Thai local brokers in the Swedish berry industry:
Roles and positions across time and space
Acknowledgements

Throughout the process of doing research and writing this thesis, I received support and assistance from many people. To start, I would like to thank my supervisor Associate Professor Charlotta Hedberg for supporting me throughout the process, and her invaluable input and encouragement. I want to thank the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography (SSAG), whose stipend enabled the fieldwork for this thesis. In Thailand, I would have gotten nowhere without the assistance Novalee Branting. Thank you for translating, helping out with the practical challenges of the fieldwork, and all the discussions that resulted from these. I want to thank Irma Olofsson, Johanna Knutson, and an anonymous reviewer for their comments on draft versions. This thesis would never have been written if not for my partner Desirée Enlund, who not only supported me throughout this intense period, but also provided comments and suggestions on this thesis from start to finish.
Abstract

Over the last decade, each year 2500 - 6000 Thai go to Sweden to work as berry pickers during the berry season via a regulated system of temporary work permits. Bangkok-based staffing agencies rely on the networks of local brokers to recruit workers in Thailand’s more peripheral northeastern Isan region, as part of the larger migration industry in Thailand. During the berry season, these local brokers also travel to Sweden and are part of the division of labour. Next to picking berries, their jobs can be cook, camp leader, and driver. Key concerns raised in relation to this seasonal work are precarity and vulnerability to exploitation, resulting from the need to pay high fees to staffing agencies and a piece-rate wage-system.

This thesis aims to analyze roles and positions across time and space of local Thai brokers. It does so by examining how they have come to occupy their current positions, and what their roles are in the recruitment process in Thailand and during the berry season in Sweden. Moreover, it investigates the interlinkages between these two roles, and how differences in remuneration and payments of fees shape precarity at the micro-scale.

Based on the analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted in the Kaeng Khro district in Thailand in March 2019, this study suggests that the local brokers are industry veterans. Moreover, suggests a large degree of variation in size and scope of local brokerage. During the berry season in Sweden, the local brokers tend to occupy positions above the regular berry pickers. Moreover, it is suggested that there is a differentiated precarity within the group of brokers, resulting from differences in the payment of wages and the need to pay fees to staffing agencies.
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1 Introduction

While driving around in the rural villages in the Kaeng Khro district in northeastern Thailand in early March, the impression one gets is that it is a peripheral region that pre-dominantly relies on agriculture. On the main roads, trucks loaded with locally produced sugarcane and tapioca pass you by. Looking out over fields one can see people working, wearing long sleeves, facial protection and hats against the burning sun, as the temperatures gets pushed over 35 degrees Celsius around midday. With most people out working on the fields, the sounds of chickens and roosters occasionally interrupt the villages’ quietness.

Some women are weaving, while a group of men is laying foundations for a soon to be built. Others are resting in the hammocks in the shadows under a house. A discerning viewer might spot moose antlers on the outside walls of some of the house, and wonder how those ended up so far south. But next to such small clues, there is little else suggesting that the inhabitants of these villages are part of an elaborate system of migration for seasonal work in the Nordic wild berry industry, connecting this peripheral region in Thailand to the northern peripheries of Sweden and Finland. These villages are home to local brokers involved in the recruitment process of the berry pickers that work in the Swedish forests in the end of summer. These local brokers are not only part of a larger recruitment chain that facilitates this seasonal migration, but they themselves also migrate, and are part of the division of labour during the berry picking season in Sweden. Yet despite these important double roles of the local brokers, there is only limited research on the recruitment process, their roles and positions in Thailand and Sweden, and how these shape the Swedish berry industry.

From 2009 to 2017, each year 2500 - 6000 Thai received permits to work in Sweden during the berry season (Carmo & Hedberg, 2019). The local brokers are part of a regulated system with temporary permits for seasonal work in the Swedish berry industry (Axelsson & Hedberg, 2018). This specific temporary migration scheme has to be seen against the background of two more general trends. The first is a trend towards an increasing reliance on temporary migrant labour, by many developed countries from the early 2000s onwards, fostered by a policy practice often referred to as circular migration (Castles, 2006; Castles & Ozkul, 2014; Skeldon, 2015; Vertovec, 2006; Wright, Groutsis, & van den Broek, 2017). This circular migration entails a partial easing of restrictive migration policies for selected sectors and categories of labour migrants, while at the same time emphasizing the temporary character and need for eventual return, and limiting the rights of migrants. The second trend is that across many contexts, migrants are disproportionately affected by conditions of precarity, both at work and more general (McDowell, 2013; Schierup, Munck, Likić-Brborić, & Neergaard, 2015; Strauss & Fudge, 2013; Waite, Craig, Lewis, & Skrivankova, 2015).

A central component shaping and being shaped by the migration of Thai berry pickers are the relations between governments on the one hand, and profit-oriented migration intermediaries, such as staffing agencies and local brokers on the other hand. These relations have evolved into a complex multi-level system with public and private actors, stretching across multiple borders and regulatory frameworks (Axelsson & Hedberg, 2018; Hedberg, 2014). Of paramount importance to this system is the employment practice of ‘posted work’, which refers to the condition of workers being formally employed in Thailand via Thai staffing agencies, while the actual work takes place in Sweden (Axelsson & Hedberg, 2018). While
these staffing agencies are mostly Bangkok-based, they rely on networks of local brokers in Thailand’s more rural north-eastern region for recruitment (Carmo & Hedberg, 2019).

Overall, research on the Swedish berry industry and migration has tended to focus more on elements related to the Swedish geographical and institutional context, and has dealt with the context in Thailand to a lesser extent. The overall structure and actors involved in the recruitment chain are part of research by Axelsson and Hedberg (2018), that centers on the regulatory framework and the upper tier actors (Thai state authorities and staffing agencies) in the chain. For one specific staffing agency Hedberg (2014) mapped and analyzed relations that constitute the links between the agency in Bangkok, regional brokers, village brokers, and workers. Carmo and Hedberg (2019) analyze the production of local social inequalities in Thailand as linked to selection criteria for workers, of which the brokers also are part. While this previous research brings part of the recruitment chain into view, the specific roles of brokers in the recruitment processes of different staffing agencies remains understudied.

Overarching concerns about berry pickers’ precarious position, vulnerability to exploitation and human trafficking, poor working conditions, and latent and manifest racism permeates almost all scholarly output (see especially Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2013, 2015; Herzfeld Olsson, 2018; Herzfeld Olsson, Woolfson, & Thörnqvist, 2012; Vanaspong, 2012; Vogiazides & Hedberg, 2013). While there is a large risk of Thai workers being exploited in the Swedish berry industry, this risk is accompanied by possibilities for social upgrading in Thailand (Hedberg, 2013; Kamoltip Kallstrom, 2011). In Sweden, some of the local brokers work as berry pickers, while others have different jobs in the division of labour related to berry picking, such as cook or camp leader. While there is a general understanding of the factors that shape the precarious position of the berry pickers, I seek to explore how differences in precarity are related to different positions in the division of labour in Sweden.

A more complete understanding of the Thai local brokers thus necessitates the inclusion of their roles and positions in both the recruitment chain in Thailand as well as during the berry season in Sweden. To this end, I draw on the concept of spatial divisions of labour by Massey (1995, 2004). Through employing this concept, I seek to analyze these roles and positions via jobs in the recruitment chain in Thailand and in the division of labour in Sweden as part of the larger overall division of labour of the Swedish berry industry that stretches to Thailand, via relations that involve power asymmetries.

Up until recently, the understudied role of intermediaries in constraining and facilitating migration and mobility could be referred to as a “black box” (Lindquist, Xiang, & Yeoh, 2012) and “a gaping theoretical hole” (Hernández-Leon, 2013, p. 24). Emerging and new approaches, under different guises such as migration industries (e.g. Cranston, Schapendonk, & Spaan, 2018; Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg Sørensen, 2013b), migration infrastructure (e.g. Lin, Lindquist, Xiang, & Yeoh, 2017; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014), and migration brokers (Deshingkar, 2018; Lindquist, 2012; Lindquist et al., 2012) aim to remedy this situation. For analyzing the local brokers in the larger recruitment chain, I draw on these approaches.

1.1 Aim and research questions
The aim of this master thesis is to analyze roles and positions across time and space of local Thai brokers. Via a multi-sited approach, it investigates how these roles and positions are part of networks that span
two interrelated spatial-temporal contexts: First, within the broader recruitment chain in Thailand, and second in the division of labour during the berry season in Sweden.

The research questions to be answered to fulfill this aim are the following:

- How have the local brokers come to occupy their current position?
- What are the roles and positions of local brokers in the recruitment process in Thailand?
- What are the roles and positions of those who are local brokers in Thailand in the division of labour during the berry season in Sweden?
- How are these roles and positions related to precarity?
- How are the roles and positions during the berry season in Sweden and the roles and positions as local brokers in Thailand related?

This thesis is structured as follows. This introduction is followed by a theoretical framework in chapter two, which introduces the central concepts employed in this thesis. These concepts are spatial divisions of labour, precarity, and migration, brokerage and migration intermediaries. Chapter three on methodology elaborates on the methodological choices, methods used for the collection and analysis of data, and ethics. Chapter four provides a background to the case of the Swedish berry industry and migrant labour, providing overviews of the historical transitions, the main actors involved in the recruitment chain, and the migration industry in Thailand. The last section of chapter four details the factors that make work in the berry industry highly precarious, but how it also can be seen as a livelihood strategy. Chapter five presents the analysis of the interviews conducted with local brokers in Thailand, zooming in on their histories in the berry industry, their roles and positions in the recruitment process in Thailand as well as during the berry season in Sweden, and how these can be viewed as interrelated and in terms of precarity. Chapter six consists of a summary of the findings as answers to the research questions, and discusses these findings in its broader context.
2 Theoretical framework

This chapter aims to introduce the central concepts that inform this study, and consists of three parts. The first part elaborates on the concept of spatial divisions of labour, and how this concept can assist in understanding the double role of the Thai local brokers for the Swedish berry industry. The second part presents the concept of precarity, in relation work and migration. The third and last part of this theoretical framework deals with the concepts of migration and brokerage, and presents three emerging approaches to migration intermediaries.

2.1 Spatial divisions of labour

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the roles and positions of the local brokers in Thailand and Sweden and how these are related. The local brokers are part of both the recruitment chain in Thailand that supplies seasonal labour to the Swedish berry industry as well as the division of labour during the berry season in Sweden. To analyze these seemingly disparate roles and positions I draw on the concept of spatial divisions of labour.

Central to the concept of spatial divisions of labour are the relations between social classes, aspects of power and control, and how these relate to space, according to Massey (1995, 2004), on whom this section is based. A basic premise of this concept is that society consists of different classes that are defined by relations to each other. These relations are not to be seen only in simple term of capitalists and workers, but also by how different functions in an economy are mutually defined. Thus, what a particular job entails should be seen in relation to other jobs. For example, there can be no manager without workers to manage. Next to this element of mutual definition there is an element related to space. The social relations of production are stretched out over space in myriad ways, different for smaller and larger companies and different production processes, resulting in different spatial structures. Moreover, the mutually defining relations that constitute these spatial structures are unequal, characterized by differences in power, leading to positions of subordination and dominance, and wealth and poverty. The spatial division of labour consists of these interlinked spatial structures. The unequal relations between classes are constitutive of the division of labour in society at large, and these can be analyzed at different scales, from international to local. International spatial structures extend beyond national borders, linking different parts of the globe via relations that involve power asymmetries. In addition, there are different analytical dimensions, including the technical division of labour. The technical divisions of labour refers to how production is carried out through different jobs that consist of different tasks and functions. In this thesis, I use roles and positions as interchangeable with jobs consisting of different tasks and functions.

2.2 Precarity, work, and migration

Precarity can be defined more broadly or more narrowly. The broader definition extends to more general social and economic insecurity beyond remunerated work (Strauss, 2018b). The more narrow definition of precarious employment, according to Strauss (2018b), refers to “uncertainty around continuation of employment (temporary or contract work), the ability to exercise control in the labour process over such aspects as working conditions and the pace of work (linked to the presence or absence of collective representation), the presence and degree of regulatory protections, and sufficiency of income” (p. 487). In relation to paid labour, precarity means an overall increase of insecurity, due to a decline of the
standardized employment relationship (a fixed contract, control of working conditions, union representation, and a secure income). Driving this increasing insecurity in employment is capital’s increased power compared to labour, labour market deregulation, and the increasing use of temporary staffing agencies for the subcontracting of work, which exert a downward pressure on wages and working conditions (Strauss, 2018b; Strauss & Fudge, 2013). While rising precarity is a wider pattern, it especially affects migrants. Precarious work conditions are more widespread at the lower end of the labour market, and in ethnically segmented and polarized labour markets this is where migrants are disproportionately employed (Strauss, 2018b; Strauss & Fudge, 2013).

In addition to migrants overall facing more precarious conditions due to labour market positions, factors related to the migration process itself should also be considered as contributing to precarity, including for labour migration under government sanctioned temporary work schemes (Anderson, 2010; Strauss & McGrath, 2017). A first factor here is that the migration controls inherent to such temporary work schemes typically limit the legal status of migrants compared to regular citizens, for example by tying legal status to particular employers (Anderson, 2010; Strauss & McGrath, 2017). A second factor is that debt incurred to finance the temporary migration can not only aggravate precarious situations, but also lead to situations of unfree labour, as debt exacerbates both relations of dependency as well as power asymmetries between migrant and employer (Platt, Baey, Yeoh, Khoo, & Lam, 2017; Strauss & McGrath, 2017).

If precarity can be understood as a concept to understand structural inequalities, agency can be understood as individual and collective ways aimed at changing social structures (Paret & Gleeson, 2016). On brokerage in relation to migration, Deshingkar (2018) points out two ways in which brokers can be related to the agency of migrants. First, brokers enable migrants to transcend local inequalities by moving away (see also chapter 7 in Castree, Coe, Ward, & Samers, 2004). Second, agency should not be seen in the context of migration as a one-off event, but should be viewed in the longer term, with situations and positions of precarity being able to transform over time.

Precarity and agency can be studied via different approaches. For example, Paret and Gleeson (2016) differentiate between large-scale quantitative migration research on the one hand, and qualitative ethnographic approaches based on interviews “to hone in on the micro-mechanisms that generate and solidify broader patterns of precarity” (p. 278) on the other hand. One specific approach they mention is the industry specific approach, which centers on employment and insecurity in specific sectors. This appears closely related to the following suggestion from the field of labour geography. In a recent review article, Strauss (2018a) highlights the growing research interest in the interconnections between precarity, migrant labour and broader economic restructuring, and one of the suggestions for further research on precarity is on “spatial divisions of labour between precarious and less precarious workers within and between work sites, firms, and sectors” (p. 627, emphasis added).

Via their central role in the organization of migration and mobility, Deshingkar (2018) argues that brokers also contribute to precarisation of migrant workers by enabling their insertion into specific, more precarious positions in ethnically segmented labour markets. Moreover, brokers are involved in the selection of migrant workers based on certain criteria preferred by employers.
2.3 Migration, brokerage and migration intermediaries

Migration involves the movement of people. While migration studies have viewed such movement in terms of both short-term and temporary as well as more long-term and permanent (King, 2012a), the idea of migration as movement followed by permanent settlement has been highly influential over the last two centuries (Skeldon, 2015). This conception has however come under critique from the mobilities paradigm, which argues that there is an inherent assumption of sedentarism in such ideas of migration (King, 2012b). Recent migration scholarship has taken up this challenge and argues that because of increased mobility our contemporary era is characterized by “a great variety of temporary forms of migration”, including temporary migration for work (Skeldon, 2015, pp. 104–105). One particular trend in migration at the beginning the 21st century is “limited temporary and seasonal recruitment schemes” to accommodate the need for low-skilled labour migrants (Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2014, p. 116). Thus, and in line with previous scholarship on the particular movements related to work in the berry industry (e.g. Axelsson & Hedberg, 2018; Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2013, 2018; Hedberg, 2014; Hedberg, Axelsson, & Abella, 2019), despite its shortcomings I call this highly mobile movements across the world migration.

In this context brokerage has become an increasingly important aspect of migration to study, as brokers play a vital role in the movement of people across space. The concept of brokerage has its origins in sociology. In their review of this concept, Stovel and Shaw (2012) define brokerage as “the process of connecting actors in systems of social, economic, or political relations in order to facilitate access to valued resources” (p. 141), and central to brokers are their functions in bridging gaps in social structures and fostering material and immaterial flows. At the most basic level, a broker is an intermediary that links two previously unconnected actors. Moreover, they argue that there are two sides to brokerage: While brokerage can facilitate social, political and economic interactions and progress, it can also worsen social inequalities via the creation of situations of exploitation, abuse of power, the pursuit of personal gain, and corruption. Foundational theory on brokers and brokerage are the triadic relations as developed by Simmel in the 1950s, and the seminal work of Granovetter (1973) work on the bridging functions of weak ties, through which new information flows in social networks. Stovel and Shaw (2012) state that the gains that are commonly associated with the performance of brokerage are the result of information asymmetries and dependencies, which the broker can leverage due to its position in a network, to extract resources from a third party.

As the definition above suggests, brokerage is a highly relevant concept for understanding many aspects and situations in everyday life. This includes brokerage in migration. Brokerage in migration can involve a prospective migrant relying on an intermediary for the connections to state institutions, private companies, and migrant networks, for instance for acquiring legal documents, arranging travel, and access to accommodation and labour markets in the destination country. Brokerage can be performed by many different intermediaries and for different kinds of migration. Intermediaries engaged in brokerage can range from informal smugglers, recruitment agencies, to transnational corporations, non-governmental organizations, and the state itself (Faist, 2014). Brokerage has been essential to organizing labour migration to and from a plethora of different places and different sectors, and for high-as well as low-skilled labour (Abella, 2004; Kuptsch, 2006; Martin, 2017; Martin, Abella, & Kuptsch, 2006; Rodriguez, 2010). Next to labour migration, brokerage also takes place in for instance education migration (Robinson-
Pant & Magyar, 2018; Thieme, 2017) and marriage migration (Bélanger, 2016; Chee, 2012; Constable, 2012). Moreover, the context for brokereage can vary greatly, for instance formal or informal, legal or illegal.

Until recently, the role of intermediaries in organizing migration received scant attention in academic literature (Hernández-Leon, 2013; Lindquist et al., 2012). The emerging literature on migration intermediaries can be seen as both an extension and critique of the dominant paradigm of transnational migration, as well as of studies that focus on migrant networks. The transnational migration paradigm according to King (2012a), has been the dominant approach in studies on international migration since the 1990s. Transnationalism has been defined by Basch, Schiller, and Blanc (2005) “as the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (p.8), emphasizing the transgressing of national borders. While studies of migrant networks go back several decades, these have also increasingly taken a transnational turn (King, 2012b). Such networks are defined by King (2012b) as “sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, non-migrants and former migrants in webs of kinship, friendship and shared origin” (p. 21), that enhance the likelihood of migration via flows of information that diminish the risk and cost of migration. While acknowledging the importance of transnational flows and migrant networks, these new approaches on migration intermediaries depart from these concept by re-focussing the attention on for-profit motives as opposed to the reciprocal relations within networks (Hernández-Leon, 2013), and a “shift of attention away from the migrant towards a system or set of actors that move migrants” (Lindquist et al., 2012, p. 11).

Studies on the role of intermediaries in migration is a relatively new and emerging field. This means the absence of a commonly shared framework for analysis, a high degree of contestation of what should be considered central concepts, as well as how these concepts are defined and relate to each other. One characteristic of this state of the field is that it is difficult to distinguish between different approaches. Illustrative of this are the different terminologies employed to describe and analyze migration intermediaries, which have been described as migration industries (Cranston et al., 2018; Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg Sørensen, 2013b; Salt & Stein, 1997), migration infrastructures (Lin et al., 2017; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014) and migration brokers (Lindquist, 2012; Lindquist et al., 2012; McKeown, 2012). Whether each of these constitute subfield or can be synthesized under one broad approach, as recently suggested by Cranston et al. (2018), remains to be seen. Here I suggest that the three aforementioned terms can also be used to describe three different approaches.

2.3.1 The migration industry approach

The migration industry approach consists of a heterogeneous range of analyses of how migration has become big business. The migration industry is defined by Hernández-Leon (2013) as “the ensemble of entrepreneurs, firms and service which, chiefly motivated by financial gain, facilitate international mobility, settlement and adaptation, as well as communication and resource transfers of migrants and their families across borders” (p. 25). The seminal study by Salt and Stein (1997) argued that there are both legitimate and illegitimate sides to this industry, and continued by focusing on the latter by studying the trafficking. More recently, the edited volume by Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg Sørensen (2013b) illustrates the extremely wide range of different commercially motivated actors in involved in different
forms of migration. These include transnational corporations (TNCs) involved migration control; clandestine actors, which can range from well-organized international crime syndicate to smaller locally based activities, including human smuggling, trafficking, and illegal border crossing; groups driven by a more humanitarian aim instead of profit, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and migrant organizations; and transport companies. This approach deals with how various actors constrain or facilitate distinct forms of migration, such as formalized labour migration, irregular migration and refugees. A central axiom of this approach, according to Cranston et al. (2018), is the counter position of the commercialization migration to reciprocity and solidarity. The main contribution of the migration industry approach is that it enables understanding the local brokers as part of larger industry of actors in the form of a recruitment chain, which this approach suggests are not driven by altruistic motivations but by a search for profit.

From the migration industries literature, the concept of the migration hump can assist in understanding of local brokers. This model, as described by Hernández-Leon (2013), differentiates between four stages in the rise and fall of migratory flows, and relates each of these stages to the different roles and positions of recruiters. During these stages, as shown in figure 1, the migratory flow increases at first, reaches a plateau, and eventually declines. These stages are labelled initiation, takeoff, saturation, and decline. A key questions during the initiation stage, according to Hernández-Leon (2013), is whether the role of recruiters is limited to facilitating transnational mobility or actively involved building the infrastructure. Central to this is the idea of path dependency, meaning that the migration is shaped by decisions that preceded it. Recruiters can provide the impetus the initiate migration by providing social capital, and through their knowledge and infrastructures, the migratory flows can reach the second stage of takeoff. During this stage, the dependence on brokers is lessened, as knowledge spreads via friends and family. This allows recruiters to shift attention from the sending country to the receiving country. The growth of the migratory flow also enables increasing commodification of solidarity, by allowing in-group members to capitalize on their position as members of social networks. During the take-off stage regular business enters the growing market with its own parallel operations. As states responds to the increasing flow with management and control strategies, this provides a further boost to migration intermediaries, especially those engaged in illicit and illegal practices. Sending states can also actively promote migration to mitigate demographic and labour market pressures, and to capture remittances. This can go hand in hand with tolerance of informal practices and partial outsourcing of migration management to private companies. Lastly, the third stage of saturation and the fourth stage of decline can be the result of not only economic and demographic factors, but also political.
2.3.2 The migration infrastructure approach
A second approach advanced to understand the role of migration intermediaries is that of migration infrastructure. This framework draws heavily on the mobility paradigm, according to Lin et al. (2017), for which a key conceptual vantage point is problematizing the dichotomy of movement and fixity. They define infrastructures as “socio-technological platforms for mobility” (p. 167). Elsewhere, Xiang and Lindquist (2014) define migration infrastructure as “the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility” (p. 122). In their view, central to understanding migration as infrastructure is a processual approach to how the distinct operational logics of five dimensions (the commercial, the regulatory, the technological, the humanitarian, and the social) contradict and interact with each other, thereby focusing on the internal drivers of migration infrastructure and the roles of different actors. For Xiang and Lindquist (2014), concrete infrastructural elements brokers engage in are “collecting documents, organizing medical tests, or dealing with pre-departure training” (p. 133). Migration infrastructures, according to Lin et al. (2017), are imbued with a productive power that is generative of (im)mobilities, and when migration is viewed through this lens it becomes a more fluid process, moving beyond a dichotomy between movers and non-movers. Moreover, migration infrastructures can also be seen as hierarchies of power, that through producing differentiated access to opportunities and resources raise issues about stratification in terms of both mobility as well as society as large. A first element of the migration infrastructures approach that is useful for understanding the local brokers is that problematization of movement-fixity can be used as a way to understand the repeated seasonal labour migration as something inherently mobile, defying easy classification as either settlement or sedentarism. A second element is the concrete pointer to see document collection as part of infrastructure. Third, it allows viewing local brokers as gatekeepers to mobility, which both in itself as well as in terms of outcomes shapes inequalities (Carmo & Hedberg, 2019).

2.3.3 The migration brokers approach
A third approach to migration intermediaries can be called migration brokers. This approach is distinct from more policy-oriented approaches to labour brokers, or closely related terms such as recruiters,
headhunters, labour contractors, and so on. Characteristic of such research (e.g. Abella, 2004; Kuptsch, 2006; Martin, 2017) is the view of the broker as using its knowledge, power, and connections to migrant networks, to collect excessive fees from the migrants, often in unregulated and informal settings, which has made labour brokers into a key concern of government policy, to be remedied by government intervention. According to McKeown (2012), the emphasis on the illegal role of migration brokers (i.e. traffickers, smugglers, etc.) has obscured understanding their role in shaping mobility, in part by laws forcing them into illegitimate practices. Moreover, state sanctioned temporary guest workers programmes also obscure the role of brokers because “private recruiters flourish beneath the veneer of guest worker regulation” (p. 44). What distinguishes the migration brokers approach from both the other two migration intermediaries approaches as well as more policy-oriented research on labour brokers, is an ethnographic approach to the individual migrant broker. Via this approach, these studies provide thick descriptions based on case studies, detailing the role of migration brokers in organizing transnational and intra-national migration, as well as the impact of brokerage, in the Global South (Deshingkar, 2018) and Asia (Lindquist, 2012; Lindquist et al., 2012). The focus on migration brokers is put forward by Lindquist et al. (2012) as a way to open what they call “the black box of migration” (p. 7). This entails a shift in focus from migrant networks and migrant experiences to the more narrow methodological starting point that starts from the role brokers in generating mobility, in particular the process of recruitment.

Lindquist et al. (2012) provide several elements that can contribute to the study of local brokers in Thailand. First, Lindquist et al. (2012) defines a broker as “a party who mediates between other parties” (p. 8), and furthermore, that who they are, how they work, and their degree of professionalization can vary greatly. This suggests a need to be sensitive to different modalities of brokerage. A second facet for understanding brokerage is how the identity of brokers is socially constructed. Of particular importance is the observation by Lindquist et al. (2012) that “a broker is not a fixed identity and must be considered in relation to location, time and power” (p. 8). A corollary of this observation is that identities of brokers can differ in trajectories and outcome. In other words, it opens up space for a differentiated understanding of brokers by analyzing how they came to be brokers over historical time, as well as the ways in which their brokerage can involve different positions and roles. Moreover, it means that the roles and positions of brokers should be seen in relation to particular places and spatial-temporal context. These elements are highly relevant to understanding the differences in across space and time for the Thai brokers in this study.

An insight from both the migration infrastructure and the migrant broker approaches is the centrality of migrant brokers in organizing mobility and migration via recruitment and documentation (Lindquist, 2012; Lindquist et al., 2012; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). Moreover, brokers are increasingly involved in migration management, as highlighted by Lindquist et al. (2012), as part of an increasing formalization of migration across Asia, in particular in countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia. In these countries, state-led promotion of labour-export via regulated circular migration is part of development efforts, but these often depend on informal networks of local brokers. Thus, focusing on the recruitment process is a way to problematize the easy dichotomies between victim-perpetrator, formal-informal, altruism-for profit, and also broker-migrant, which Lindquist et al. (2012) argue should be a question of empirics instead of a-priori assumptions. An important case in this respect is the analysis and description by Lindquist (2012) of the networks of informal brokers and sub-brokers in Indonesia involved in the recruitment of migrants.
for overseas work on palm oil plantations and as domestic workers. This ethnographic research details how the increasing formalization of the migration regime led to increase of formal staffing agencies that rely on a delicate informal network of brokers for the recruitment of workers. These informal brokers are often former migrants themselves that are able to use their experience as well as background to provide services as intermediaries.

2.3.4 Migration intermediaries: Shared assumptions

The differences between the approaches of migration industries, migration brokers and migration infrastructures notwithstanding, underlying them are several shared assumptions (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg Sørensen, 2013a; Lin et al., 2017; Lindquist et al., 2012; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). These shared assumptions can be summarized as follows.

The first is that migration is perceived as an increasingly mediated process. Second, that there is an increasing number of non-state actors involved in this process, including illegal smugglers, NGOs, security firms, and labour recruiters. Third, that under the guise of neoliberalism and new public management, states have both outsourced and decentralized significant parts of migration management to private actors, including border control, migrant detention, selection procedures, and visa application processes. Fourth, that in the context of both an increasing formalization of migration regimes and deregulation of labour markets, cheap migrant labour demanded by employers increasingly takes the form of temporary work schemes and circular migration. In short, these assumptions point to a fundamental remaking and increasing complexity of the relations between states, markets and migrants.
3 Methodology and methods

This chapter on methodology consists of three parts. A first part discusses the methodological choice for interviews. The second section on methods zooms in on how data was collected and analyzed. The topic of the third part is ethics, and deals with power asymmetries in this research, and how reflexivity and positionality offer ways to account for how these impact this research. Moreover, the ethics section details how the procedures I followed related to the ethical requirements of privacy and informed consent.

3.1 Methodology

The qualitative methodology for this thesis sprang from both the aim and research questions as well as practical considerations. The aim is to analyze roles and positions across time and space of local Thai brokers in the Swedish berry industry, operationalized through research questions inquiring into their history, and their roles and positions in the recruitment process in Thailand as well as in work during the berry season in Sweden. The qualitative method of interviews was selected several reasons. First, the aim and research questions inquire into the lived experience of the local brokers, data on which would have been difficult to attain via other methods. A high degree of informality that characterized work in the berry industry and the recruitment process made it highly unlikely that such data could be obtained via official sources. Moreover, one of the strengths of interview as a method is to gain access to information that would otherwise be difficult to access, such as individual experiences (Dunn, 2016). Second, via interviews it is possible to gain insight into a diversity of experiences and opinions within a group (Dunn, 2016). And last, the choice for interviews was also given in by practical considerations. There was a time constraint of a one-week period for data collection. While more ethnographic approaches could be used to study local brokers in Thailand and Sweden, one characteristic of such approaches is that these tend to require immersion into a context and observation of what people say and how they act over an extended period of time (Cloke et al., 2004). Questionnaire surveys would be an approach to consider, but would require a large representative sample and a logistical operation deemed not feasible within limited time that was available (Cloke et al., 2004). Contrary to the need for a large group of participants due to the issue of representativeness in quantitative research, sample size is less critical for qualitative research (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2016).

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Data collection

The data collected for this thesis consists of two types. The primary source are semi-structured interviews conducted in the Kaeng Khro district in northeastern Thailand, which is located almost 400 kilometers to the northeast of the capital Bangkok. The sections below provides a motivation for this choice, how the research area was selected, how the interviews were arranged, and problematizes the issue connected issue of language and using an interpreter. These interviews are not isolated from the observations for which the period of these observations is considerably larger than the one week for interviews in Kaeng Khro.

Before this week, as a paid research assistant the same interpreter and me conducted interviews with Thai state officials and staffing agencies in Bangkok for three weeks, and did one day of participatory
observation during a big regional meeting of berry pickers for one staffing in agency in the larger regional city of Khon Kaen. Although the interview data collected during this period is strictly speaking not part of the data analyzed in chapter five, the interviews provided invaluable background information and details, enabling a further contextualization of the narrower interview material gathered in Kaeng Khro. Moreover, they provided important additional information on some of the actors in Thailand on whose role in relation to the berry industry there is only a very limited amount of previous research. Parts of the background section draw on these interviews, and where necessary I have indicated the interview as source material in the text.

3.2.1.1 Selection of the research area

The Thai berry pickers that perform seasonal work in Sweden are pre-dominantly from in the poorer, more peripheral areas in Thailand’s northeastern greater Isan region (Carmo & Hedberg, 2019; Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2013; Hedberg, 2013). The greater Isan region consists of twenty provinces, including the province Chaiyaphum. The selected area for this research, the Kaeng Khro district in northeastern Thailand, is one of the sixteen districts of the Chaiyaphum province.

This geographical delimitation is based the historical origins of the system of seasonal labour, which research by Hedberg (2016) has shown is closely intertwined with the Kaeng Khro district. Her research details the pioneering role played by a women called madam Nroy, who moved from Kaeng Khro to northern Sweden in the mid-1980s to marry a Swedish man. After realizing the economic potential of berry picking for remittances, she started woman inviting family members to come and pick on tourist visa. Via word of mouth this practice proliferated in Kaeng Khro, and the network extended and deepened as some of the Thai women that came to Sweden as berry pickers found Swedish partners as followed in Nroy’s footsteps (see also Carmo & Hedberg, 2019). It seemed plausible to assume that brokerage is positively connected to both proximity to the practice of going to Sweden and how often oneself has experienced this practice, thus acquiring sufficient knowledge to perform brokerage. This suggested a large chance of success in finding local brokers in Kaeng Khro.

3.2.1.2 Semi-structured interviews

The basic premise for doing interviews is that talking to people is a way to gather information. Conducting interviews is a well-established method in a broader repertoire of methods for qualitative research in general (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), and geography in particular (Clifford, French, & Valentine, 2010; Cloke et al., 2004). Semi-structured interviews can be found in the middle of the continuum between relatively structured and relatively unstructured interviews (Brinkmann, 2018). A distinguishing characteristic of semi-structured interviews, according to Brinkmann (2018), is a flexible structure that allows for interviewees the raise issue and queries from their situation and in their own expressions. In addition, such interviews provide more options for the interviewee to engage from different points of view, and enables the interviewer to steer the conversation and focus on topics considered of higher importance or relevance.

The rationale to use semi-structured interviews with an interview guide was given in by several considerations. To start, the guide assisted in keeping track of the broader themes deemed important beforehand while at the same time allowing for divergence from the guide whenever necessary.
Moreover, the ideally preferred option of in-depth, less structured interviews appeared untenable due to issues of language, and the need to rely on the skills of an interpreter. The structure provided by the interview guide was instrumental to allow for sudden shifts during interviews, as well as having a certain degree of stability to allow for a degree of improvisation. The interview guide that formed the basis for the semi-structured interviews can be found in the appendix.

3.2.1.3 Arrangement of interviews
The interviews were conducted in the period of 4 - 8 of March in 2019. Arrangement of the interviews was done via snowballing (Cloke et al., 2004). The research team (consisting of a interpreter, a driver, a guide and myself as interviewer) drove to the selected village, where the interpreter asked people if they knew people who worked as a local broker for the Swedish berry industry. We got directions to a first person, whom we met at his work in the fields, and made an appointment for the interview later that day. After the interview, we asked the interviewee if they could recommend anyone else to be interviewed and received directions and a name. A total of six out the eight interviews conducted resulted from this practice of snowballing via interviewees. For two interviews, I received the contact information via their staffing agency.

In total, twelve people in total were approached and asked to participate. In four instances people declined: Two persons cited reasons of limited time, and one cancelled an appointment due to unexpected illness of a family member. In one instance, an interviewee withdrew consent to participate after the repeated statement for the recording that participation is voluntary and one has the right to withdraw participation at any moment. Out of the eight conducted interviews, seven were recorded. One interviewee did not agree to a recording, but did consent to making detailed notes during the interview.

3.2.1.4 Interviews, language and the role of interpreters
An important issue in cross-cultural research is working with different languages. Here I broadly follow the points raised by Smith (2010) regarding different languages and data collection and fieldwork. These points are the languages being used, working with an interpreter, the translation strategy, and consideration how these factors influence the research and collected data.

The languages used in the fieldwork were Thai and English. Conducting the interviews involved going back-and-forth between questions formulated in English that were translated to Thai, and answers being translated from Thai to English. As pointed out by Smith (2010), such translation is almost never straightforward because it deals with concepts and meanings that are culturally embedded. Further compounding this issue is that the translation does not only take place between two languages, but also needs to take into account and in practice deal with concepts that come from an academic setting and transpose these to the concepts to relatable concept for people with a pre-dominantly rural and agricultural background and little formal education. Moreover, neither the interpreter nor I are native English speakers. The interpreter has bachelor degree in Human Geography, is from a Swedish-Thai background. She has mostly lived in Sweden, and therefore has a good understanding of the Swedish context, but is also knowledgeable about the Thai context.

The translation strategy for the this thesis fieldwork was an extension of the strategy followed for related but separate project fieldwork in the three weeks preceding the thesis fieldwork. This consisted of
interviewing government officials and staffing agencies in Bangkok. This allowed us to discuss the research in more detail. In addition, the surveys used for the project fieldwork contained a large degree similar concepts, which we discussed before, and were then translated to Thai. Furthermore, the interpreter improved these translations through discussing them with native Thai family members, enhancing the validity of the concepts used.

Conveying meaning between a researcher and interviewees involves an inherently active and shaping role, according to Smith (2010). The ability to instantly translate almost word-by-word from one language to another is highly professional skill, which I could not expect my interpreter to have. The process of interpretation often involved an exchange in Thai for clarification and verification. The interpretation tended to consist of a shortened approximation of what was being said, with an inherent element of loss of meaning, and a heightened active role of the interpreter. Discussions afterwards with the interpreter about the interviews, observations during the interviewing, and more general impressions from the fieldwork, enriched the understanding of data from the interviews.

3.2.2 Data analysis
The method selected to analyze the data from the interviews is a thematic analysis. A thematic analysis, as described by Clarke and Braun (2017), starts of by generating and assigning codes to qualitative data, which are the constitutive elements of larger themes. These larger themes in turn provide an interpretive framework. Furthermore, Clarke and Braun (2017) emphasize the fluidity between initial research questions and the process of coding and development of themes. While the initial research questions guide this process, they can be amended if this is deemed necessary.

The analysis of the interview material was done by proceeding through the following steps. The first step was transcribing of the questions and answers in English form the interviews. The second step involved reading through the interviews to acquire a general sense of the main themes. After identifying the main themes, the interviews were then coded with the help of MAXQDA software. This allowed for analyzing those sections of the interviews that were part of similar themes.

An alternative approach to the thematic analysis of interview material is narrative analysis. According to Wiles, Rosenberg, and Kearns (2005), a drawback of thematic analysis compared to the narrative analysis is a loss of meaning, that is the result of analyzing parts of different unique interviews together, instead of analyzing them in the context of each unique interview itself. Their overview of narrative analysis also suggests that language is of critical importance. While language is also of importance for thematic analysis, it appears that narrative analysis is more sensitive to issues related to language. Given the issues described earlier regarding translation and the use of interpreters, pursuing a narrative analysis would seem fraught with unsurmountable difficulties.

3.3 Ethics
Ethical considerations in research refer to what to study, how to study it, the behavior of researchers, how researchers relate to those participating in their research, data collection, analysis, and presentation of results (Dowling, 2016). Critically for qualitative research, this involves interactions between individuals in social settings that are shaped by norms, expectations, and relations of power (Dowling, 2016). While
these elements are important for qualitative research in general, they can take on heightened relevance in the context of cross-cultural research (Clifford et al., 2010; Smith, 2010).

The concept of critical reflexivity refers to a continuous “self-conscious scrutiny of the self as researcher and of the research process” (Dowling, 2016, p. 34) in relation to issues of power and subjectivity. Power is involved different parts of the research process since it is fundamental to social relations, and relations of power as part of social research can take on different forms, according to (Dowling, 2016), which can be reciprocal, asymmetrical, or potentially exploitative. In reciprocal relationships, the social positions between researcher and those researched are similar. Relations between researcher and researched can be asymmetrical. In some cases those being researched can have a higher social position (e.g. the CEO of a multinational), while in other cases the researcher’s larger power can result in a potentially exploitative relationships.

Regarding the larger relations of power, one ethical issue to address is the inherent power asymmetry involving my privileged social position compared to those I interviewed. I am a student in one of the world’s wealthier countries in the global north whom is able to travel without much restriction to do interviews in Thailand. In comparison, the people I interviewed faced much more restrictions, flowing from less access to financial means and restrictions on international mobility imposed by both the Thai and Swedish state. While I did not perceive that this power asymmetry had a direct influence, one possible way in which this could have had an impact is via introducing an element of a need to comply with the requests for an interview. While there is no easy way to avoid this power asymmetry, in this context informed consent acquires extra significance.

The notion of subjectivity refers to how research is shaped by a person’s pre-conceptions, value systems, and their location in space and time. Intersubjectivity refers to how meaning is created via interactions with others (Dowling, 2016). This can for example be via the construction of knowledge through the interaction between researcher and interviewee in an interview (Cloke et al., 2004). Confronting the more subjective element inherent in qualitative research, feminist geographers have developed and rely on the concept of positionality, for which this section draws on Cloke et al. (2004); Mullings (1999); Rose (1997).

The concept of positionality to referers the ways in which the interpretations inherent in both the collection of data as well as analysis of data is shaped by specific attributes of the researcher and their location in space and time. These specific attributes of the interviewer can include gender, class, age, nationality, and ethnic background. Positionality also raises the issue of relations of power between researcher and interviewee, which becomes especially significant when interviews take place in a cross-cultural setting. In such a setting, the attributes of the researcher and how these are perceived can be compounded by complex relations of inequalities and historical legacies, which can influence both the answers provided and access to interviewees and information.

One way I have tried to be reflexive is by clearly indicating the instances where I felt that my positionality came into play. More concretely, while the general atmosphere of the interviews with the local brokers was open, questions related to remuneration for their service as broker appeared comparatively sensitive. One factor I think contributed to this was that being an outsider, I lacked the trust necessary to be able to access this information.
Another issue to reflect upon is the amount of people who declined to participate. Once more being an outsider could have played a part here. While the driving to people’s home and asking them if they want to participate in an interview was the only feasible way for me to conduct interviews within practical constraints, this also involved arriving with a whole team. As described above, in one specific situation an interviewee withdrew its consent given earlier. In part, this could be the result of the interviewee feeling pressured to comply with the request for an interview confronted by a research that all of a sudden shows up at its house.

As Mullings (1999) points out, positionality and power during data collection is markedly different from the analysis, since the analysis consists almost solely of interpretation by the researcher. Furthermore, the method of analysis also matters. As Wiles et al. (2005) argue in their comparison between thematic analysis and narrative analysis, thematic analysis relies to a greater extent on interpretation by the researcher.

Two important more formal requirements in research ethics and guidelines are informed consent and privacy (Cloke et al., 2004; Dowling, 2016). To establish informed consent I followed a similar protocol in each situation. Before commencing the interview, each prospective interviewee was told about the purpose of the research, that their participation was voluntary, that data would be anonymized, and that they are entitled to withdraw participation at any time, also after the interview. Following this oral information, the prospective interviewee was handed two items. First, a small booklet on the berry industry with pictures and writing in English. Second, a letter in Thai introducing the researcher and the research topic. Crucially, both these items also contained contact information of my thesis supervisor, and each responded was explicitly informed of the option to contact the supervisor in case of complaints, or to have their data taken out. After this, each interviewee was asked for permission to record the interview for purpose of making transcriptions for the analysis.

To ensure privacy, the names of the local brokers used in this thesis are fictitious. Moreover, the names of the Thai staffing agencies and Swedish berry companies are omitted, and are replaced by the characteristics necessary for the analysis.
4 Case background: The wild berry industry and migrant labour

This chapter consists of four parts. The first part narrates the historical development of the Swedish wild berry industry and the role of migratory labour as part of two intertwined shifts: A shift towards an increasingly large-scale industry has been accompanied by a shift to nearly total reliance on foreign migrant labour. The second part zooms in on the complex web of relations between numerous public and private actors that are involved in the recruitment of Thai migratory labour that has resulted from these historical developments, stretching across, and sometimes beyond, multiple regulatory regimes. These actors include Thai and Swedish state actors, berry merchants, Swedish berry companies, Thai staffing agencies, regional and local brokers, and the berry pickers. The third part provides a background of the larger migration industry in Thailand of which this smaller recruitment chain is a part. The fourth section focusses on the how work in the berry industry can be seen as both highly precarious and as a livelihood strategy for Thai households.

4.1 A system in transition

The current wild berry commodity chain and the system of seasonal migratory labour for the Swedish berry industry depend on two elements specific to the Nordic context: An abundance in the natural availability of berries, and an exceptional right of public access. This natural resource has become increasingly exploited for commercial gain by private actors, via the employment of large amounts of foreign labour. The specific forms this supply of foreign labour has taken has been shaped by the interaction between changes in government policies and regulations, and responses to these changes by the Swedish wild berry industry.

4.1.1 The wild berry commodity chain

The wild berry industry can be seen as part of what is called Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) (Laird, McLain, & Wynberg, 2010) or non-wood products. According to Forest Europe (2015), the value of non-wood products in Europe is EUR 2.277 million, consisting of EUR 1.659 million in marketed plant products and EUR 618 million marketed animal products. Two factors on which the wild berry industry is premised is an abundant availability of the berries in the wild, and the right to common access. The annual yield of wild berries in Sweden (blueberries and lingonberries) is estimated to be just over 400,000 tons, while a combined total 25,750 tons is picked annually for home-use and commercial harvest (Kettunen et al., 2012). This would mean that around 6 percent of total is picked. Contrary to most countries in the world, where privately owned forests are off limits to the public, the Nordic countries have some of the least restrictive trespassing rights in the world (Ilgunas, 2018). While the majority of forest in Sweden is privately owned, the right of public access (allelmansrätten in Swedish) gives every person (including foreigners) the right to access the forest, irrespective of if it is privately or publicly owned. Not only does it give access for recreational purposes, this access also includes the right to pick berries and mushrooms, and to camp. The only conditions for this right are that one should not loiter or cause damage, and respect the privacy of people living in the area. This allelmansrätten is not enshrined in a specific law, but consists of a combination of indirect regulation and laws, and is a strong tradition stretching back for at least a century, according to Sténs and Sandström (2014). Moreover, attempts to limit this allelmansrätt by asserting stricter private property rights, especially aimed at banning or limiting for-profit use, have been unsuccessful in Swedish parliament and courts. Nevertheless, the exploitation of a freely available wild
resource for corporate gain as in the case the berry industry has triggered new discussions (Ilgunas, 2018; Sténs & Sandström, 2013).

Historically, berry picking was a highly localized affair, done for subsistence purposes and local trading. The transition from a small-scale to a large-scale industry has its roots in the increasing market value and profitability of wild berries (especially wild blueberries), and the globalization of markets of both production and consumption (Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2013; Hedberg, 2013). Wild blueberries, also called bilberries, are distinct from cultivated blueberries due to their high levels of anti-oxidants, and are only found in Scandinavia, Russia and Northern Europe (Hedberg, 2013). Berries from northern Sweden are in especially high demand, because of their higher level of anti-oxidants and vitamins (Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2013). These characteristics have made billberries highly sought after, and after an extractive process that turns the berries into powder they are used as an input for health products manufactured in Asia (Hedberg, 2013). Next to health products, wild berries are also used in the food industry. While Sweden accounted for half the world market the early 2010s (Hedberg, 2013), it has since lost its top status due to competition from Belarus and the Ukraine (Hedberg, 2014). Illustrative of the berry industry’s expansion are the export volumes of billberries: In 2007 Sweden exported 8.000 tons of billberries, and 2005 had a record of 9.500 tons, both up from an export of 6.000 tons in 1996 (Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2013).

While the berry picking historically used to be performed by native Swedes, those days are long gone. The question of labour supply has been of core concern to the Swedish and Finnish berry industry, as documented by Paassilta (2009), viewed by the industry itself as a key barrier to further expansion. Nowadays, nearly all picking for commercial purposes is done by foreign labour. This process started at in the 1980s with the arrival of Polish workers on tourist visas, which stopped when economic conditions in Poland changed for the better (Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2013; Hedberg, 2014). Nowadays, there are two parallel systems of foreign labour, that constitute two different sets of regulatory environments and working conditions.

The first is the regulated system of migratory labour with mainly Thai workers. This regulated system of labour migration grew out of an informal system. Thailand has been an important tourism destination for Sweden (Hedberg, 2016; Sörensson, 2015), which has also led to marriage migration. In the early 1990s, a Thai woman from Kaeng Khro married a Swedish man, saw the opportunity for her family members to supplement their incomes by picking berries in Sweden, and started the practice of inviting them during the berry season on a tourist visa (Hedberg, 2016). This practice spread among Thai women in Sweden, extending from a first generation with direct links to Sweden to a second generation without such links, with numbers of pickers from the rural areas of North-eastern Thailand increasing from the 2000s onwards (Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2013). As will be discussed below, this informal system was transformed into a regulated system of labour migration in during 2007-09.

The second system is not regulated by work permits, and consists of workers from other European countries exercising their right of freedom of movement in the EU, and of Thai that still come to Sweden on tourist visas. A large group of those that come from other European countries to pick berries come from Bulgaria, often with a Roma minority background (Hedberg, 2014; Mešić, 2017). The Thai who still
come to Sweden on a tourist visa can be seen as a continuation of the old informal system (Hedberg, 2014; Sörensson, 2015).

In the industry, the group of intra-EU migrants from Bulgaria was thought to account for roughly the same amount of pickers as via the regulated system (Hedberg, 2014). For the 2017 berry season, Wingborg (2018) estimates a total 2000 unregulated pickers to a total of 3145 regulated berry pickers, with the number of unregulated pickers from Bulgaria and Thailand going down and the number from the Ukraine going up; a similar trend as in 2016. Thus while there are shifts in almost exclusively foreign workforce in the Swedish wild berry industry, the provision of labour from Thailand is of great importance.

4.1.2 Regulatory change & industry response

In the 2000s, changes in taxation and new migration legislation were two developments that diminished the importance of the informal practice based on tourist visas in favor of a regulated system of labour migration. To start with the issue of taxation, as pointed out by Eriksson and Tollefsen (2013, 2018), representations of northern Sweden as a peripheral area have hidden from view important industrial activity that is present, including the labour performed in the berry industry. A corollary of this was that the berry industry did not pay any payroll taxes. Then, the Swedish tax agency in 2005 changed its view on this, and the berry companies and merchants became the legal employers of berry pickers, liable to pay a 25% Special Income Tax for Non-Residents, which prompted employers to shift to the hiring of workers via staffing agencies in Thailand to avoid taxation (Axelsson & Hedberg, 2018; Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2013). This practice of what is called ‘posted work’, in which the legal employer (a Thai staffing agency) is situated in Thailand while the actual work takes place in Sweden under a de facto employer (a Swedish berry company), stretches the employment relation across Sweden and Thailand, and became common practice in the berry industry from 2007 onwards (Axelsson & Hedberg, 2018).

Next to taxation, a second change was the introduction of a New Law on Migration in 2008 by the conservative government. For labour migration, this new law made Sweden into one of the comparatively most open models in the world (Emilsson, Magnusson, Osanami Törngren, & Bevelander, 2014; OECD, 2011). In marked contrast to the situation before, not only did it become much easier to import labour from a third country, but this demand-driven model displaced the central role of the Swedish trade unions by putting employers firmly in control of key aspects of the migration policy, including determining the number of migrant workers needed in a certain company or industry (Emilsson et al., 2014; Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2013; Herzfeld Olsson, 2018). Ten years after the reform, in terms of permits granted Thailand ranks among the top three countries, and is the largest one for permits in agricultural work, mainly for the berry industry (Hemmaty, 2019). A key actor in influencing policy outcomes in line with the interests of the Swedish berry industry was the now-defunct Swedish Forest Berry Association (SBIF), which was instrumental in securing the endorsement by Swedish governmental agencies of the outsourcing of employment to Thailand (Hedberg, 2013), and played a key role in setting up the regulated system (Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2013).

4.1.3 Precarity, exploitation and working conditions

A core issue related to this system of migratory labour is the Thai berry pickers’ highly precarious position, vulnerability to exploitation and human trafficking, and poor working conditions. These pressing issues
have been brought to the fore in reports, academic literature, and media, especially for the seasons from 2009 to 2013, although both degree and frequency of the issues have varied (Axelsson & Hedberg, 2018; Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2015; Hedberg, 2013, 2014; Herzfeld Olsson, 2018; Herzfeld Olsson et al., 2012; Krifors, 2017; Vogiazides & Hedberg, 2013). The most important issues were the risk of indebtedness related to loans taken out to pay the fees to staffing agencies, working weeks in Sweden far exceeding 40 hours, the cost for food and housing in Sweden, low and uncertain wages due to being paid per kilo of berries, and sometimes non-payment of wages. Perhaps one of most publicly visible manifestations in response to one of such issues was the protest organized in 2013 by Thai berry pickers in Sweden’s largest northern city Umeå following non-payment of their wages (Axelsson & Hedberg, 2018; Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2015). The issues regarding working conditions and wages also extend to those whom are considered to the another significant group of foreign workers in the Swedish berry industry: Intra-EU migrants from the Roma minority in Bulgaria (Mešić, 2017; Mešić & Woolfson, 2015). In response to the issue mentioned above, the Swedish authorities sought out new regulations and requirements for the berry industry.

On whether such measures are successful is a contested issue. The stepwise introduction of new financial and legal requirements, as detailed by Axelsson and Hedberg (2018), intended to bring the transnationalized employment relations back into the reach of national level governmental agencies and trade unions. This dependent to a large extent on voluntary actions on behalf of the Swedish berry industry and Thai staffing agencies. Moreover, while they argue there is some improvement in working conditions, there remains ample space for circumvention of regulation. A more positive assessment is the one by Herzfeld Olsson (2018), whom touts the concerted efforts by trade unions and state authorities to curb exploitation in the sector as “fairly successful” (p. 151). While Eriksson and Tollefsen (2015) point to the potential of reasserting union power, they also point to the unions’ intransigence when confronted by the demands and actions of Thai berry pickers, highlighting the role of the berry pickers themselves as well as Thai state actors and NGOs in taking the lead in addressing the wrongs, being tailed by Swedish unions and state agencies.

4.1.4 The intersections of class, gender and race

In the berry industry, asymmetric power relations related to class intersect with those of gender and race. The most obvious manifestation of this is the system of seasonal labour migration itself, which places the Thai berry pickers in highly precarious positions, in part by limiting their rights compared to those of native Swedes and EU-citizens (Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2013, 2015). As shown by Hedberg (2016), both the business side and the labour side of the berry industry have gone through profound changes that show the intersections between race and gender. The system of Thai labour migration was an innovation by Thai female entrepreneurs whom saw a business opportunity, and whom occupied a central position in this informal system. Most of them lost their leading positions and where relegated to secondary role to native Swedish men when the Swedish state set up and delegated a central role to SBIF in managing the new regulated regime of labour migration. On the labour side, the transformation to a large scale industry has also required an increase in the volumes picked, which on average can be 60–80 kilo a day for one berry picker. Work has been redefined as typically male and heavy. While work used to be performed by men
and women, men now make up to 90-95 percent the workforce (Hedberg, 2016). Moreover, the idea that Thai people are naturally apt for berry picking is prevalent among berry industry actors (Hedberg, 2013).

4.2 The recruitment chain in Sweden and in Thailand

The transformations of the berry industry in scale and labour force over the last four decades presented above have resulted in a system characterized by a large number of different groups of actors and highly complex relations. This section shifts the attention from the historical backdrop to the actors involved in the recruitment chain in the regulated migration system.

The main groups of actors in the recruitment chain of the regulated system consist of both public and private actors in Sweden and Thailand. The private actors in Sweden are the berry merchants, the berry companies, and subcontractors. The public actors in Sweden are the Swedish state and the Swedish Migration Agency. In Thailand, the private actors are the staffing agencies, the local brokers, and the berry pickers. The public actors are the Thai state, the Thailand Overseas Employment Administration (TOEA, which is part of Department of Employment), and the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC). A simplification of these relations is shown in figure 2.

![Diagram of recruitment chain in Sweden and Thailand](image)

Figure 2: Main actors in the recruitment chain for the employment in the Swedish berry industry. Source: (Hedberg, 2019)
4.2.1 Actors in Sweden

The most powerful actors in Sweden are the berry merchants, whom buy the berries from the berry companies. The supply chain is dominated by these large buyers, which exerts a downward pressure on the berry companies to lower production costs and wages, in what Eriksson and Tollefsen (2013) argue is an example of a “buyer-driven global value chain” (p. 186). The merchants sell the berries to Asian companies for the extraction and usage in cosmetic-and health products (Hedberg, 2014), as well as to other large buyers for processing into the food products. The two leading berry merchants each have an approximate turnover of USD 154 million (SEK 1.300 million) a year and a profit margin from 5 - 8 percent of turnover (Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2018). Their turnover is ten times that of largest berry company (Hedberg, 2013). Via cooperation in the operational side of the business, in for example transport, freezing and quality checks, the berry companies have become closely aligned with specific berry merchants to whom they exclusively sell the berries, according to Hedberg (2013, 2014). Furthermore, it is the berry companies that officially invite the Thai berry pickers to come and pick berries via an offer of employment, and are responsible for dealing with all day-to-day issues in Sweden including accommodation and transport (Hedberg, 2013). While their role is that of a de facto employer, the legal employers are Thai staffing agencies, often located in Bangkok, who ‘post’ those they employ to Sweden, and are responsible for the payment of salaries (Axelsson & Hedberg, 2018). This employment via Thai staffing agencies has been commonplace since 2007, as a way of avoiding taxation following the 2005 change in regulation that would make the berry companies liable to pay certain taxes, and was further enhanced by the 2008 overhaul of the Swedish migration policy. Crucially, it is this relationship between the Thai staffing agencies and the Swedish berry companies that is generative of the system of transnational seasonal labour migration.

In Sweden, the regulatory context for the employment relation is shaped by the Swedish state, in particular by the laws and regulation regarding labour migration. In general, the overhaul of the Swedish migration law by the conservative government in 2008, in combination with judgements from the European Court of Justice, has contributed to a situation that restricts state enforcement of labour standards, especially putting at risk labour migrants working in less skilled, low-paying jobs (Woolfson, Fudge, & Thörnqvist, 2014). In the more particular case of Thai migratory labour for the Swedish berry industry, as argued by Axelsson and Hedberg (2018), this new migration law has enabled the practice of posting workers, stretching the employment relation beyond the direct regulatory reach of nation states and national frameworks of industrial relations. This situation has prompted several attempts in indirectly re-asserting state power, with a central role for the Swedish Migration Agency. As shown by Axelsson and Hedberg (2018), these attempts included the introduction of new regulations to draw the Thai staffing agencies back into regulatory reach of the state and Swedish trade unions, by requiring the establishment of a Thai presence in Sweden, the inclusion of the interests of the berry pickers in collective bargaining agreement on agricultural work, and re-gaining control by the Swedish Migration agency of the work permit application process that had been relegated to the embassy-level. Moreover, the Swedish Migration Agency made the granting of work permits conditional upon the Swedish berry companies showing enough financial liquidity to enable the payment of the guaranteed wage (see section 4.4.1) to the berry pickers by the Thai staffing agencies.
Both the market for trading with berry merchants as well as the market for the supply of Thai labour to the berry industry are characterized by the presence of a handful of larger players, and many more smaller players. According to figures from the Swedish Migration agency collected by Wingborg (2018), in the 2017 season there were twelve berry companies that were granted visa for a total of 3145 berry pickers from Thailand. Over two thirds of this total came from three berry companies that each were granted visa for between 723 to 837 berry pickers. Regarding the staffing agencies, Wingborg (2018) shows that some thirteen Swedish berry companies relied on at least seven different Thai staffing agencies, with some staffing agencies supplying Thai labour to multiple Swedish berry companies. In February and March 2019 I conducted interviews with the representatives of three staffing agencies in Thailand, whom together expected to supply around 3000 berry pickers on a total demand by the Swedish berry companies of 6000 for the 2019 season. Moreover, these interviews and impressions from fieldwork indicates that the Swedish berry companies actively cultivate and manage their relation with the Thai staffing agencies, for example via regular visits to Thailand, and by being present at preparatory meetings for the berry pickers organized by the staffing agencies.

4.2.2 Actors in Thailand

In Thailand, the staffing agencies rely on networks of regional and local brokers and sub-brokers to recruit workers, as analyzed in detail for one specific company by Hedberg (2014). In that case, the role of one of the two female regional brokers appears more administrative, functioning as a liaison for documents between Thailand and Sweden. Knowledge from her own background from the Isan enables her to function as a bridge between the rural villagers from Isan and the staffing agency located in more urban areas. The second women has a double role, as she recruits workers in Thailand, but also lives in Sweden where she provides accommodation to the berry pickers. In contrast to the local brokers, the regional brokers have limited direct contact with the berry pickers. According to Hedberg (2014), the local brokers tend to be former berry pickers themselves, often residing in the same village in which they recruit. In the village, local brokers from different agencies are active and competing for workers. As for the selection of recruits, local brokers tend to select berry pickers from their own social networks, linked to them via kinship ties and/or through living in the same village (Carmo & Hedberg, 2019).

The governmental actors in Thailand are the Thai government, TOEA, and BAAC. The general legal framework for overseas employment is the Recruitment and Job Seekers Protection Act, established in 1968 and revised 1985, 1994, and 2001, which specifies the conditions and procedures for working abroad and the recruitment industry (Chantavanich et al., 2010). To go and work abroad via official channels, workers are required to obtain clearance from the TOEA, as explained to me during interviews with TOEA officials in February 2019. Such clearance is acquired by providing the TOEA with the necessary documents (including a visa and offer of employment), upon which workers attain a so-called exit document. This exit-document is necessary to pass the TOEA checkpoint at the airport in Thailand. Moreover, the TOEA provides pre-departure orientations for workers, aimed at preparing them for work abroad. These pre-departure orientations are organized by the Thai staffing agencies in the regions where the berry pickers reside, and for which TOEA officials are invited from Bangkok. The TOEA has a small group of two to three officials who work on the berry industry, for Sweden as well as for the different system for Finland. According to an interview I conducted with two TOEA officials in February 2019, working conditions are
also monitored by the TOEA, by checking wage slips from the staffing agencies, as well as visiting workers and camps during the berry season in Sweden.

Another important actor is BAAC. Supporting Thai workers that want to increase their income by working abroad, this bank provides relatively low interest loans to agricultural households to be used to cover the fees workers need to pay to staffing agencies (Hedberg et al., 2019). In 2016, BAAC and the Department of Employment signed a Memorandum of Understanding to further cooperation in facilitating Thai workers in working abroad (Ministry of Labour, 2016). To be able attain a to loan from the BAAC one has to be a customer. According a credit analyst I interviewed at BAAC in Bangkok in February 2019, the staffing agencies are required to put up a collateral of 10% to ensure repayment of the loans. Furthermore, the bank also screens staffing agencies to verify that they have paid wages properly in the past, and looks into working conditions in Sweden (Hedberg et al., 2019). According to this BAAC-official, it is extremely uncommon that berry pickers are unable to repay the loan to BAAC.

4.3 The migration industry in Thailand

Migration and mobility are important for understanding social and economic development in Thailand. Next to almost 4 million labour immigrants from other countries, who constitute around 10 percent of Thailand’s labour force, each year some 100,000 Thai migrate abroad for work, and the estimated inflow of remittances of USD 7.5 billion for 2018 amounts to 1.5 percent of the GDP of Thailand (Harkins, 2019). Moreover, there is a high degree of rural-to-urban migration, a large portion of which is circular and seasonal in nature.

The specific system of seasonal labour migration for the Swedish berry industry in Thailand should be seen as part of larger system of transnational labour migration that developed from the early 1970s onwards. Characteristic of this system was active promotion of overseas labour migration by the government, in combination with the central role of government licensed private agencies engaged in labour recruitment (Ayuwat & Chamaratana, 2015; Chantavanich, 1999; Jones & Pardthaisong, 1999). While active promotion was dropped in the early 1990s due to increasing economic growth and employment opportunities, a surge in unemployment during the 1997-8 Asian crisis led to renewed efforts at promotion (Chantavanich, 1999). An important effect of this migratory labour was a growth of remittances, as shown in figure 3 below.
The private agencies are one of the central actors in the system of overseas labour. It is estimated that at the end of the 1990s some 200 licensed agencies were engaged in recruitment (Chantavanich, 1999), and 206 licensed agencies in the early 2010s (Ayuwat & Chamaratana, 2013). While there is illegal travel and employment, the majority of overseas employment takes place via official private recruitment agencies (Ayuwat & Chamaratana, 2015; Chantavanich, 1999).

In terms of structure, these agencies are pre-dominantly based in the Bangkok area, and they rely on the social networks of local, often part-time, brokers for finding workers, as well as the preparation of documents and logistical tasks (Ayuwat & Chamaratana, 2013, 2015; Jones & Pardthaisong, 1999). The high degree of formalization and government involvement notwithstanding, recurring issues in the system of overseas employment have been the fees charged by both recruitment agencies and local brokers, which are often large and exceed legally stipulated maximum amounts (Ayuwat & Chamaratana, 2013, 2015; Chantavanich, 1999; Jones & Pardthaisong, 1999).

4.4 Berry picking: Precarious work and livelihood strategy?

As discussed in section 2.2, central to the concept of precarity is uncertainty about income and working conditions, and precarious situations can be further compounded by debt-financed labour migration. Shaping the precarious situation of Thai berry pickers are costs related to indebtedness resulting from paying fees to staffing agencies, the deductions of cost of living from wages, and other cost. Furthermore, uncertainty of income is related to the piece-rate wage payment system, natural factors, and exchange rate fluctuations. On the other hand, from a Thai household perspective seasonal work in the berry industry can be seen as part of a livelihood strategy. Below I will discuss each of these in turn.
4.4.1 Factors shaping precarity: Fees, costs and earnings

A first factor that shapes precarity is that berry pickers need to pay a fee to a staffing agency in Thailand to be able to go to Sweden via the regulated channel, for which most borrow money from BAAC (Carmo & Hedberg, 2019). According to interviews and observations from my own fieldwork, for the 2018 and 2019 seasons, this fee ranged USD 2.096 to USD 2.180 (THB 75,000 to THB 78,000). This comparable to findings by Hedberg et al. (2019), whom based on interviews with 165 berry pickers found an average agency fee of USD 2.129, which was similar across the sample. This fee covers of expenses made by the staffing agency, and typically include the various travel costs (flight tickets, transport to and from the airport in Thailand and Sweden), the cost for attending preparatory meetings, visa and work permits, and a mandatory medical check (Hedberg et al., 2019). Included in the fee is also a part for the coordination by the staffing agency.

To put that in perspective, according to United Nation’s FAO (2008), monthly farmer household income in Thailand was on average USD 300. More specifically, based on survey data from 2016 Hedberg et al. (2019) estimate the mean monthly income for berry pickers from work in Thailand at USD 266, albeit with a high standard deviation. Based on these two income estimates, the fees the berry pickers pay to the staffing agencies are the equivalent of more than half an annual income. Next to the fee for the staffing agency, in Sweden the pickers have to pay the Swedish berry companies for the provision of food, accommodation, and access to car. On average, according to Hedberg et al. (2019), these daily cost add up to USD 1528 for one season, based on a regular stay of 70 days. These fees are deducted from the berry pickers’ earnings during the berry season. Moreover, the berry pickers have additional cost of on average USD 208, including the need to pay for tools for berry picking, clothing, and shoes (Hedberg et al., 2019). The total expenses, consisting of the fee for the staffing agency, daily cost, and other cost, averaged USD 3,995 (Hedberg et al., 2019).

Next to these fees and cost the earnings to be made in Sweden during the berry season need to be taken into consideration. Determining the height of these earnings is a combination of two different payment systems, consisting of a piece-rate system and a guaranteed minimum wage. In the piece-rate system, the height of the earnings is determined by how much is picked, the kilo price of berries, and the availability of berries. First, and absolutely central to dynamic of this system, is that berry pickers are paid per kilo picked. As a wage payment system the piece rate system is distinctively different from a wage payment system based on time intervals, e.g. a fixed wage per hour or month. As Marx (1976) observed in Capital volume one, the piece-rate system tends to make both an increase of the intensity of work as well as the lengthening of the working into a personal interest of the worker. Illustrative of this was one interviewee impressing on me that they are not forced to work hard and long days, but that they themselves want to do this to make as much money as possible.

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To enable comparison, all figures here are shown in US dollars (USD), followed by the original. For the conversions from other currencies (Thai Bhat and Swedish Crown) I followed the exchange rates employed in the most comprehensive report available on the costs and earnings of berry pickers, by Hedberg et al. (2019). The conversion key in this report is based on the exchange rates on 1 September 2015:

1 USD = 8.45 SEK, 1 USD = 35.78 THB
Moreover, the kilo price can be very volatile, fluctuating from year to year as well as during each berry season, as shown in table 1. The kilo price of berries was a recurring issue in my interviews. One local broker who picks himself during the berry season told me that the kilo price is all he thinks about. Other interviewees asked me why the kilo prices are so low, or expressed the wish for higher prices per kilo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Start of season</th>
<th>End of season</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015 *</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 *</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017 **</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: * Hedberg et al. (2019), ** Wingborg (2018)

The guaranteed minimum wage functions as a safety net to keep workers from returning to Thailand indebted (Hedberg, 2013; Hedberg et al., 2019). It was introduced in 2010, and for 2018 the guaranteed minimum wage was USD 2.501 (Hedberg et al., 2019). Workers are entitled to this guaranteed wage, also if their earnings in piece-rate system are lower, for instance due to illness or availability of berries. Overall, the people I interviewed presented the introduction of the guaranteed minimum wage as an improvement because of keeping people out of debt upon returning, but at the same time as falling woefully short of what people expect to make during a season. While the pickers are entitled to the guaranteed minimum wage, it is suggested that workers are sometimes forced to choose between one of the two systems (Axelsson & Hedberg, 2018; Hedberg et al., 2019). Moreover, since the actual payment of wages takes place in Thailand after the deduction of fees, it has been difficult to verify if and what workers are paid (Axelsson & Hedberg, 2018). According to Hedberg et al. (2019), an average berry picker makes around USD 2.000 in on season after deduction of all the fees and costs, which is around three times as much as could be made in the same time in farming occupations in Thailand. They found however that there is a high degree of variation in earnings, with some berry pickers reporting net-losses. This underscores the uncertainty of income, which is one aspect of precarity.

Another factor shaping precarity is the availability of berries. There can be large differences from year to year, since the availability is affected by weather conditions during and out of the season, including dryness, humidity and precipitation, which in turn can result in low yields. While low yields contributed to the disastrous outcome of many workers returning indebted in 2009 (Hedberg, 2013), adverse natural conditions do not automatically lead to such outcomes. The 2018 season was also marked by adverse conditions, including high temperatures and low precipitation that contributed to an extremely large amount of forest fires across Sweden, but without the adverse impact on the availability of the berries. For the workers, a likely outcome of lower availability is an intensification of the pace of work and

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2 For the conversion for the figures from Wingborg (2018) from Swedish krona to USD I used the conversion key described under footnote 1 on p. 32
lengthening of hours worked, since it seems plausible that traveling distance and therefore time travelled increases.

Lastly, total earning are affected by the exchange rate between Swedish Krona (SEK) and the Thai baht (THB), impacting purchasing power. While the exchange rate between these currencies has not been extremely erratic, a stronger Thai baht against the Swedish krona does push down real wages, since workers can buy less in Thailand with the money earned in Sweden. As displayed in figure 4, the Thai baht has indeed been stronger since 2015 compared to the end of the 1990s up until 2014, in effect lowering the salaries.

Figure 4: Exchange rate 1999-2018, Thai baht (THB) for Swedish krona (SEK), averages per quarter.
Source: Calculation by author, based on Riksbank (2019)

4.4.2 A precarious livelihood strategy?

While work in picking berries is highly precarious work, from a Thai household perspective this seasonal work in the berry industry can be seen as part of a livelihood strategy that can offer substantially higher financial means compared to alternative options in Thailand (Carmo & Hedberg, 2019; Hedberg, 2013; Kamoltip Kallstrom, 2011). The goal of engaging in temporary migratory labour is to gain a supplemental income. Next to an income from the berry industry, the berry pickers predominantly rely on income related to work in agriculture in Thailand (Hedberg et al., 2019), such as working in the fields, rice planting, selling products at the local markets, and harvesting and transporting of cash crops (sugar cane or tapioca), and small-scale rearing of livestock such as chickens or cows. As argued by one interviewee, what attracted and persuaded people to go to Sweden was hearing from neighbors and relatives that there was good money to be made.

While labour migration is common in Thailand, it is especially associated with the northeastern Isan region, according to Mills (2012). At the macro level, Rigg and Salamanca (2011) argue the key driver for migration from Thailand’s northeastern region has been a “persistent condition of regional
underdevelopment” (p. 556). Obfuscated by the image of rural communities as isolated and sedentary, over the last four decades their mobility has become wider and intensified, linking their lives much closer to the urban experience then suggested by the urban-rural binary, via both of internal labour migration in Thailand as well as transnational labour migration (Mills, 2012).

A declining capacity of farming to deliver a sustainable livelihood has necessitated an increasing diversification of rural incomes, which is an important driver behind the increasing engagement of rural communities with different forms of labour mobility (Rigg & Salamanca, 2011). This declining capacity has been suggested to be the result from increasing pressure on agriculture after reaching the farmland frontier in the in 1980s (Rigg & Salamanca, 2011), and agricultural restructuring towards an export-oriented model. While this agricultural restructuring made Thailand the world’s fifth largest exporter of agricultural commodities around the turn of century, it increased the dominant position of large urban-based agribusiness companies, while marginalizing poorer small-scale farmers that increasingly needed to rely on non-farming income (Buch-Hansen, 2001). Next to the need for additional income, Mills (2012) argues that heightened material expectations since the 1970s have also contributed to increasing engagement in internal and international migration.

From the 1980s to the Asian financial crisis of 1997, Thailand went through a period of enormous economic expansion and growth (Jansen, 2001). This process was highly uneven, exacerbating the inequalities between the greater Bangkok area and more peripheral rural areas (Piriya, 2012). Another consequence was an increasing demand for labour in manufacturing and construction, and a supply of labour via migration from rural areas by farmers in need of additional income (Buch-Hansen, 2001). Another way in which income diversification took place was via overseas labour migration (Mills, 2012; Rigg & Salamanca, 2011).

The system of migratory labour for the Swedish berry industry therefore should be seen against this backdrop of highly uneven socio-economic development in Thailand, structural changes in agriculture, and transformations in patterns of migration and mobility. Seasonal labour in berry industry fits well in the agricultural cycle work in Thailand, since the berry season is Sweden is between the sowing and harvesting of rice (Hedberg, 2013; Sörensson, 2015). Moreover, the seasonal character of work in the berry industry also means the social cost are also lower compared to other forms of overseas labour that require being away from family for longer periods of time (Ahsan et al., 2014; Hedberg et al., 2019). Nowadays, almost all berry pickers at minimum have a small positive income after deductions of all the cost, and paying back debt incurred to pay for fees (Hedberg et al., 2019). In the recent past, especially before the introduction of the guaranteed wage, the risk of being indebted upon return was much greater. The Thai Labour Campaign asserted that in 2009 up to 70 percent of the berry pickers returned indebted (NAT, 2010); a claim that according to Hedberg (2014) “seems to be a much over-exaggerated figure” (p. 48), and moreover, less likely to occur with the introduction of the guaranteed wage in 2010. While arguably, the risk of indebtedness has become less, risks remain regarding the uncertainty of the height pay-off of the substantial investment.

To summarize, for Thai workers, work in the Swedish berry industry can be characterized as highly precarious. They themselves pay a large chunk of cost related to their employment, and carry the brunt of the risks. A central factor in this is indebtedness resulting from the need to pay a large fee to a staffing
agency. Paying off this debt, as well as the height of their income depends for one part on the workers self-exploitation driven by a piece-rate system, and for another part on natural and larger social, political and economic processes external to the workers control. At the same time, the work in the berry industry offers a way to access a potentially higher income compared to, and fits in the seasonal cycle of agricultural work in Thailand.
5 Analysis

The thematic analysis of the interviews with the local brokers resulted in four main themes:

1. Trajectories in the berry industry: An analysis of the changes of the local brokers’ roles and positions over historical time sheds light on how the local brokers came to occupy their current positions.

2. The recruitment process: Illuminates the differences and commonalities between the five local brokers related to recruitment process, including how many of workers they recruit, the selection of workers, the collection of documents, tasks related to the financial side of the recruitment process, and their relations with other local brokers and staffing agencies.

3. Work during the berry season in Sweden: An analysis of the roles and positions the local brokers have in the technical division of labour during the berry season.

4. Differentiated precarity: This theme extends the analysis of the different roles and positions in Thailand and in Sweden to include differences in remuneration and fees, and how these shape differences in precariousness.

The closing section of this chapter presents an overarching analysis of these four themes by suggesting ways in which the roles and positions that span two spatial-temporal contexts can be seen as related. An overview of the findings regarding the differences and commonalities between the five local brokers for each of the four themes outlined above is shown in table two below. The analyses for each theme will be presented in following sections of this chapter.

5.1 Trajectories of local brokers in the berry industry

One shared element that all the five brokers describe during the interviews is a long involvement in the berry industry, often starting as berry pickers under old informal system starting back in the 1990s, as can be seen in table two on the next page. This informal system started with Thai women, the so-called madams, residing in Sweden inviting family members to pick berries on a tourist visa (Hedberg, 2016), but rapidly expanded beyond next kin. Prasert started out 23 years ago by joining one his friends to go to Sweden, after one of the Thai madams from Sweden asked them to come. This was in the time before the staffing agencies, but four years ago, he changed to going with a staffing agency. This appears relatively late, since the shift from the informal madam system to the regulated system with Thai staffing agencies took place around 2005-2009. One explanation that could account for why Prasert told me he changed so late could be that the Thai madam in question was retained by the staffing agency during the shift. As argued by Hedberg (2016), while the Thai women entrepreneurs that innovated the informal system lost their independent role during this shift, many of them retained a position as sub-contractor in the larger-scale and regulated system created by the berry companies. Nattapong went via the same madam as Prasert three years later. Atid began picking berries ten years ago, and has been a team leader and driver for the last two years. Teerapat started going to Sweden to pick berries in 2002, after hearing of the possibility to go via a relative with a Swedish boyfriend. After three years of picking, he started recruiting people as well. At the same time, he switched from going on a tourist visa via relatives to going via a staffing agency. This switch around that time is in line with the expectation that the drive towards larger scale operations in the berry industry, in combination with the shift to the use of Bangkok-based staffing
agencies, created opportunities for upward mobility for some of the berry pickers via jobs as local brokers. Through their social networks they could connect the staffing agencies to local villagers to work in the berry industry. While Chantara has been active in the berry business for nine to ten years, her story is markedly different for several reasons. Not only is she the sole female local broker I interviewed, but she is also the only one out of five brokers that did not start out by picking herself, and started with recruiting from the start. She told me she first heard about work in the berry industry via her boyfriend, whom had gone to Sweden as a berry picker.

Overall, comparing these trajectories with the findings of previous research, they fit in the more general pattern of the migratory labour in the form of berry picking spreading via networks of kinship and friends presented in previous research (Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2013; Hedberg, 2016).

Table 2: Summary findings for five local brokers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>&quot;Teerapat&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Nattapong&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Chantara&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Prasert&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Atid&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male / Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing agency size</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**History:**

- Been going for (in years): 17, 20, 9-10, 23, 10
- Went under informal system: •, •
- Has picked berries: •, •, •, •, n/a

**Recruitment process in Thailand:**

- No. of workers: 120 to 185, 160, 125 to 150, 30 to 50, 8
- Document collection: •, •
- Contact with BAAC: •, •
- Contact with TOEA: ?

**Division of labour in Sweden:**

- Picker: •, •
- Cook: •
- Driver / Group leader: •, •
- Camp leader: •, ?
- Berry scout: •

**Remuneration and fees**

- Needs to pay fee: •
- Remuneration in Sweden: fixed, piece-rate, fixed, piece-rate, piece-rate
- Remuneration in Thailand: larger, smaller, larger, smaller, smaller

Source: interviews by author; staffing agency size also based on Wingborg (2018)

• = yes, ? = unclear, n/a = not available

5.2 The recruitment process

One characteristic of the migration industry in Thailand, as argued in section 4.3, is the reliance of Bangkok-based staffing agencies on local brokers in the more peripheral labour-sending regions to find
workers, prepare documents and provide logistical services (Ayuwat & Chamaratana, 2013, 2015; Chantavanich et al., 2010; Jones & Pardthaisong, 1999). The migration industry that provides seasonal labour to the Swedish berry industry is no exception to this (Axelsson & Hedberg, 2018; Hedberg, 2014).

Drawing on the concept of the spatial divisions of labour (Massey, 1995, 2004) as discussed in section 2.1, I view the recruitment process the local brokers are involved as part of a larger spatial structure, i.e. the migration industry that supplies seasonal labour to the Swedish berry industry. In this way, tasks and functions the local brokers perform can be seen as a part of a particular technical division of labour. First, I’ll describe the differences in size, i.e. how many workers a broker is in contact with. This is followed by looking at various more functional elements of the recruitment process, such as the selection of workers, the collection of documents, and relations to other actors in the recruitment chain.

5.2.1 The size of recruitment
In the descriptions given by the local brokers during the interviews, the size of the groups of workers they recruit varied greatly. Three out of five local broker are in contact with relatively large groups of workers. For instance, Teerapat planned to bring 185 pickers this year, and brought 120 last year. Chantara brought 150 last year, and expected to bring 125 this year. They both rendered their services to the larger staffing agencies. Nattapong worked for a smaller staffing agency, but expected to bring 160 people this year. Prasert brought 30 workers last year but expected 50 this year, while Atid said he would bring eight for the 2019 season.

To illustrate these findings, I compare the number of workers the local brokers are in contact with the numbers of the staffing agencies. Over the last decade, the annual number of regulated berry pickers from Thailand was between 2500 and 6000 (Carmo & Hedberg, 2019). For 2019, the expectation is that the total regulated berry pickers from Thailand is around 6000. According to interviews I conducted in February 2019, of these 6000, roughly half will be provided by three larger staffing agencies, with the number of berry pickers per staffing agency ranging from 800 to 1200.

Another comparison can be made to the size of a local staffing agency is based in a city in Chaiyaphum, whose owner I interviewed. This staffing agency has personnel in Bangkok that liaison with the Thai and Swedish authorities and the Swedish berry companies. While this agency started by sending workers to pick berries in Finland a decade ago, since two years they also provide workers to Swedish berry companies, sending around 130 to Sweden, next to some 700 to 800 workers to Finland last year. These are large numbers compared to the two brokers who bring smaller groups, but smaller compared to the brokers whom bring a larger group.

5.2.2 The recruitment process and the roles and positions of local brokers
In the interviews, the local brokers describe different roles they play at different times and in different places. These roles also involve navigating different relations, which can be grouped in the following sub-themes. The first and primary set of roles and relations revolves around finding people and the collection of documents for the staffing agencies. Next to this primary set of roles and relation a second role is related to assisting berry pickers in contact with the BAAC (The Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives) for loan to cover fees, as well the collection of fees for staffing agencies by local brokers.
5.2.2.1 Selection of workers and collection of documents

A first aspect of the recruitment process that local brokers engage in is finding and selecting workers, i.e. decisions whom to bring. The response of the local brokers to questions related to whom they bring and how they select them was almost one of surprise. For them, the obvious answer and most important factor that influences whom they recruit are relations of kinship and friendship, in close geographical proximity to themselves. Atid, who brings the smallest group from the brokers interviewed, perceives his room for selection as limited, since he brings relatives, whom will be his team in the van that he drives in Sweden. For 2019, Prasert aims to bring eight vans with each seven people, consisting of friends and neighbors. He prefers to recruit strong men that he thinks will not come back indebted. Chantara points out that most that go via her are people that already have been going, but that when there is a need for more pickers, the new recruits are relatives of those already going. Similarly, Teerapat largely brings the same group of relatives and acquaintances. If they take in new people, they will be from the same area. Nattapong highlight his role in deciding the composition of the groups that go in one van, and in arranging for new pickers to go with more experienced ones. Teerapat argues that even if people do not pick enough in their first year, this does not constitute a barrier to go next year, because they need to learn the skills. Several of the local brokers seem to minimize their own role in the selection of workers, while they highlight the freedom of the workers to choose with whichever broker and/or staffing agency they want to go.

This local selection process in which the brokers are involved is part of larger selection process in both Thailand and Sweden analyzed by Carmo and Hedberg (2019), which involves ethnic stereotypes on the suitability of Thai people for work in the berry industry in Sweden, and criteria related to health, age and gender in Thailand. Moreover, they highlight the importance of relatedness to local brokers as a criterion for selection, via family ties or living in the same village, which is also suggested by the findings above.

A second task for the local brokers in the recruitment process is the collection documents. The workers need to acquire approval to go and work abroad from the TOEA, and need visa and work permits from the Swedish authorities. The staffing agencies, being the formal employer, need to build dossiers and have the required documentation. This means a going back and forth of important and valuable official documents, such as ID cards and passports, as well as forms with personal information. The local brokers describe that they can have a comprehensive role in this, but that this is not necessarily the case. Atid for example told me he is not directly involved in the collection of documents, and refers the workers that go with him to another person that handles the collection of the documents. Prasert, Chantara, Nattapong and Teerapat all are directly involved in collecting documents from the workers. Prasert and Nattapong told me that the company will visit to pick up the collected documents from them. Sometimes documents are filled out and collected during local or regional information meetings organized by the staffing agencies, which on that occasion also can be done by the local broker.

In addition, there also seems to be a certain degree of learning, in which berry pickers fill out the documents themselves and send them directly to the company. The degree to which this happens is however unclear, and appears to be company specific. One large staffing agency suggested this was around one third of total, while a local broker for another staffing agency presented the extent as very little.
5.2.2.2 Relations to other actors in the recruitment chain

The impressions from the descriptions in the interviews with local brokers tentatively suggests that their contact with Thai and Swedish state authorities and Swedish berry companies are limited in a way similar to regular berry pickers. They will see TOEA officials at local preparatory meetings and the airport for exit clearance, and see the Swedish berry companies in Sweden, but direct and regular contact appear to be very seldom. The contact with Swedish authorities is indirect, via the staffing agencies and the Swedish berry companies. Here I use the adjective tentative, because the combination of the need for translation and complex web of relations made it difficult to disentangle these relations in the interviews. For example, during the interview with Nattapong at first a translated answer suggested he had direct contact with the TOEA, which in second instance turned out to be indirectly via the staffing agency.

An exception to the limited interactions of the local brokers with the Thai governmental apparatus brought to the fore in the interviews is contact with BAAC (see section 4.2.2). BAAC plays a key role in overcoming financial barriers to go to Sweden by providing loans at relatively low interest rates. For large groups of workers, these loans are instrumental to providing them with the financial means needed to pay the high fees demanded by the staffing agencies. In this process, the workers take out loans at BAAC, which then are used to pay the required fee to the staffing agency. To amortize this loan, the staffing agencies deduct a certain part from the wages the berry pickers make during the berry season.

Several of the local brokers that I interviewed play a part in this procedure, by verifying for BAAC that requests for loans are from workers whom are actually going to Sweden, and that these workers are going through them. This appears complementary to contact between BAAC and the staffing agency. Whereas Prasert and Atid do not have this contact with BAAC in this way, Teerapat and Nattapong are involved in such contact. Whereas it is not clear if Chantara has this contact with BAAC, she arranges meetings with BAAC for pickers that want to take out a loan.

Next to the role of BAAC in providing loans to cover the fee, some local brokers play a role in the collection of fees for the staffing agencies in cash. This could be a relatively small amount in the beginning, with the aim of cover the expenses of the staffing agency if a prospective picker drops out, or decides to go with another staffing agency. Another way is the collection of the fee for the staffing agency at a local preparatory meeting, as done by Chantara.

Interestingly, none of the brokers interviewed said or hinted at recruiting for multiple staffing agencies at the same time. Regarding the supplying workers to a single agency, one explanation could be that the local brokers themselves depend on the same staffing agency to go Sweden, either to pick berries themselves or to perform other roles related to the seasonal labour. This ties them closely to one staffing agency, with an important incentive to maintain a good working relationship. Adding to this is the absence of price-based competition between the different staffing agencies. The interviews with local brokers as well as non-brokers indicate that while it is common for workers to change from one staffing agency to another in between seasons, this appears closely related to a variety of working conditions in Sweden. Such working conditions can include how workers are treated, if the location of the camp provides access to good quality and quantity of berries, if a berry company is able to move berry pickers around different camps in Sweden to gain better access to berries, and if they can move up in the hierarchy by for instance becoming a driver. Since most of the berry pickers have gone to Sweden for multiple times, they tend to
have a certain degree of knowledge based on their own experience and that of others, that informs preferences for a specific company, and a specific broker.

In their descriptions of their relations with other local brokers they tend to portray these as being more cooperative as opposed to competitive. This involves discussions and contact about how many people they can bring. While it is logical to assume such cooperation between the local brokers that work the same staffing agency, some local brokers suggest this also extends to local brokers working for different staffing agencies. For instance, if one broker has too many works that want to go, while others are in need more to make their quota, they will discuss this and try to sort this out.

Despite many other similarities between this case and the analysis of local brokers in Indonesia by Lindquist (2012), supplying of labour to one staffing agency is an important way in which these local brokers differ from each other. In contrast to the analysis above for Thailand, in the Indonesian case local brokers regularly play-off different staffing agencies against each other by supplying workers to the highest bidder, or supply labour to those that allow pocketing the largest difference between the staffing agency fee and the price the prospective labour migrant pays to the local broker.

5.2.2.3 Recruitment fees
The adding of fees and costs at each step in the recruitment chain, to be paid by a prospective migrant, is perhaps one of the more salient features of contemporary labour migration (Martin, 2017). This general practice is well documented for the migration industry in Thailand for a range of sectors, destination countries, and different provinces with a high degree of transnational labour migration (Ayuwat & Chamaratana, 2013, 2015; Chantavanich, 1999; Chantavanich et al., 2010; ILO, 2013; Jones & Pardthaisong, 1999). More specifically, previous research also indicates this practice in the recruitment chain for the Swedish berry industry (Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2013; Hedberg, 2013, 2014), with research by one NGO (NAT, 2010) suggesting a fee in the range of USD 84 - 838 (THB 3.000 – 30.000) charged by local brokers, in addition to the USD 2.096 (THB 75.000) fee for a staffing agency. None of the local brokers interviewed indicated that they themselves partake in this practice. One way to account for this is that they simply would not tell this to an outsider, and that it would take more time and effort to establish the trust necessary to gain further insights into this matter. Another factor that needs to be considered is the way in which remuneration takes place. While the height of compensation seemed a sensitive topic, the overall suggestion is that the staffing agencies pay the local brokers for their work as local brokers, based on the time they spend on this work. This could reflect an effort by part of the industry to limit excesses that also impacts their own reputation. It is however difficult to establish if this is the case, and if this extends beyond specific companies. In addition, the informal context in which the local brokers operate leaves much room for individual malpractice.

5.3 The technical division of labour: Work during the berry season in Sweden
Next to the technical divisions of labour in Thailand described above, the local brokers are also part of the technical division of labour in the local context in Sweden. While being in Sweden, this local context is highly segregated from day-to-day Swedish life. The picking of the berries takes places in the vast Swedish forests, often in areas located in the sparsely populated northern parts of the country, at long distance from the more densely populated and urbanized areas in the south. Accommodation is typically found in
former schools or other public building, often outside of more peripheral towns and villages. In many cases, these buildings are left vacant by a combination of rural-to-urban outmigration and migration to the southern metropolitan areas, and subsequently bought by the Swedish berry companies from local municipalities that had no use for them any longer (Hedberg, 2014). Depending on the size of accommodation and the availability of sanitary services, these locations can serve as a temporary home and as a base camp for the operations for anywhere between 50 to 200 berry pickers.

This physical segregation is further augmented by social- and cultural segregation. Next to language barriers there are long working days. Working days of 13 to 17 hours are not uncommon when including the time spend driving and weighing the berries that were picked (Hedberg, 2014). This leaves little room for other activities but those related to work. Furthermore, to minimize costs both the berry pickers and the Swedish berry companies aim to maximize self-sufficiency. For example, this is done by bringing Thai mechanics for repairs and servicing of the old vans that break down often (Hedberg et al., 2019). Another example is the bringing of foodstuffs and cooks, which reduces the need to buy those at prices of Swedish goods and labour. This creates a temporary microcosm that is the context for roles and relations between the different actors in Sweden.

Central to these roles and positions is the technical division of labour that enables the picking of berries. In this technical division of labour (see section 2.1), different jobs consist of different tasks and functions that are mutually constitutive. While the vast majority of Thai that come to Sweden work as berry pickers, the task of picking is sometimes combined with other roles. Moreover, in this technical division of labour there is a small group of selected workers that is exempt from picking berries, and whose tasks and functions are related to managing the camp, looking after the accommodation and ensuring cleanliness and hygiene, and being in charge the supply of food. Another important task is weighing the berries. At the end of the day the workers have to wait between one and two hours to have the berries weighted, which determines the daily wage (Hedberg, 2014). Although specific arrangements vary by company and size of the total group, the interviews suggest that on a 100 to 200 berry pickers this group would not be more than four to five individuals.

While all of the local brokers I interviewed have been part of the seasonal migration to Sweden during the berry season, three out of five work as a berry picker, while two are no (longer) picking themselves. As can be seen in table two under the heading “Division of labour in Sweden”, the three that work as berry pickers recruit for smaller staffing agencies in Thailand. In Sweden, Nattapong, Prasert and Atid combine berry picking with another role: That of driver. While this might not seem a big deal to an outsider, the role of driver is important in the technical division of labour. As illustrated above with the example of Atid, it is common for drivers pick the team that will come with them to Sweden, which also is a selection mechanism in whom can earn money that way or not. Moreover, drivers commonly have a role as leader of the team that is in the van, which can influence how much people can earn. Importantly, this suggests that while the drivers still pick berries, they occupy a higher place in the hierarchy of the division of labour, distinct from being a berry picker only. Next to picking and driving, Nattapong also describes his role as including looking after the workers in the camp. This camp consisted of 70 berry pickers, divided into ten smaller groups per van.
The two of the five local brokers that do not pick themselves when they are in Sweden are Chantara and Teerapat. Chantara told me she has never picked, but that she provides food for the camp in her role as cook. Teerapat did pick for several years, but is now a camp leader. His main responsibility is to look after everything that goes on in the camp, including hygiene, accommodation, that the food is good, and people are looked after. The camp he is responsible for houses around 200 people.

Another important role Teerapat has in Sweden is scouting for berries. This scouting is critical to the success of the berry pickers. Another berry scouter and sub-camp leader, who when in Thailand performs logistical tasks for one of the staffing agencies, described this process in more detail. The scout will go out as first from the camp to locate spots where there are berries. Once a good spot is found they check the surrounding areas and estimate how much berries there are, and then direct the number of vans for which they think there are enough berries. If it seems there is enough for all pickers from one camp all the vans will be directed there. If not, they split up. This role is a big responsibility, and appears reserved for those at the higher levels of the hierarchy of the technical division of labour of berry picking in Sweden, who have acquired the necessary skills and intimate knowledge of the conditions in the Swedish forests through experience.

### 5.4 Differentiated precarity? Differences in remuneration and fees

In light of the highly precarious nature of work in the berry industry for Thai berry pickers, as sketched out in section 4.4.1, an important question is if the local brokers are in similarly precarious positions. This can be done by looking at the need for the payments of the fee to the staffing agency, and how their remuneration is organized, and can be seen in table two.

To start with the need to pay fees to the staffing agencies, the three local brokers that also picked in Sweden (Nattapong, Prasert and Atid) told me they need to pay this fee, just as regular berry pickers. In contrast to these three local brokers that picked, Chantara and Teerapat, the two local brokers that do not pick, do not have to pay the fee to the staffing agency. This suggests that at least some of those performing the role of local broker in Thailand are much less exposed to the particular risk of indebtedness compared to those that pick berries. As mentioned earlier, Chantara’s role is cook, and Teerapat’s roles include being a camp leader and berry scout. During another interview with a cook and a camp leader, that have similar tasks and functions in Sweden as Chantara and Teerapat, they told me that they do not need to pay the fee. This also seems logical, since the tasks they perform are largely incompatible with being away from the camp large parts of the days, which would be required to pick enough berries.

Next to the company paying the fee for them, Teerapat and Chantara’s remuneration is also organized differently. Instead of the combination of the piece-rate wage payment and guaranteed minimum wage for those that pick described in section 4.4.1, they receive a fixed wage. Being entitled to a fixed wage offsets the risks to which those that pick are exposed, such as to the availability of berries and the fluctuations of the berry price from year to year and during the season. Although neither Chantara nor Teerapat revealed the height of their wage, this can be illustrated with the following example. When asked if he felt that he could make more by being a successful picker in Sweden, or that he makes more in his current role of camp leader and berry scout, Teerapat suggested that the amount of money would be similar. Moreover, he added that the role of camp leader is much more comfortable, since the picking is
hard work under harsh and sometimes dangerous conditions in the forest. An important implication of these differences is that these suggest that Chantara and Teerapat are in a significantly less precarious position compared to those that pick, since they don’t face the risk of indebtedness, have more certainty about their income, and have some degree of better working conditions. In addition to this differentiated precarity in the technical division of labour between those that pick and those that do not, within the group of those that pick it also possible to discern differences.

As argued earlier, in the hierarchy of the technical division of labour drivers tend to occupy positions that are nominally above the regular berry pickers. When asked about benefits of their role as drivers, both Prasert and Atid mentioned that the only benefit is that they do not have to partake in advancing the money for the fuel. While this finding is contrary the suggestion that drivers earn more (Hedberg, 2014), this could be the explained by intra-company differences. Regarding the money for the fuel, the other berry pickers in the van will collect the money, pay for the fuel, and are reimbursed by the Swedish berry company. Although this practice of reimbursement might not be common across companies, it was at least the case in the two different companies for whom they drive. Alternatively, in some companies reimbursement is limited to a certain amount of kilometers per day, in which case not having to contribute money for gasoline could constitute a direct material advantage. While the issue of money for fuel might seem a trivial thing, one has to bear in mind that getting to locations for picking berries in Sweden can involve crossing vast distances, with the cost of fuel adding up to substantial amounts. Moreover, this could be interpreted as signifying a degree of difference between the driver and those he drives around, or at minimum a division of labour in which the driver is absolved of this practical issue. It is also worth recalling that it is common that the drivers pick their team.

In addition to their remuneration for work in Sweden, all the five local brokers are paid for their role in the recruitment process in Thailand. In marked contrast to answers on questions regarding the amount of money people make as berry pickers or the fees they need to pay to staffing agencies, questions on the remuneration for local brokerage were answered vaguely, or declined to answer. This suggests that there is a certain amount of sensitivity to the topic. There is some variation as to how the remuneration was presented during the interviews. Prasert and Atid, the brokers with the comparably smaller groups, represented their remuneration as occasional and little or small amounts. Teerapat and Chantara, whom both have comparably larger groups and more substantial roles and tasks, suggest that they their remuneration is something that approaches a more regularized form of payments during the months they work in Thailand, i.e. a monthly wage. Nattapong, who also has a large group, the highest degree different tasks, and picks himself too, represents the remuneration as a wage but not much. The general impression from the interviews is that nearly all local brokers earn more during the time they are Sweden than when they are in Thailand, as do the berry pickers in general.

5.5 Linking local brokers across space and time

The trajectories of the local brokers of historical time are in line with the research on migration brokers that local brokers often are former migrants themselves (Lindquist, 2012; Lindquist et al., 2012). As can be seen in table two, all of the brokers are industry veterans. One important way in which this case diverges from theory is the relation between social networks and the role of local brokers over time. According to the concept of the migration hump, brokers play an important role in the first phase of
migratory flows by providing knowledge and infrastructure, but their importance in sending location diminishes as migrant networks acquire social capital, taking over the functions of brokers (Hernández-Leon, 2013). In this case by contrast, social networks first established migratory flows, whose importance diminished with the introduction of the recruitment chain consisting of staffing agencies and local brokers. Illustrative of this is that three out of five of the local brokers, and possibly four, started out in berry business in the period when this was still based on social networks, before the advent of the regulated system with the staffing agencies.

While it not possible to map the networks that the brokers are part of for one or multiple companies based on the above, it is possible to sketch the general contours of variation in the roles and positions in the local recruitment process that can be seen table 2 in the following way. A first element is what could be termed size, referring to the number of workers a broker is in contact with, and which can range from relatively small with eight workers, to relatively large with over 150. A second element is what roles and tasks the local broker performs. This could be termed scope, ranging on a continuum from broad to narrow. The findings also suggest that local brokerage can consist of multiple layers, with some local brokers that act as sub-brokers, a situation in more abstract pointed out by Faiist (2014). Prasert and Atid could be typical for a larger group of sub-brokers characterized by a smaller size and narrower scope, and who rely on other intermediaries for the collection of documents and/or contact with BAAC.

Next to their roles in the larger recruitment chain in Thailand, the local brokers are also part of the migration to Sweden and have different tasks and functions in the technical division of labour during the berry season. The findings in this research strongly suggest that the presence of local brokers in both the sending- and the receiving country is a distinct feature of this system of seasonal labour migration. In other forms of labour migration, the services of local brokers primarily focus on the local sending context, and the broker remains in the sending country (e.g. Lindquist, 2012). Upon arrival in the destination country, various other actors involved in a larger migration industry can render services for the transfer of remittances, or assisting the migrant in settling in the receiving country by mediating in housing matters and labour market entry (Hernández-Leon, 2013; Salt & Stein, 1997).

Furthermore, while the local brokers have different roles in the recruitment process in Thailand and during the berry season in Sweden, the analysis suggests that these roles are linked. Overall, people that perform roles and tasks in the recruitment process as local brokers in Thailand tend to occupy hierarchical positions nominally above the regular berry picker whom they recruit. As can be seen in table two, their jobs in Sweden can complement berry picking with a job as driver. Or they do not pick themselves, instead having jobs that are necessary to support others to pick berries, such camp leader, berry scout, and cook. Moreover, local brokers whose role in Thailand is to handle a larger size of group of workers and whose tasks are broader in scope, occupy positions in the technical division of labour in Sweden that confer a less precarious position. As can be seen in table two, Teerapat and Chantara are exempt from paying the fees that are central in shaping the precarious position of the regular pickers, have jobs that are less uncertain regarding income, and can be seen as offering better working conditions.

Such a less precarious position appears related to the size of the Thai staffing agency to which the local brokers render their services. The two local brokers in the least precarious positions, Teerapat and Chantara, are employed by two different but relatively larger Thai staffing agencies. Nattapong on the
other hand works for ay smaller player in the market. While his tasks in Sweden include both picking and tasks related the support of a larger group of workers, his position more precarious compared to the two other local brokers handle a large size group, but still is less precarious compared to regular berry pickers due his additional income from brokerage. A possible explanation for this could be that the larger staffing agencies have a higher degree of professionalization and are connected to the bigger Swedish berry companies that have a comparatively larger scale of operations, resulting in a more sophisticated division of labour that offers more possibilities for upward mobility for some.
6 Discussion and conclusion

Through the thematic analysis of the interviews with local brokers their multi-sited roles and positions emerge as highly differentiated. I have sought to delineate the contours of local brokerage in Thailand and how the local brokers shape migration and mobility, as a way of further opening what Lindquist et al. (2012) call the “the black box of migration” (p.9), for this particular system of transnational labour migration related to the Swedish berry industry. Moreover, I analyzed their roles and positions during the berry season relative to the regular berry pickers the local brokers recruit, unpacking how these can be associated with different degrees of precarity. Lastly, I argued how these roles should be understood as interrelated.

Based on the analysis in the previous chapter, the answers to the research questions can be summarized as follows. First, regarding the questions how the local brokers have come to occupy their current positions, the findings suggests that local broker have been part of this migratory labour for an extended period of time, and are likely to have started as berry pickers themselves before the regulated migration system. Second, regarding the roles and positions in the recruitment process in Thailand, the analysis indicates there is a large degree of variation in size and scope of local brokerage, and that local brokers rely on local social networks of kinship and friends for recruitment. While all brokers have contact with the staffing agencies, there is a high degree of difference regarding roles related to the collection of documents and fees, and contact with other actors. Third, there is a high degree of difference regarding the roles and positions the local brokers have in the technical division of labour in Sweden, but overall brokers tend to be in positions nominally above the positions of regular berry pickers. Their jobs tend to be driver of a van and team leader in addition to picking berries, or camp leader or cook for some of the brokers. Fourth, these differences in roles and positions result in differentiated degrees of precarity, related to differences in the payment of fees to staffing agencies, the organization of remuneration, and working conditions. Finally, linking the roles and positions between Thailand and Sweden suggests that those brokers who handle a large size of group of workers in Thailand occupy positions less precarious positions in Sweden, but that the size of the staffing agency for which the brokers recruit also plays a role.

One limitation of the analysis presented in this thesis is the difficulty in drawing generalizations from it because of two reasons. First, there is high degree of case-specificity, by which I mean that it deals with specific form of migration related to work in a particular sector that links two specific geographical areas. Second, it is based on a low number of interviews. These elements, in combination a certain amount of uncertainty introduced by the need to rely on interpretation during the interviews, suggest that the findings should be viewed as tentative. Nevertheless, with these three caveats in mind I think one should attempt to generalize.

The local brokers occupy two interrelated positions in the larger division of labour for the berry industry, in different spatial-temporal contexts: As local broker in Thailand outside of the berry season, and various positions during the berry season in Sweden. While the suggestion by Lindquist et al. (2012) that “a broker is not a fixed identity and must be considered in relation to location, time and power” (p. 8) appears right in abstract, this does lead to the question how to analyze the differences in roles and positions of brokers over different time-spans and related to different contexts, especially in regard to the non-broker part. Therefore I relied on the concept of concept spatial divisions of labour (Massey, 1995, 2004). The discussion
below revolves around how to relate the micro-level analyses of the roles of local brokers to the larger spatial division of labour (Massey, 1995, 2004) for the Swedish berry industry, that stretches from Sweden to Thailand.

In Thailand, the local brokers are part of a larger migration industry (Cranston et al., 2018; Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg Sørensen, 2013b; Hernández-Leon, 2013). The roles of the local brokers in the recruitment process indicate that they have a central position between the local berry pickers and the Bangkok-based staffing agencies. Via their roles as brokers in their social networks, consisting of next of kin, friends, and neighbors, they are instrumental in organizing flows of information, documents and money, and are therefore key in enabling transnational mobility in the system of seasonal migratory labour for the Swedish berry industry. Focusing on brokers, as argued by Lindquist et al. (2012) as part of what I have called the migration brokers approach, offers a way to understand migration via their role in the recruitment process and the collection of documents. While the situation in Thailand of formal staffing agencies relying on networks of informal brokers is similar to what Lindquist (2012) describes for Indonesia, an important difference is related to the fees the brokers require from workers for their services, in addition to the fees for the staffing agency. In the Indonesian case this was common practice by the local brokers. While I did not find indications for this in my interviews with local brokers in Thailand, previous research suggests this practice is also commonplace in the among local brokers in the migration industry in the Thailand in general (Ayuwat & Chamaratana, 2015) as well as for the berry industry in specific (NAT, 2010). Therefore it seems highly unlikely that this practice does not take place. More likely is that if the local brokers I interviewed do partake in such practices they would reveal this to me. One way to gain insight would be to ask recruited workers how much they pay, and compare these figures with how much the staffing agency charge. Another factor to consider is the possibility that some of the staffing agencies actively try to discourage this practice. Overall, these elements pointing to the need for future research on these important actors.

The concept of the migration hump (Hernández-Leon, 2013) relates flows of migration to the role of migration intermediaries, and argues that the need for recruiters becomes less after the initial phase, since knowledge spreads via social networks as flows grow bigger, allowing recruiter to shift their attention to the provision of services in destination countries. In the case of the Thai berry pickers, that relation seems to run in reverse. At first, knowledge spread via social networks and flows grew bigger, later followed by local brokers and staffing agencies (Hedberg, 2014). One factor to consider here is that the migration industry consisting of staffing agencies and local brokers was set up in response to regulatory changes (Axelsson & Hedberg, 2018), which highlights the importance of how changes in institutional context affect migratory systems. Nevertheless, one would expect this reliance on staffing agencies to become less, as migrants acquire the social capital required to take over these functions. Hence, the question why this reliance persists arises. One element here could be that the staffing agencies provide a complete package of services that are difficult to arrange in other ways, for example fulfilling the requirements of the TOEA to achieve clearance for exit as well as work permits and visa for Sweden, which require close cooperation with the Swedish berry companies. Given the close links between the Swedish berry companies and the Thai staffing agencies (Carmo & Hedberg, 2019), the most plausible scenario for individual requests from Thai berry pickers to Swedish berry companies is a referral to arrange
this via a staffing agency. This points to the need for more research on the role of the staffing agencies in the recruitment chain.

The roles of local brokers shape social inequalities, migrant agency, and precariousness. As argued by Deshingkar (2018), brokerage can extend or limit migrant agency. Moreover, the mobility brokers enable can increase precarious positions of migrations via insertion into specific positions in the labour market. Overall, the insertion of Thai workers for the berry industry into the Swedish labour market can be described as characterized by a subordinate position and ethnic segmentation, as exemplified by their temporary status and selection based on racialized views of Thai workers by actors in the berry industry (Carmo & Hedberg, 2019; Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2013). Since the Thai local brokers also migrate to Sweden to work during the berry season, their contribution to creating precarious positions also extends to their own position. Next to this, via their role in enabling seasonal labour migration for berry industry, brokers offer those they recruit a way to access material resources that can improve their livelihood, which can be seen a form of migrant agency (Castree et al., 2004; Deshingkar, 2018; Rogaly, 2009). The roles of the local brokers in selection of migrants (Carmo & Hedberg, 2019), based on local relations of kinship and friends, as well attributes such as gender and health, contributes to social stratification by enabling transnational mobility for some people, while denying it to others. As argued by the migration infrastructures approach (Lin et al., 2017), both differentiated access to mobility itself and outcomes that result from this access are issues related to hierarchies of power and social stratification. Since the local brokers themselves are also part of the technical division of labour during the berry season, their position in the larger Swedish labour market is similar to the positions of the workers they recruit. Yet, the analysis at the micro-scale level of the technical division of labour indicates there are subtle but important differences in jobs and hierarchical positions, which in turn lead to a differentiation in precarity via differences in remuneration and the need to pay the large fee to a staffing agency. This points to two elements in the relation between precarity and migration. First, this indicates that while the overall position of migrants in a particular sector can be viewed as precarious, there is a need to pay attentions to differences at the micro-scale within this overall precarity (Strauss, 2018a). Second, this underscores the importance of taking debt incurred to finance migration into account as an important factor in shaping migrant precarity (Platt et al., 2017; Strauss & McGrath, 2017).

While the brokers via their role in the selection in the recruitment process contribute to unequal outcomes, I would argue that this is a smaller part of larger selection mechanisms and inequalities (Carmo & Hedberg, 2019). As argued by Martin (2017), a contemporary trend in labour migration is that migrants themselves have to pay for the cost related to their employment. This also is the case for the Thai workers in the Swedish berry industry (Hedberg et al., 2019). The Thai workers themselves are required to pay for the bulk of the cost of their employment and migration, while there is no a priori reason why this should be the case. What this does indicate is the highly asymmetrical relations of power, in which those with the least power are put in a highly disadvantaged position. While the berry pickers are not without power or agency, they are in the least powerful position, and the local brokers are only in a marginally better position. The staffing agencies and the Swedish berry companies are more powerful actors, but these in turn have a subordinated position to the berry merchants who are dominant (Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2013). While these unequal relations of power and dominance are constitutive of the spatial division of labour (Massey, 1995, 2004) of the berry industry, two other important actors that are of paramount importance
to how this system of temporary labour migration is organized are the Swedish state and the Thai state. For the migration industry in Thailand, high fees and overcharging by staffing agencies and local brokers have been recurring problems (Ayuwat & Chamaratana, 2013, 2015; Chantavanich, 1999; Chantavanich et al., 2010; Jones & Pardthaisong, 1999). The regulated system of Thai workers in the berry industry stems from the Swedish government allowing the practice of ‘posted work’ to become commonplace from 2007 onwards as way for the Swedish berry companies to avoid paying taxes (Axelsson & Hedberg, 2018). Moreover, the overhaul of the migration law in 2008 resulted in a system driven by employer demands, putting them in control of key aspects migration policy, including decisions on the number of migrants needed (Emilsson et al., 2014; Eriksson & Tollefsen, 2013; Herzfeld Olsson, 2018). Ultimately, this points to how larger social, political and economic changes and shifting boundaries between states and markets shape transformations in labour market policies and transnational migration and mobility.

This last point is worth reiterating in relation to government policy. In the context of state sanctioned temporary work schemes, informal brokers operate in the shadows of official legitimacy (McKeown, 2012). While brokers in general are vilified for exploitative practices, ethical consideration should also be extended to include the structural inequalities on which such temporary work schemes are based, and not just narrowly focus on brokers (Lindquist et al., 2012; McKeown, 2012). This suggests that policy should start from considerations beyond the local brokers and the migration industry, to include the roles of the berry industry and Swedish and Thai states in shaping the current system.
References


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8 Appendix 1: Interview guide for local brokers

General

- Could you please describe the one year cycle of your work?
  - Has there been any recent changes to this?

- How did you get involved in the berry business?
  - Could you describe how it happened that you entered into the business?
  - With whom did you first get in contact? What was your relationship before you entered the berry business?
  - What is your personal background? (education, where they grew up)
  - Have you worked as picker yourself? (how often, as picker, driver, camp leader?)
  - Do you have other forms of work next to brokerage?

- In which villages are you recruiting? (show a map)
  - How did you get into these villages? (Social networks?)
  - How are you keeping in contact with the staffing agencies?

- What kind of workers do you prefer to recruit? (gender, age, other skills, ‘used to hard work’, etc.)

Regulations

- Is there state regulation (DOE, TOEA) that you as a broker need to follow?

Relations

- With which actors are you in contact?
  - In Thailand: TOEA, BAAC, other local recruiters, staffing agencies, workers, etc
  - In Sweden: berry companies, subcontractors, Swedish authorities, brokers (Thai women), others?
  - Do you recruit for other destination countries than Sweden

- Can you describe what these relations look like?
  - TOEA
  - BAAC
  - Other local recruiters in villages
  - Competing staffing agencies
  - Swedish berry companies
  - subcontractors
  - Swedish authorities (the embassy?)
Broker role

- Do you recruit workers for one staffing agency, or multiple ones?
- Have there been changes in which staffing agency you work for? If so why?
- Do you feel there is competition between staffing agencies?
- Do you feel there is competition between brokers?
  - Over workers?
- What do you offer to workers?
- Are there instances where you work together with other brokers?
- Do you collect deposits? How much are they?
- Could you break down the fee in different components?
- Do you collect documents (ID cards, driving license)?
- Do other people help you with finding workers? (in villages, Thai women in Sweden, etc.)

Opinions about the system

- Is your opinion that the system works well?
  - What works well?
  - What could be improved? Are you doing anything to improve the system?
  - How do you perceive that the system has been more regulated over the years?
- Have you had any particular problems in the recruitment procedure?
- We have been informed that the staffing agency provides the TOEA with a salary list after each season.
  - Do you know about this, and can you tell us how that works?
  - Do you think that this helps workers receiving the salary they are entitled to?
- How do you perceive the minimum wage requirement?
o Do the workers receive the minimum wage or do they have to choose between wage and piece rate?

• How much do you earn as a broker? (Is it related to your picking? (If they pick))