



The production of the rural landscape and its labour: The development of supply chain capitalism in the Swedish berry industry

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Abstract. Increased commercial interest in wild berries in Northern Sweden's resource periphery has connected places and people to a global berry supply chain that produces goods for world markets. As a part of a wider global food chain, every link in this chain is deeply insecure and partly marked by secrecy and mystification. Contemporary representations of the Norrlandic landscape tend to obscure and hide economic conflicts and power relations connected to resource exploitation and corporate concentration, neglecting workers and local communities. This paper examines how globalization, neoliberal policies and the development of supply chain capitalism drive changes in labour markets and migration policies, which in turn shape/and are shaped by both material and immaterial aspects of the Norrlandic landscape. While many studies of global food chains have focused on abstract patterns of chain governance, business economics and logistics, we analyse the wild berry industry by centring on migrant workers and the production of a distinct spatiality through interconnectedness and historical conjuncture, with a starting point in a particular place in the interior of Norrland. We thereby contribute to a different narrative of the Norrlandic landscape, making visible power and labour relations.

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1. Introduction

Year-to-year variations in yields, concentration of corporate power in key parts of the chain, high turnover of small enterprises/informal actors, price pressures and exceptionally low wages and harsh working conditions define the wild berry industry in Northern Sweden. Northern Sweden or Norrland (Eng. “Northland”) is a sparsely populated territory in the northernmost part of Sweden, comprising 58% of the national territory and much of the nation’s natural resources. Besides being home to valuable natural resources, Northern Sweden is perceived as a remote landscape with inaccessible mountains, endless forests and spectacular Northern Lights and snowfall. Research by Eriksson (2008, 2010) demonstrates that such representations are typically a product of imagination, obscuring our knowledge about not only the past but also the present. Cosgrove (2006) asserts that one of the purposes of representations of landscape is to make a scene appear unworked and fully natural, to ignore the labour and laborers that make up the landscape. Drawing from Don Mitchell’s work on labour struggles in California (Mitchell, 1996, 2012), this paper shows how certain people become ignored in the representations of Norrland, even though their labour has for many years been part of the construction of the Norrland landscape. The focus here lies on the newest group of labour migrants, the berry pickers from Thailand, and why they happen to arrive in Sweden at this particular moment, in this particular place, and in this particular industry. This paper examines how globalization, neoliberal policies and the development of supply chain capitalism drive changes in labour markets and migration policies, which in turn shape/and are shaped by both material and immaterial aspects of the Norrlandic landscape. Moreover, the aim of this paper is to explore the meaning and material functions of rural places and how landscapes are constructed and put to work in order to hide conflicts and power relations from view.

The rationale for analysing Norrland is that this particular territory can be considered as one of the regions in Western Europe that is the least favoured by politicians and investors in the global processes of restructuring, typically suffering from unemployment and population decrease. The largest inflows of people to many of its small communities occur during the summer when seasonal labour migrants, mostly from Thailand (but also Bulgaria, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Poland), travel to the region to pick wild berries. Even though foreign berry pickers have travelled to small communities in Norrland and generated earnings for local businesses since the mid-1980s, the berry pickers have in many cases repeatedly been subjected to scams and racism (Swedwatch, 2011; Eriksson, Tollefsen, 2013). Nonetheless, they have become part of the construction of the Norrland landscape, in both the representational and material aspects of place (Mitchell, 1996). We will address the particularities of Fredrika, a small village located in the midst of the most productive wild berry territory of Sweden, which at the same time is described as one of the most deteriorated municipalities in Sweden. The community holds a special position as the first place to have been developed as a node in a migration network with connections to the berry industry. Hence, the small village plays a crucial role when trying to understand the berry industry and the labour landscape.

We draw from research conducted during a four-year period (Eriksson, 2010; Eriksson, Tollefsen, 2013, 2014; Eriksson et al., 2015), as well as from our own experiences of growing up and picking berries in the very area we study. Hence, this paper is more of a theoretical contribution intending to, by giving examples from the Swedish berry industry, offer an analysis of how we can make sense of uneven geographies and the exploitation of workers today.

2. Analysing labour in the Swedish wild berry industry

The berry industry holds a far-from-peripheral position in the creation of value in this region. Together with Finland, Sweden is the main supplier of wild berries to the world market, but the Swedish industry remains underdeveloped and lacks innovations and efficiency measures. Yet, this does not contradict the fact that the Swedish berry industry is a significant industry shaping the global movement of people. The workers in the industry are, together with IT-technicians from India, the largest group of labour migrants coming to Sweden. This influx of labour migrants and the global character of the industry is an example of how resources and industries of rural areas as much as urban areas, are fully integrated into a global economy which is marked by the multiplication and intensification of international transactions, the stretching of commodity chains, the growing power of multinational corporations, and the dismantling of trade barriers (Woods, 2007). Yet, rural areas are commonly represented as local and described as only the victim of global forces, forces that are seen as abstract and always starting somewhere else (Massey, 2004). Following Massey, we instead recognize the existence of many different globalizations and what Massey and others have called the “coeval multiplicity” and the “radical contemporaneity” of places. Such a relational view of space might help us better understand the dilemma of consumers and producers, grappling with their sense of moral responsibility for distant strangers. Anna Tsing (2009, 2015) shows how responsibility for workers and the control of production have become increasingly challenging. Tsing uses the term “supply-chain capitalism” to address what she considers to be a reorganization of the global economy. As a new global standard, supply-chain capitalism identifies how leading firms around the world outsource everything, particularly what used to be risky: labour recruitment, training and discipline. Tsing argues for the importance of representation and discourse in the capitalist relations that construct, reproduce, or manage *difference* between groups of workers, through her conceptualization of supply chains. Tsing (2000) argues that discourses of “differences” are at the core

of how accumulation of wealth takes place in contemporary society.

In this paper, we centre on the multifaceted labour history of Norrland, by examining how labour has been spatially and socially organized (through struggle) and how these struggles have taken place. We will examine the labour geography of places and thus the production of the morphological and represented landscape (Mitchell, 1996). In doing so, our concern is to understand these processes and their consequences from the standpoint of workers. Ultimately, this may permit us to contribute to an analysis of Norrland as part of a more politically charged regional history. The concept of landscape in human geography has different ontological meanings, from representations of the measurable and tangible, to desired, performed and imagined spaces (see, e.g., Olwig, 2002; Cosgrove, 2006; Mels, Setten, 2007). Landscape as proposed by Mitchell (1996, 2000) is a way of bringing the critical project of “reasserting space”. Mitchell asserts the importance of both examining ideology and its material form, both the material and representational aspects of space, in order to understand the production of difference. In Mitchell’s work on labour migration he shows that landscapes are always sites of struggle and places of resistance, and the reason for making a space into a landscape by those in power is to obstruct that struggle and to make power relations appear “fully natural and timeless” (Mitchell, 2000: 136; see also, e.g., Cosgrove, 2006). The work of people necessarily produces landscapes and transforms the land. However, there is no simple relationship between work and the making of landscapes—these crucially depend on the social organization of labour and the ideology of the labour process (Mitchell, 1996).

The article is structured by themes: The landscape, the industry, and labour. These themes highlight, in different ways, some of the meanings and material functions of rural places in Sweden and the co-constituted processes that hide conflicts and power relations from view; the construction of the Norrland landscape, the development of the berry industry, and the discourses of labour.

We begin our account of the of the Northern Sweden landscape by a historical narrative, describing the history and the special position the Northern Swedish landscape holds in the popular national

imagination. We focus on a particular small community, Fredrika, which struggles with unemployment and depopulation but at the same time receives thousands of labour migrants to the berry industry every year. We then continue the historical analysis by addressing the berry industry as part of the making of uneven geographies. After that, we address the labouring process of this industry, the way in which certain labour becomes ignored and exploited. Our concern is to understand the processes of landscape making and their consequences from the standpoint of migrant workers in the berry industry as well as other people who form part of the ongoing struggle to reproduce, rework and/or resist marginalization and objectification that have structured and made the land. We conclude by suggesting why the landscape of labour has taken the shape it has.

3. The landscape

When parts of Northern Sweden were colonized in the 1600s, the indigenous Sámi population was used as involuntary workforce in the mines and were deprived of their land and livelihoods. The valuable natural resources found in the North were vital for the modernization of the nation. Typically for colonial relations between the core and the periphery, northern Sweden has not seen much of the valuable resources being reinvested in the region; it was rather the centre, urban areas further south that received most of the investments (Müller, 2017; Eriksson, 2010). The great economic expansion, considerable land reclamation, railway constructions, poor working conditions, and the first great strike in the industrial town of Sundsvall in 1879 resulted in national-media debates and representations of Norrland as “a Swedish Klondike” (Sörlin, 1988: 179).

While international migrant workers have yet to be inscribed in histories of labour struggles, the Swedish labour movement has a long history in Norrland, as many famous labour conflicts and strikes have taken place in northern Sweden. However, the depression after World War I had a harmful effect on the industries in Norrland and suddenly the area also had to deal with these prob-

lems. The production of raw materials underwent a structural transformation which dramatically reduced the need for labour in the forestry and mining industries. The urbanization process during the twentieth century resulted in an extensive population decrease in the northern inland of Sweden (Nyström, 1982). The modernization process, including industrialization, urbanization and the decline of agrarian self-sufficiency, had an apparent effect on rural areas in many nations, for instance Italy (e.g., Brunori, Rossi, 2007) and England (Massey, 1984). In Sweden in the middle of the twentieth century, this resulted in unemployment followed by out-migration. However, the widest migratory flows remained within the region and people from the inland areas of Norrland primarily moved to northern urban or semi-urban areas (Håkansson, 2000). As late as in 1938, the population of Norrland was significantly poorer than the rest of the Swedish population (Sörlin, 1988). The physical form and the representations of the Norrland landscape were produced by the ideologies and material conditions of colonization and modernization.

The Swedish welfare state were organized around the ideals of a redistributive policy, with progressive taxation and a reduction of income inequality and poverty achieved in part through the provision of elaborate welfare services (Müller, 2017). Like in almost all advanced and capitalist societies in the 1960s, many regulatory reforms took place in Sweden, with the aim of steadily reducing the significance of private ownership and building toward collective ownership managed by representatives of the workers. But after the economic crisis of the 1990s, demands for market adjustment were heard. One major idea in the regional policy investigation of 2000 was that the policy should support regional diversity and help strengthen regional comparative advantages, and that all parts of the country should contribute to growth. This was a change from a regional policy strategy of “All of Sweden should live” to one of “All of Sweden should provide growth” (Lindström, 2005; Müller, 2017). It was the responsibility of provinces and their population to create the growth and the welfare. Compensation for disadvantaged demographic or geographic structures, as well as for economic restructuring in the global economy, was no longer considered a major task of the regional policy.

Fredrika is a former agriculture and forestry town, colonizers settled in the area in mid-17th century. The town is a typical example of the spatial consequences of divestments and supply-driven policies. It was a regional centre until 1973, seeing the construction of a city hall, school and community centre in the 1950s and 1960s. It was a city that was to link together other smaller cities and towns in the region—based on a rational, modernist approach, as rational and functional as the bee hive's structure of hexagons. Preferably, there was to be a single strong city; this would allow for good service at a reasonable distance for everyone. Most tax money was invested in a place located strategically between a good number of other places.

But already in 1943, Fredrika found itself at the top of its development curve. Nearly 1,900 people lived in the city at that time, whereas today about 300 people live in the area, including the surrounding villages. In the 1950s and 1960s, in step with the building of “folkhemmet”—the People's Home—with the modernization and mechanization of the forestry industry, the population in all of Norrland began decreasing. People lost their jobs, companies and authorities were centralized in cities, and after 1973 Fredrika was no longer a regional centre. Regional politics would compensate the municipalities that lagged behind. There were still researchers and politicians who were convinced that big cities were historical mistakes that had arisen due to an excessively unbridled market, and who regarded cities as unhealthy and harmful. Even into the 1980s, the importance of strengthening the smaller structures of the area system, places like Fredrika, was stressed. However, the theory of the sprawling area structure grew increasingly difficult to implement. After the economic crisis in the 1990s described in previous section, regional campaigns came to concern the creation and reinforcement of urban agglomerations. That is, concentrations of manpower and job opportunities in the big cities, which affected places like Fredrika. Instead of sprawling area structures with small regional centres, now it was the urban agglomerations that were the saviours of Sweden's economy. It was no longer self-evident that all the places that had been established during the colonialization of Norrland would survive (Eriksson, 2010). Drawing from Harvey (2006), among others, this is a consequence of the centralizing log-

ic of capitalism. The logic of these processes gives urban areas advantages when it comes to attracting production and investments; this has become even more evident with increasingly global markets. The circular and cumulative causality within the economy makes wealthy regions wealthier and poor regions poorer (Harvey, 2006). The 1990s mark the Swedish transition from national capitalism to global capitalism, and the Thai berry pickers happened to be, by chance and opportunity, crucial for the berry industry in this transition. They established themselves as informal workers in the berry industry in the 1980s.

The first Thai women arrived to Fredrika in the mid-1980s. They met men at Thai tourist destinations and seized the opportunity to flee their poverty in Thailand. They also made it possible for their families to come for seasonal work in the berry industry, but also to contribute as manpower in Fredrika and other agricultural areas in Northern Sweden. The introduction and presence of Thai women and Thai berry pickers in small communities in Norrland started to alter the landscape, and has brought about new local and global relations and conditions. Norrland has Thai restaurants, take-away establishments and food stalls—not only in major towns but also in small villages in the countryside. Over the past two decades, many Thai have settled in Sweden, and the total number of Thai-born people in Sweden is now nearly 30,000. Most of them are women who have married Swedish men, but there are also Thai men who work in restaurants and other small businesses. These relations are however often saturated by power relations related to gender, race and class. In Sweden, for example, Thai women are often suffering from gendered and ethnic stereotypes of the “prostitute” (Hübinette, Lundström, 2011). Swedish men in this context are defined by class and discourses of obsolete masculinity (Eriksson, 2011).

Today, most of the about 200 people residing in Fredrika are elderly or self-employed. The parsonage is today owned by a Dutch couple, who live in the house and run a shop there. Dutch people have migrated to rural Sweden in small numbers since the 1990s, and in migration research they are called lifestyle migrants as they are privileged, searching for self-fulfilment, and a “good life” (Eimermann, 2017). Different to other life-style migrants, they

rarely see their move to Sweden as a permanent decision (for more on life-style migration to Sweden see Eimermann, 2017). Nonetheless, life-style migration is what the inhabitants in Fredrika now put their hopes to, the selling argument to life-style migrants is nature and silence (Eimermann, 2017; fredrika.se, n.d.). The pastor's office now serves as a shop, its walls papered with images of white moose. The Dutch couple sells baked goods and coffee, t-shirts depicting local scenes and figurines carved in wood. The city's name, "Fredrika", is today associated with the two figurines, which were created by the local association "Fredrikas Framtid" (The Future of Fredrika) you can buy miniature copies from the Dutch couple. However, the name "Fredrika" ought to be associated with the royal who in 1799 with the arrogance and speech of her (colonial) power, changed the city's name from Viska, which derives from the Sami word *vistege* (a place rich in reindeer lichen). The Dutch couple have placed a colourful Thai bike taxi at a crossing close to their shop, they have also started to sell Buddha statues and incense.

These Buddhist items are sold because in 2005 the councillor of Åsele municipality decided to engage in the plans to build the world's northernmost Buddha temple in Fredrika. It was supposed to be a co-founded project between the Åsele municipality and Thailand. The municipality had plans to build a very large conference facility near the temple which would attract large numbers to Fredrika and the Åsele municipality. The temple's location was motivated by Thai monks with the scenery and serenity of the Norrland landscape. There is also a large minority of Thai people living in Sweden and Norrland. But ironically, the temple was planned to be located in an area where labour migrants from Thailand have for decades been systematically exploited as underpaid labour. Many Thai berry pickers have come to these parts of Sweden over the years and ended up in bankruptcy or have been forced to stay illegally in Europe to work in order to pay their debts. These social relations are not visible in the landscape or in the narratives of Swedish-Thai relations. This may also be seen as a disconnection whereby the power geometries and responsibilities between different spaces and places become obscured. To date, only two statues have been erected on the temple mount, as the politi-

cal unrest in Thailand has postponed—and possibly even stopped—the project. Even so, a provisional temple has been established in a red house in town. Thai people, mostly women from all over Norrland, with connections to the berry industry, see to it that the Buddhist monks have food on the table (Eriksson et al., 2015). This has dramatically changed the social relations and practices of Fredrika and altered the material landscape and the landscape representations; from being predominately protestant and white, with visitors (mostly men) arriving to fish and hunt.

The origins of the current seasonal migration from Thailand have to be viewed in relation to the rapid industrial development in that country in recent years, which has led to increased efficiency in agriculture and an uneven geographical development that has hit poor farmers in the periphery of the country especially hard. Internal migration has long been a common response to these processes together with the seasonal nature of rice cultivation in Thailand. Internal migration, especially from the North-eastern and Northern regions to Bangkok and the Central region has supported economic growth in the country by providing labor for construction, manufacturing and services, and by generating remittances to the regions of out-migration (Hugo, Young, 2008). A report from 2014 estimates that 20 per cent of Thai children are not living with their parents, largely because of significant levels of internal migration (Chamaratana et al., 2014). The labor migration to Sweden is most common among poor people in Isan. Sweden is also the country in Europe most Thai people go to in order to work (1). While occupying different positions in the world system, both Isan in Thailand, which is the region most berry pickers come from, and Norrland in Sweden, which most berry pickers arrive to, constitute peripheral regions within their national contexts. Here, Tsing would argue, difference becomes a resource, as supply chains link pockets of political economy and make explicit use of discrepancies, inequalities and trauma. This is part of the social practices that form the landscape and continues to produce and reproduce those self-same social practices (Mitchell, 2002), hence, importantly, the landscape has no agency in itself (Hornborg, 2017).

While the presence of Thai labor is made invisible, so is also the indigenous Sami population

in stories about Fredrika. This is the logic of landscape-making; it involves creating a conflict-free narrative about a place (Mitchell, 2000), in many cases in order to attract attention and new investments and businesses, place marketing becomes a process of landscape making. When it comes to the Fredrikas' website the slogans from a place in desolation are easily recognizable, the slogans attempt to attract residents with "beautiful nature and good connections to larger cities", and when it comes to employment one can read: "But what about a job, you might be wondering? Oh yes, for those who are enterprising and industrious there are jobs! It's just a matter of taking advantage of the opportunities the area offers!" (fredrika.se, n.d.).

It may be in places where the welfare society has receded the most, like Fredrika, that the expectations for people to create their own support and growth are the greatest. David Harvey (2005) asserts that neoliberalism is an inconstant and unstable form of government. He points at how the media and the reigning power structures have contributed to spreading the myth of failed regions, which has paved the way for even more neoliberal reforms. The municipal system of tax distribution, in turn, has entrenched a skewed picture of just where in the country value is created; taxes based on the incomes of those who live in a municipality, rather than on workplaces and economic activity, hide the creation of value in the municipalities where the raw materials, natural resources and power plants are. This is what, among others, Kristina Mattson (2010) and Arne Müller (2017) assert, that the Swedish model, with the tax system's structure, leads to Norrland's contributions to the national economy being systematically made invisible. Northern Sweden has been represented among politicians, in media, and popular culture, as drawing from the reserves and as an "internal spatial other", not really part of the Swedish modern nation (see Eriksson, 2010). And Northern Sweden is both represented as a landscape for resource extraction and nature and recreation (Eriksson, 2010). Particularly the inland areas of northern Sweden struggle to become attractive in the eyes of investors and companies and to keep what is left of job opportunities. At the same time has the demand for Swedish wild berries from the north of Sweden increased. Sweden is now, together with Finland the largest supplier of wild berries to

the world market. The development of the Swedish berry industry into a global industry has received little attention by politicians and lawmakers and it seems as if the supply chain of the industry mainly is channeling the wealth generated by the industry to lead firms, reproducing discrepancies and inequalities. Many analyses, such as world system analysis or the commodity chain analysis, simplify complex and relational circuits of economic activity into static frameworks where consumption is presumed to be located in the "core" while production takes place in the "periphery" (Bair, Werner, 2011). In the case of the berry picking industry, the "core" only possesses the crop; the berries. The bigger part of the production and consumption is done elsewhere, or in the "periphery". Following Bair and Werner (2011) and Tsing (2009) there are always new processes by which regions and places may be connected to, or disconnected from, commodity chains. In Mitchell's research on the Californian landscape, the physical landscape is literarily shaped by the labor migrants into a farming landscape. Thai berry pickers in Sweden are also transforming the landscape, but not by cultivating it, the berries are growing wild in the forest, rather they provide a prerequisite to keep the landscape "as it was". The landscape representations similarly hide the labor, but the representations also hide the realities and consequences of supply chain capitalism.

4. The industry

Even though berries from Northern Sweden are in high demand, the berry industry does not make any notable contribution to Fredrika's economic development when it comes to local job creation (Eriksson, Tollefsen, 2013). Nevertheless, the industry has significantly altered the landscape and how the landscape is represented. To start with, as discussed by Eriksson and Tollefsen (2013), industry requirements and labour struggles among berry pickers have profoundly shaped Sweden's migration policies and the strategies used by different actors. And the material landscape and the representations of landscape have made certain economic structures and industries possible and others not as colonial relations are not just reflected in the landscape, but also

actively incorporated in them. The asymmetrical relations between the people in a place like Fredrika, the landscape, and the exploited labour, marked by ideologies of race and gender, have become obscured and represented as natural and mutual and have become reinvested in neoliberal strategies aiming to attract very different people to the area. The materiality and representations of the landscape and its inhabitants are enmeshed with materiality and representations of the labour migrants and produce real material effects and new geographies (Mitchell, 2002).

Recent trends in natural resource-based industries are, firstly, an almost complete dependence on migrant labour, and secondly, an increased competition for the natural resource, including previously non-commodified natural resources. In the global food industry—with large retailers and merchants as leading companies—there is a strong downward pressure on prices and wages. In processed food with mixed content—for example, in jam and other berry products where the berries are mixed in the processing of the food product—there is no requirement to report origin, which has led to price pressures on both cultivated and wild berries; retailers and merchants are buying from Russia, Ukraine, Poland, China, Chile and other countries. The industry forms part of a trend of extremely low food prices—today the low prices mean that the industry's buyer-driven commodity chain exposes the most brutal forms of labour exploitation, putting pressures on growers, on berry companies and on agricultural producers to keep down production prices, including salaries. Low wages are paid to migrant and undocumented labour force, all in line with an industry that, under fierce competition, is producing industrial food (often of low quality) to compete in selling products in the low-price chains all over the world (Laird et al., 2010; Wolfson et al., 2011). Workers and the environment in the production chain are paying for the actual costs of production—the price to the consumer is not covering these costs.

Asian companies catering to the health-conscious pay good money for the berries, as they need them to develop their products. Good prices on the world market have created conditions for growth, company takeovers and high operating margins for the two largest berry wholesalers, Polarica and the

Nordic Food Group. It is the Nordic Food Group that owns Olle Svensson AB, the company that buys berries in Fredrika and freezes them. The two leading corporations have generally the same turnover, nearly SEK 1,300 million a year; and approximately equally high profit margins, 5–8% of the turnover (Nordic Food Group, 2015; Cervenka, Efendić, 2010). One often hears in the media that the industry wouldn't survive if, for instance, the regular tax and work regulations applied—that the margins are so small. But this refers to the smaller actors further down the value chain, in places like Fredrika (Eriksson, Tollefsen, 2013). This is an industry where things are going brilliantly for the two dominating companies, which should not really be so surprising—the raw material is free, unlike in other primary industries like agriculture, mining and forestry. The system of manpower is “rigged” for the import of cheap migrant work. At the same time, the companies can buy berries directly from “free pickers”—workers without work contracts—without being held responsible as an employer. Additionally, tax pressure is minimal.

The wild berry industry can be broadly placed within the lines of businesses dealing with Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP). NTFP industries worldwide are particularly prone to exploitation of marginalized groups in society (Laird et al., 2010). The forms of exploitation in NTFP industries take place in ways often hidden from public scrutiny and/or attention from protective state agencies, trade unions or human rights organizations. The absence of “conventional” control actors is characteristic of NTFP industries, and paves the way for a multiplicity of other actors and interests to exercise power, not seldom related to illicit economic activities (global examples include logging, land grabbing, over-harvesting, and environmental crimes). Thus, supply chain-sponsored industrial logging produces a patchwork of ruination. This is the kind of opportunity which supply chains seize (Tsing, 2015).

The contemporary figurations of labour are linked to legacies of work and mobility in the peripheral North, in particular the historical patterns of dis/investment and dispossession. Representations of the Swedish rural periphery as backward, with unemployment and out-migration, may obstruct improvements for precarious positions in

the wild berry industry, but also the development of the industry towards a more process-based one. The berry industry can carry associations to a concept within the research world known as the “curse of natural resources” (Boschini et al., 2007). It afflicts nations that, within their territory, have access to natural resources and raw materials that they make a good deal of money on. The theory states that this “abundance” causes a lack of innovations and efficiency measures—the economy stagnates. This can lock regions into dependency and one-sided trading patterns. It is not seldom that the “curse” afflicts developing economies whose economic structures are characterized by their colonial origins and interdependencies. It entails that certain individual actors—who can earn sufficient sums from the direct sale of the natural resource—act in a way that inhibits processing and new innovations. If the profit margins are “enough” at this point, then according to the theory the natural resources have no positive circulation effects on other parts of the economy. Similarly, researchers have studied the conditions under which entrepreneurs in natural resource industries choose between being “producers” and what they call “looters”; the shape of surrounding institutional framework determines whether we can call a natural resource industry “production-friendly” or “looting-friendly”. The social practices form and are formed by the landscape, hence as Mitchell asserts, the landscape is both a “material and representational creation”. Certain geographical configurations of the landscape contribute to the exploitation (Mitchell, 2002: 386).

5. Labour

Berry picking has historically been crucial for local subsistence in Fredrika and other places in Northern Sweden, the Swedish Law on Right of Public Access (2) has contributed to Swedes recreational activities in the forests, picking berries and mushrooms. But it has also provided side-incomes through selling to local buyers, berry driers, jam producers (work performed by women, school children, teenagers, the elderly)—but never before in the form of a social relation of wage labour, formalized in contracts between employer and worker and integrated into

a global commodity chain. Tsing (2015) calls the processes of translation of stuff with other histories and social relations into capitalist wealth as “salvage accumulation”. She argues that the capacity of capitalists to take advantage of non-capitalist labour processes, such as the skills of berry picking, are particularly evident in supply chains.

Twenty-five years ago, the majority of berry pickers arrived from Poland on tourist visas and after 1991 many berry pickers began to arrive from the newly independent Baltic States, the same pickers continued to come back for several years and made friends with the locals. After the EU expansions in 2004 and 2007 many of the former berry pickers from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Poland chose other better-paid industries and branches. With the transition from national to global capitalism, the industry started to suffer from competition from the rest of Europe and needed workers who could work harder for less pay. Swedish customers and consumers of berries have become increasingly aware of the fact that Swedish berries are rarely found in the product they buy, such as jams and lemonade. In recent years, there have been debates about foreign companies that “harvest” berries and instantly transport them to other countries in order to be put in freezers and sold, without benefits for the local or national job market. The future for the Law on Right to Public Access has also been under debate, as companies commodify commodities which are publicly owned on a large-scale (Sténs, Sandström, 2013). As berry-picking has become industrialized, the conditions for migrant workers have worsened.

As already mentioned, the migration network of the berry industry between Sweden and Thailand started in Fredrika, through the invitations from Thai women married to Swedish men. Hence, the first generation of berry-pickers did not need to pay intermediaries and stayed with relatives. The state did not impose taxes on any form of berry picking and did not enforce taxation, such as general payroll taxes, on berry-picking companies. It was also possible to recruit foreign workers without working permits. Hence, the berry-picking industry was not regarded as a “conventional” industry by lawmakers, and work there was not regarded as labour. As the demand for cheap labour within the industry increased, berry picking expanded to also involve

farmers from Thailand without any direct contact to Sweden. These groups needed to pay more for housing and other services and thus earned much less. Since then, many poor farming communities have increased their debts after the involvement in the Swedish berry picking industry. There have been labour law violations every other year, companies and individuals have exploited workers by not paying them enough, or by risking their lives by demanding inhuman working hours, and by offering bad accommodation and vehicles (Swedwatch, 2011; Woolfson et al., 2011; Eriksson, Tollefsen, 2015). Today, approximately 80 percent of the labour force in the berry picking industry consists of seasonal migrant workers coming from Thailand, Vietnam, China and from Eastern European countries such as Poland, Ukraine and Lithuania. A handful of people in Fredrika are involved in the industry during the berry season—they are helping out with logistics and are hired by the bigger companies. The laborers in the Swedish wild forest berry industry have become increasingly racialized and being a non-white migrant worker means, in the Swedish national discourse and labour market practices, being differentiated and subordinated, not really part of the Swedish nation and not fully covered by the Swedish labour laws (Nergaard, 2009; Therborn, 2012; Eriksson, Tollefsen 2013). The berry industry is dependent on these workers, and the industry is not only alienating the workers from their labour, but also the consumer from the products (Moore, 2011).

Berry picking was only recently defined as wage labour in Sweden, within the national discourse of depopulation and job loss in Northern Sweden, the politicians resigned to the demands of the berry industry association to exempt the industry from taxes and employer responsibility (Swedwatch, 2011; Eriksson, Tollefsen, 2013). But in 2005, the berry companies and buyers became employers in a legal sense and the berry companies were thus liable to pay general payment taxes (3). To bypass the law, the berry companies in Sweden hired Asian pickers through recruiting companies based in their home countries or elsewhere. This became more profitable for the companies but it also dramatically changed the character of the Swedish berry industry, not least the scale of operations. Despite the introduction of a system of wage labour in the berry indus-

try, the previous system, with “free pickers” selling berries directly to berry companies on tourist visas (or as residents in Sweden or the EU), was maintained as before. Two systems of work and taxation are thus simultaneously applied in relation to the workforce, which is unique for the berry industry (Swedwatch, 2011).

The process of the transformation of work into a social relation of wage labour (i.e., the way that work becomes a commodity) has been a major theme within the social sciences, especially within Marxist and feminist literature, who have, for instance, analysed women’s unpaid work in relation to wage labour (Tsing, 2000; Acker, 2006). “Work” according to these traditions has an ontological status as the lived, creative experience through which humans create and recreate society and culture. “Labour” on the other hand can be defined as a particular aspect of work, appropriated and controlled in a capitalist social formation

The berry industry appears to be one big tangle of new legislation, company structures, recruiting of manpower, new actors, and conflicts with landowners. There have been reports of trafficking, fraud, false contracts, unreliable middlemen, substandard living conditions, strikes and protest marches. The labour struggles have led to improvements in labour legislation for pickers with a work visa, but at the same time more new examples of criminal behaviour on the employer side (see Eriksson, Tollefsen, 2013, 2015). As previously argued by Eriksson and Tollefsen (2015), the berry industry illustrates the problem with supply chain capitalism, where the legal employer is allowed to be located far away from actual operations, and associated business partners are able to systematically avoid and deny responsibility. Further reinforcing this, work permits since 2008 have been granted on the principle that it is the individual employer’s assessment of the need to recruit labour from a third country that must be the basis for the administration of matters of residence and employment permits. One consequence of the law is that it is now possible to hire labour from third countries when poor working conditions make it impossible to recruit workers from Sweden or the rest of the EU (LO, 2013). The law also stipulates that in order to obtain a work permit, the temporary migrant worker is obliged to stay with the same employer throughout the period in Sweden.

Similarly to the migrant workers in Don Mitchell's study on the making of the California landscape, these workers are expected to contribute to the landscape at the same time as they are exploited by the social practices that form and constitute the landscape. According to political rhetoric, these new regulations were made primarily in order to facilitate employers to attract skilled labour to Sweden, in particular to high-tech growth sectors with labour shortages. The largest group of migrants under the new law has nevertheless been unskilled laborers, coming to the berry industry and to low-wage jobs in urban service, commercial and construction sectors, where there is no labour shortage (LO, 2013). Thus, it is not only the landscape of Northern Sweden that objectifies the laborers and hides conflicts, this is common in the whole of Sweden, a nation typically known for its universal welfare and social inclusion (Pred, 2000; Eriksson, 2010).

6. Concluding remarks: Landscapes of labour

By taking Fredrika as a point of departure, we can show the importance of place and industry-specific patterns in producing and reproducing labour relations. Examples from the wild berry industry depict the consequences of supply chain capitalism in producing and reproducing difference. We can also show how the landscape and landscape representations are altered by the migrant labour, as well as how the representations help to keep the landscape "as it was".

The Thai berry pickers happened to arrive to Fredrika and Sweden at a particular moment when the berry industry needed cheap labour in order to scale-up and respond to the increasing commercial interest in wild berries in the world market for bilberry extract. The two major berry merchants maintained control in order to continue merely selling the berries frozen and unprocessed directly to the Asian market, rather than, for instance, investing in value-added production and/or wild berry research in Sweden. Thus, this migrant labour reproduced the labour landscape and became part of it, the migrants also became part in making new ge-

ographies by their presence and labour. The dialectics of representations as a "spatial internal other" and the materiality of parts of rural Northern Sweden with unemployment and population decrease have allowed berry companies to escape taxes and employer responsibilities. To disregard labour as "wage labour", which has been done by Swedish authorities for many years, is also to ignore the social relations and geographies that are marked by ideologies of race and gender. And to disregard labour as "wage labour" is a way to make exploitation appear natural and mutual, it is a way to produce landscape by those not being exploited, to hide conflicts and power relations from view. Labour in the berry industry has become the exception on the Swedish labour market, it differs from the exploitation in other branches and in other parts of Sweden. As Swedish policies changed from supporting outspread spatial structures to the concentration of people and investments to cities, because of the materiality and the representations of Northern Sweden, the industry never received investments and thus parts of Northern Sweden suffer from the "curse of natural resources". The unregulated industry may be seen as a part of the representations of the Norrland landscape as only nature and as "local" without global social relations. The law-makers' late reactions to the exploitations of migrant workers are also a part of the ideologies of race, gender and class which become part of the landscape. Consequently, space becomes obscured and made into a landscape which may be attractive and compete on a global market by, for instance, the building of a Buddhist temple.

Hence, supply chains, with varying forms of subcontracting and outsourcing, link diverse pockets of political economy, thus channelling wealth to lead firms. Supply chains also scatter solidarities to deepen pockets of difference that can be translated along the supply chain into capital accumulation (Tsing, 2015). Difference becomes a resource, and gaps grow wider. Precarious wealth and precarious poverty thus sit side by side, what reproduces heterogeneity. The commodification of forest berries and labour takes place through integration into a global value chain of dominant merchants and retailers. The emergence of a system of seasonal labour migrants in industrial berry picking is an example of the way that labour markets are increasingly globalizing and different industries are adjust-

ing to this transformation, for instance, through a variety of disciplining techniques and gendered recruitment strategies (Eriksson, Tollefsen, 2013). Contemporary global processes of industrialization in Asia and de-industrialization in the rural periphery of Scandinavia have produced connections and new figurations of labour that tell effective stories about our contemporary world. The “coeval multiplicity” and “radical contemporaneity” (Massey, 2005) of rural–urban changes in Asia and transformations in the peripheries of Sweden link in complex ways the lives of Asian migrant workers to the rural north of Sweden through global production networks and supply chains, and social networks and recruitments by intermediaries. Unequal geographies thus cut through differences beyond, for example, the North and South divide. In consequence, supply chains remake geographies and form landscapes.

The global processes and the social relations between Thailand and Sweden must be understood relationally and situationally in both space and time, and in terms of a variety of spatial scales. Thus, by understanding place as relational, places must be seen as arenas of negotiation; “meeting places”, internally complex and always being negotiated and fought over (Massey, 2005). Massey (2004: 10) asserts that we all are discursively subjected to “a disempowering discourse of the inevitability and omnipotence of globalization”, but that places are not simply subjected to globalization: both the degree of exposure and agency vary between people and places (4).

Notes

(1) However, the size of those migration flows cannot be compared with the ones to other countries in Asia, such as Taiwan and Singapore, and to countries in the Middle East such as Israel and United Arab Emirates (Dubai) (Chamaratana et al., 2014).

(2) The Right of Public Access gives everybody the freedom to roam the Swedish countryside.

(3) The biggest change was the Special Income Tax for Non-residents (SINK), where employ-

ers have to pay a 25 percent tax when employing non-resident workers (Eriksson, Tollefsen, 2013)

(4) This article is part of the 40th issue of *Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series* entitled “Sustainability—differently”, edited by Mirek Dymitrow and Keith Halfacree (Dymitrow, Halfacree, 2018).

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