managing both productive and reproductive labour, that is, working for an income and simultaneously providing for small children and elderly parents (Bakker & Silvey 2008; Kofman 2012).

The women in my research were thus divorced single mothers prior to meeting their Swedish men and deciding to migrate permanently to Sweden. They narrate about experiences of being spatially separated from their Thai husbands for long periods of time before they were formally divorced. The reasons for these spatial separations were generally that their husbands circulated to the Bangkok region to work, for example, in construction. Due to tensions between the spouses related to an economically difficult situation in the household and the fact that they lived in geographically different parts of the country, they finally got divorced and the women were left with sole responsibility for the children. The women handled this responsibility in different ways.

Sirikit left her children with her parents and migrated, first to Bangkok and then to southern Thailand to work in tourism. She describes labour migration as a necessity and an ongoing tradition in her natal region (e.g. Rigg & Salamanca 2011). Her nieces and nephews have also migrated to Bangkok for work and they remit money to their parents every month. For Sirikit, the migration was a survival strategy because she could not support her children with the available jobs in her village:

> Sirikit: A neighbor saw that I was alone with the children, he wanted my boy to come and live with them. But I said no, I cannot leave my child. I was poor, but still. […] There were no jobs, nothing. I worked as a day laborer, cutting wood, or trees. But it was dry and hard to get work every day. That was when I began going to Bangkok. I worked at construction sites. But I didn't make enough money there either.

She uses the metaphor 'coming to heaven' when she met her Swedish spouse, who proposed that she come and live with him permanently in Sweden. Sunee, who lived and worked in Bangkok at the time of her divorce, returned to her village in the northeast to get help with childcare while taking up a factory job. Dok left her child with her sister and parents and migrated to work in Bangkok. She describes going home to see her child every weekend, which involved a five-hour journey each way.

As the narratives show, it was obviously difficult for the women to combine productive and reproductive labour in Thailand. Having a job and children in the same geographical location was impossible. They depended on their parents for childcare at the same time as they were expected to provide for their parents financially. In this way, the extended family was both a productive and a reproductive unit of mutual dependence (Katz 2001; Nakano Glenn 1992).

Sustaining reproductive responsibilities by inviting relatives to pick wild berries in Sweden

The women, despite having migrated to Sweden, remain socially and economically responsible not only for their own children, for whom they are the sole providers, but also for other family members, including their elderly parents in Thailand. Dok remits money and travels regularly to Thailand to visit her mother and to fulfill her social and economic duties, for example, in relation to family affairs such as marriages or funerals (Angeles & Sunanta 2009; Suksomboon 2008). In her view, there is a distinct difference between Thai families and Swedish families, and her impression is that Swedish families have little or no social interaction:

> Dok: We are Buddhists and if dad or mom dies, or cousins, or if someone is getting married, then we have to go there. Everyone should get together. Buddhists do not do things like they do here in Sweden. Siblings do not meet here. My husband's sister never visits us and he never goes to her place. His mother also lives close, but they don't visit each other or meet to eat. We, all brothers and sisters and cousins, must meet all the time.

Every summer, Dok invites her adult children and nephews to come and pick wild berries in Sweden. Besides the berry picking, they help out in Dok's husband's business. She describes this as a reciprocal and triangular relationship between herself, her Thai children and her Swedish spouse:

> Dok: I need the young people to help out. They can come and get money. And I can get a car that they can use. A little work, a little money. But you know, I work here and I buy food for all the young people, all of them. I have not saved a penny. [...] My husband orders visas and pays the tickets. Everything else, I pay myself. And they help him all the time.

The above narrative is an example of the combination of family and labour migration (Kofman 2012) and the spatial extension of social reproduction (Kofman 2014). What might appear to be 'simply' 'free' wild-berry picking is, in the women's narratives, a complex social and economic arrangement in which the Swedish man needs help (labour) in his business and the Thai woman needs to help her family members financially – a responsibility she has assumed by picking wild berries with them.

Dok keeps returning to the topic of Thai women's great responsibility for family members. She says that all Thai women she knows, who live in Sweden with Swedish men, are divorced and have children from their previous Thai marriages. All these women, albeit to varying degrees, assume this responsibility in a way that would have been very difficult had they stayed in Thailand instead of migrating to Sweden. According to Dok, it is common in Thailand for men to leave sole custody of their children to the mother in the event of a divorce, a claim that is supported by previous research on Thai women's gendered positions (Angeles & Sunanta 2009; Aoyama 2009):

> Dok: In Thailand, the women must take care of the children themselves. Not the man, the man can meet another girl or another woman, but we... All the women you have met have children, we take care of our children. All are working to raise

> money for the children. Not the men. It is not the same as here, where the father must take care of the kids too. But not us.

Sunee has migrated with her young child, who attends school in Sweden. She remits money to her parents in Thailand every month, thus providing economic support that would not have been possible had she chosen to stay in Thailand after her divorce. Her brother visits Sweden every year as a seasonal worker. He helps Sunee's husband in the family business and he picks and sells wild berries at a berry station. In that way, Sunee and her husband help her brother economically, but at the same time his stay in Sweden also enables him to contribute economically to supporting his parents in Thailand. Because Sunee's husband is the financial guarantor for the visa to Sweden, a mutual social and economic productive and reproductive relation is created between different members of the extended Thai-Swedish family (Bakker & Silvey 2008; Katz 2001; Kofman 2014). In Sunee's case, this family consists of her Swedish husband, her child from her previous Thai marriage and her relatives in Thailand who move between Thailand and Sweden to pick wild berries and help out in her husband's business.

Sirikit also helps her children and family members in Thailand by inviting them to Sweden. She has been living in Sweden for 20 years and picks wild berries with her relatives during her summer holiday every year:

> Sirikit: I pick berries during my vacation. Not just for the money. It feels good too. It's fun to pick. Oh, three trays, four trays. After that: oh, money! That's how we Thais think. First I pick cloudberries, then blueberries, then cranberries and mushrooms.
> *You said you've picked berries since you moved to Sweden? How did you get that idea?*
> Sirikit: It was my husband. He said that if I pick berries I can sell them. I was alone in the woods. I picked cranberries. The first day I picked one tray. Then I picked one tray after another until the berries were finished. I got 5000–6000 SEK. Pretty much money.
> *And you have continued every year?*
> Sirikit: Yes. Each year. Then I invited my son to come here too. My son and my sister and my nephew come here, all of them, every year.

One of Sirikit's children still lives in Thailand, while two children migrated with her when she decided to settle permanently in Sweden. By inviting her son to Sweden to pick wild berries during the summer months, she maintains her social and emotional bonds with him while at the same time helping him earn an additional income of major importance to him and his family in Thailand. Again, this is an example of how family and labour migration are connected in an effort to maintain the social reproduction of the family (Kofman 2012):

> Sirikit: He works with agriculture. He is also good at building. He works on building sites. Recently, he built a temple. He gets some income. He cannot make a profit but doesn't go minus. Breaks even. It's a small village. They get jobs like that. Money for food. Last year he came here and he earned pretty good money, he bought a car. When your child can get easy money, then it feels good being a mom.

The women describe wild-berry picking as something positive. In addition to the fact that it brings in important incomes for themselves and their Thai family members, they enjoy spending time in the forest with family and friends. Another aspect is that the women talk about the money they make on wild-berry picking as easy money. Every family has its own special berry sites in the forest, which they keep secret from outsiders and competitors. Sometimes they travel long distances, as far as 300–400 kilometres by car, in order to reach these good berry sites. It is key to find places with an abundance of berries in a limited area to avoid traversing long distances in the forest, but above all to minimise the distance they have to carry the berries from the forest to the car/s. Therefore, the view of berry picking as fun and as bringing in easy money must be understood in relation to their previous work experiences in Thailand, and the fact that they get to spend valuable time with family members while earning important incomes.

Conclusion

My case, involving a recently emerged geography of seasonal Thai migration from the north and northeast regions of Thailand to Västerbotten in northern Sweden, constitutes a particular process in time and space. Thai women in Sweden have found a way to help family members come to Sweden and work in a business sector with free access to a natural resource – wild berries – in a situation of growing demand on the global market. Looking beyond Sweden, the berry pickers belong to a larger group of transnational migrant workers who are becoming integrated into different systems of temporary labour migration. This particular migration system between Sweden and Thailand is thus linked to wider economic, political and policy issues.

The broader geographical pattern of the wild-berry industry and its related international labour migration need to be analysed in a way that takes social constructions of gender relations into consideration (Nagar *et al.* 2002). The gendered character of work and migration and the legacy of circular migration in Thailand are important to understand the emergence and continuity of rural–rural migration between northern Sweden and northeastern Thailand. The particular reasons for and outcomes of the gendered migration system between rural Sweden and rural Thailand can be traced to the gendered mechanisms underlying the initial migration and to intensified economic exchanges between Sweden and Thailand, as well as to neoliberal changes on the Swedish labour market. In a time of globalised capitalist production, this particular migration and work in the berry forests can be seen as an expression of Thai women's ways of upholding the social reproduction of their families across vast geographical distances (Katz 2013; Kofman 2012). It is a process in which households and communities are dependent on women for their survival (Sassen 2000).

The duties of women from the northern provinces of Thailand extend beyond the family to the community, and those who migrate internationally assume far-reaching responsibility for their natal communities. In fulfilling their gendered roles as nurturers of the family and community, they bypass the nation-state's agencies and institutions in Thailand (Angeles & Sunanta 2009; Suksomboon 2008), which constitutes a local expression of the globalised process of increasingly privatised social reproduction (Bakker & Silvey 2008). In my research, being a family is narrated as a relation marked by interdependence and by supporting each other, socially as well as economically. Bringing together family and labour migration, as Kofman (2012) points out, renders a more complex picture of the migrant caring subject. Thus, the different types of migration in this

case, both the women's internal migration for work in Thailand and their permanent migration to Sweden as well as their Thai relatives' seasonal migration to work in the Swedish wild-berry forests, are migrations that are grounded in an economic reality marked by scarcity. The women assume reproductive responsibility through their decision to migrate to Sweden. The migration decision is itself based on calculated consideration aimed at creating a better future for the Thai women themselves and for the people they are responsible for, including their own children and extended family members left behind in Thailand.

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